

To: Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
On: May 3, 2021
Re: House Bill 5009

Dear Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon, members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Mike Powers, and I am the President of SEIU Local 503. SEIU represents over 72,000 workers across the state, including many of the hardworking folks at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. I am here today in general support of House Bill 5009, the Department's biennial budget, and to lift up the concerns of our members at the Agency.

In general, I think we are all aware that the past year has been a challenging one, for our Natural Resource Agencies in particular. Declining lottery revenues, decreases in the use of our parks and natural areas impacting fee revenue, and the general impact to our economy due to COVID-19 have uniquely impacted these Agencies, which do not receive much General Fund support.

The Oregonians who work at ODFW, despite this, have stepped up to continue delivering services to all of us and to meet the Agency's mission "to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations." The men and women of ODFW continued to work under difficult COVID restrictions, as well as the unhealthy and hazardous smoke conditions in the fall. Our essential employees faced elevated exposure to the virus because the agency did not provide adequate PPE, and at times from some members of the public who refused to maintain social distancing. Other workers continued work in the field despite the heavy smoke conditions, again without proper PPE.

There are a handful of specific budget areas of concern that I would like to mention this morning. First, the Agency asked for 7 new positions to staff the Habitat Division, in addition to the 64 people they are moving, and was only given 2. We do have some concerns about the ability of the new Division to be successful if it is not fully staffed. This Division is critical to monitor changes to provide the information they, and you, need to review and approve actions required to preserve the environment our fish and wildlife need to survive in these times of climate change and extreme weather.

Second, the Governor's Recommended Budget proposes eliminating two staff at the Rock Creek Hatchery. However, this was not one of the Agency's proposed reduction options. As the hatchery is rebuilt after the fires, these staff will be critical.

Other changes proposed in the GRB include: ending the positions related to Klamath anadromous fish reintroduction, orca salmon forage, discontinuing funding for a pilot program to reintroduce sockeye salmon in Wallowa lake, ending a position to provide technical assistance for tide gates, and ending the positions within the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

These are important programs, some of which were created by the Legislature, that provide important services to rural Oregonians and our natural resource base. They deserve your reconsideration for preservation of funding, particularly given the ongoing economic recovery we are experiencing.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I hope we are able to identify general fund dollars to continue ODFW's important work for our state.