

February 11, 2021

**To: The Honorable Brad Witt, Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources**

**House Bill 2171
Mark Labhart, ODF&W Commissioner**

Chair Witt and Members

My name is Mark Labhart. I am a retired Tillamook County Commissioner and currently serve on the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. I'm here to today to ask you to support HB 2171.

In 2016 I had the privilege of chairing a Joint Legislative Task Force on funding for ODF&W. Our task force included two Senators and two Representatives as well members across a broad spectrum of Oregon hunters, fishers and stakeholders who care about Oregon fish and wildlife from the smallest species to its largest. We met monthly for a year and developed a series of recommendations narrowed down to one. This recommendation was a new and sustainable source of revenue to supplement existing revenue the department receives mainly from the hunting and fishing communities to implement a more holistic and equitable approach to fish and wildlife conservation, management, recreation and outdoor education. HB 2829 introduced in the 2019 session was titled the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF). The Bill passed with strong bi-partisan support in both chambers.

The Bill said, go out and raise \$1 million dollars to implement conservation and recreation projects on the ground and we will match your donations with \$1 million dollars of General fund to show the Legislature's contribution to implementing Oregon Conservation and Recreation strategy. Then COVID hit. But that did not stop us. To date we have received over 15,000 individual donations and raised just over \$250,000. Our Commission has approved 37 individual projects to date. We have told the donators that the Legislature made a commitment with HB 2829 that their donation dollars will be matched to double your investment in Oregon's fish & wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities. The donated dollars are going on the ground as we speak. As a few examples they are funding wildlife crossings, restoration of sea otters, restoration of pond turtles, trail projects, engaging urban students in backyard biology and engaging diverse communities in the outdoors. I respectfully ask on behalf of those 15,000 Oregonians and those yet to come to keep this program going and commit to the match your colleagues almost unanimously agreed to in the last Legislative session.

Last but not least, the Bill directs that our OCRF Advisory Committee consult with the Office of Outdoor Recreation when making recommendations on the use of the fund. We have gone

even further and have since the inception of the OCRF Advisory Committee have the Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation Cailin O'Brien-Feeney on our Advisory Committee and I believe he has attended and actively participated in every monthly meeting of the Advisory Committee. We appreciate his input and contributions.

Please moved this Bill to a Work Session and support its passage.

Contact:

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