



March 21, 2023

To Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: **SB 5509** – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2023-2025 Budget

Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by providing technical services and supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD strongly supports the ***Climate Change Resiliency Package on Private Lands*** originally encompassed in ***POP 120***. The \$199,052 dollars to leverage \$793,225 in federal funds from the Farm Bill through NRCS will allow our Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) the ability to work with ODFW and landowners to protect fish, wildlife and habitat on working lands. The POP will maximize the use of federal dollars in Oregon and promote voluntary conservation action while promoting ODFW's climate policies.

The Governors Recommended Budget (GRB) sustains the essential investments made to re-establish ODFW's Habitat Division in the 2023-2025 biennium, which provides much needed field biologist capacity within the division to address the needs of Oregon's fish and wildlife populations. SWCDs throughout the state coordinate with ODFW biologists on initiatives to implement private lands habitat conservation and stewardship on farms, ranches, and forests. The expertise provided by ODFW field staff ensures that habitat projects with landowners achieve results in line with the recommendations in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

The 2021-23 biennium capacity investments in the Habitat Division ensured that a bill we sponsored, ***HB 2527***, could be implemented without requesting additional funds for staff capacity. And adding the five biologist positions in ***POP 120*** will further enhance both the ***Wildlife Habitat Conservation Management Program (WHCMP)*** included in ***HB 2527*** as well as other needed conservation investments. Without WHCMP, landowners transitioning to habitat management on land in farm or forest deferral categories would lose those deferrals.

We also support ***POP 112*** that permanently funds a position to manage the ***Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF)*** as a priority. To maximize benefits

to Oregon Conservation Strategy species through granting opportunities, OCRF should have consistent staffing to match the needs of the program whose scope has grown significantly since its inception.

We urge the Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources to pass SB 5509, continuing to bolster ODFW's ability to address the challenges to Oregon's fish and wildlife populations.

Sincerely,

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