



March 22, 2023

Senator Michael Dembrow, Co-Chair  
Representative Khanh Pham, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Natural Resources

**Re: Input on ODFW Budget (SB 5509)**

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. TU has more than 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, including many members in Oregon.

TU participated in the public process for ODFW's 2023-2025 budget. Our organization is a member of the agency's External Budget Advisory Committee (EBAC), and TU engaged in the EBAC meetings and other stakeholder meetings held over the past year related to crafting the next biennium's budget.

SB 5509 appropriates money from the General Fund to the State Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for certain biennial expenses.

**Trout Unlimited supports providing funding for certain items already in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB), but TU recommends adding funds for a few key initiatives at ODFW that are not in the GRB.**

**Items in GRB that TU Supports**

The GRB includes a number of policy option packages (POPs) from ODFW's agency request budget (ARB)<sup>1</sup> that TU supported during the ODFW budget-building process. We particularly support the following POPs in the GRB:

- 105 – Private Forest Accord Data Coordination (though funded in the GRB to a lesser extent than provided in the ARB; see comment on this item in section below)
- 112 – Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (though funded in the GRB to a lesser extent than provided in the ARB)
- 124 – Salmonid Forecasting and Habitat Models
- 125 – Rogue South Coast Steelhead Monitoring
- 130 – Fish Passage Restoration - Culverts

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<sup>1</sup> See ODFW, 2023-2025 Agency Request Budget, available at [https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/23-25\\_ARB/Complete%202023-25%20Agency%20Request%20Budget.pdf](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/23-25_ARB/Complete%202023-25%20Agency%20Request%20Budget.pdf) .

### Items Not in GRB that TU Recommends Funding

Trout Unlimited recommends that the Subcommittee support funding for the following items, which are not in the GRB:

1. Klamath Salmon Restoration (POPs 109 and 119 in the ARB)

TU is very concerned that the GRB does not include funding for ODFW fisheries biologists focused on the Klamath salmon reintroduction effort.

In December, ODFW and the Klamath Tribes completed the “Implementation Plan for the Reintroduction of Anadromous Fishes into the Oregon Portion of the Upper Klamath Basin.”<sup>2</sup> ODFW’s Klamath Fisheries Reintroduction Coordinator is one of the primary authors of that plan.

POP 119 in ODFW’s ARB would’ve provided \$302,936 for the existing, limited duration Klamath Fisheries Reintroduction Coordinator position at ODFW, and converted that position to a permanent position. POP 109 would’ve provided \$833,643 for 3 new FTE positions to join that Klamath team. Neither POP is in the GRB, meaning the GRB effectively lays off the ODFW staffer dedicated to the Klamath salmon restoration effort, and doesn’t hire the 3 additional staffers that ODFW needed to add to that team for the dam removal and monitoring phase.

Klamath dams removal will be the largest river restoration project in recorded American history. Without funding for ODFW POPs 109 and 119, ODFW will be largely going into the Klamath dam removal and watershed restoration effort without fisheries biologist staff focused on that massive state and federal effort.

The 4 positions requested in the ARB are key to tracking the fisheries response to the massive state and federal investment in watershed restoration. The state of Oregon is going to rely on *natural* repopulation of the upriver habitat by *wild* salmon and steelhead for all species other than chinook (for about 15 years after dam removal).<sup>3</sup> TU applauds that and believes it is best for watershed recovery, but we need ODFW staff on the ground throughout the watershed restoration process to monitor and ensure the fishery response.

2. Fish Passage Program Capacity (POPs 101 and 116 in the ARB)

ODFW’s ARB included several POPs related to fish passage. In recent years, our state has asked the agency’s fish passage program staff to do more with less. For example, the 2022 legislative session provided \$8 million to the program for on-ground project grant funds, to be allocated for spending in the current biennium, which ODFW staff admirably completed on top of their existing workloads. At the same time, the federal infrastructure bills are making available tremendous amounts of funding for fish passage work in the near future, but ODFW needs capacity to pull those funds down for Oregon.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at [https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/klamath\\_reintroduction\\_plan.asp](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/klamath_reintroduction_plan.asp) .

<sup>3</sup> See Haley Ohms, Trout Unlimited, Planning for Salmon and Steelhead to Return as the Klamath Dams Come Down, March 9, 2023 (available at <https://www.tu.org/magazine/conservation/barriers/dam-removal/planning-for-salmon-and-steelhead-to-return-as-the-klamath-dams-come-down/> ) (describing Oregon and California’s respective fish reintroduction plans).

Notwithstanding these additional workloads, the fish passage program has not received additional capacity in recent sessions. The fish passage program lost a position in 2021, and POP 101 would have restored funding to the NRS 3 Assistant Fish Passage Coordinator position (for \$236,862 in General Fund). Similarly, the federal dollars for fish passage will require significant historical and archaeological resource review, but ODFW's fish passage program does not possess that capacity in-house. POP 116 would have provided \$262,594 for a Cultural and Historic Resource Specialist to ensure ODFW can implement fish passage restoration projects at a level commensurate to the significant available funding.

3. Habitat and Water Programs (POP 107 in the ARB)

TU strongly supports the Habitat Division and its water program, which is responsible for studying, safeguarding, and restoring habitat and streamflows in Oregon's rivers. TU urges the Subcommittee to not recommend any cuts to the water program, and to support funding for related POP 107. POP 107 would have established 3 FTE positions in Habitat Division: Water Planning Coordinator, Instream Flow Biologist, and Water Rights Coordinator (at a cost of \$463,725 General Fund and \$231,862 Other Funds: WRD). TU believes this agency request is key to supporting Habitat Division's important work on instream flow restoration and aquatic habitat monitoring.

4. Private Forest Accord Data Coordination (POP 105 in the ARB)

Trout Unlimited is one of the Private Forest Accord (PFA) authors. The PFA requires the State to "contribute \$10 million per year for mitigation" with funds deposited in a Private Forest Accord Mitigation Subaccount administered by ODFW.<sup>4</sup> The GRB included only 50% of the funding required by the PFA for this Subaccount. TU recommends fully funding the ODFW PFA Mitigation Grant Fund.

5. Non-Native Fish Management (POP 118 in the ARB)

In recent years, the fall chinook salmon population in the Coquille River has crashed. TU has been involved in several initiatives to understand and address this problem, including smallmouth bass suppression efforts in the watershed and supporting policies (such as HB 2966-4 this session) targeted at fixing the issue. The ARB requested \$340,458 for 1.5 FTE and field supplies to strategically address these invasive fish species issues in the Coquille River and other priority areas, and TU supports funding related POP 118.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments, and please let me know if you have questions.

Sincerely,

James Fraser  
Oregon Policy Advisor, Trout Unlimited, [james.fraser@tu.org](mailto:james.fraser@tu.org)

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<sup>4</sup> See Private Forest Accord, Section 11.3.2.2, at page 143, available at <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/aboutodf/documents/2022-odf-private-forest-accord-report.pdf>; SB 1501 (2022) (the PFA policy legislation).