



## THEODORE ROOSEVELT CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

*\*To guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish\**

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Testimony Before Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Subject: SB 5509 – Relating to the Financial Administration of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife

Co-Chair Senator Dembrow, Co-Chair Representative Pham and members of the Committee,

My name is Michael O’Casey, and I am the Pacific Northwest Region Deputy Director for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP). Inspired by the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, the mission of the TRCP is to *guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish* by uniting and amplifying our partners’ voices to strengthen policy for fish and wildlife habitat and enhance public access to quality hunting and fishing opportunities. We work with 62 organizational partners and 130,000 members nationwide. The TRCP is providing testimony in support SB 5509 relating to the 2023-25 biennial budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Specifically, I wanted to highlight several Policy Option Packages with ODFW’s 23-25 budget, some that were included in the Governor’s Budget and others that were unfortunately missing.

### **Good things included in the Governor’s Requested Budget for ODFW**

POP 120 – Oregon Conservation Strategy Farm Bill Biologists:

These positions are primarily funded with federal dollars and provide additional capacity to the department.

Pop 121: Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition:

The TRCP supports the funding for the final phase of the Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition. The acquisition of key parcels that improve and/or expand access to our nation’s public lands is a priority for TRCP and the sportsmen and women we represent. In addition to providing public access for hunting/fishing and outdoor recreation, the acquisition of more than 11,000 acres in this final phase through this purchase would permanently conserve key winter range and movement corridors for elk herds in the region and reduce challenges such as landowner damage nearby by providing additional lower elevation habitat for herds to winter on. The purchase of this property will also help to ensure more habitat remains available for Northeast Oregon’s struggling mule deer population. The TRCP applauds the dedication by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, in partnership with ODFW, to spearhead this exciting land acquisition.

Pop 122: Mule Deer Coordinator Position

The TRCP supports the prioritization of mule deer research and monitoring, as well as the completion and implementation of the Mule Deer Management Plan. This position is a great value for the state with federal funds making up much of the cost.

### **Good things NOT INCLUDED in the Governor’s Requested Budget for ODFW**

Policy Option Package 102: Habitat Division Staffing

The TRCP **strongly supports** the continued funding support for the newly established Habitat Division. However, the Division currently lacks the capacity to fulfil critical roles to advance habitat conservation in the state. Bringing ODFW staff together within a single division and filling key resource and field-based position gaps will better enable the agency to cooperate with other state and federal agencies in order to promote habitat health, wildlife connectivity, and restoration across Oregon's diverse landscape. Given the huge scale of habitat policy and restoration issues that seem to grow each year, there is a need for increased capacity at the senior policy level to ensure fish and wildlife habitat are considered in balance.

POP 108 – Good Neighbor Authority Coordinators:

The Good Neighbor Authority positions provide great value for the state with a two-to-one match of Federal funds to General fund match dollars. These positions are imperative to ODFW's ability to coordinate and implement projects on federal lands that have a direct impact on Oregon's wildlife species.

POP 115 - Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Funding:

This package requests one permanent position at the ODFW health lab, funded with Pittman-Robertson funding and 9 seasonal positions in the field offices throughout the state using general fund dollars. CWD presents a dire threat to Oregon's ungulate populations. A prion disease, CWD is 100% fatal in deer, elk, and moose. The disease has been confirmed in multiple cases in Idaho, within 25 miles of the Oregon border and Oregon should take a proactive approach to fund research and monitoring to help keep this frightening wildlife disease out of Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the important work ongoing by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Sincerely,



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