



March 31, 2023

Testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Subject: HB 3086 – Clarifies process of Senate confirmation of members of State Fish and Wildlife Commission

Chair Helm, Vice-chairs Hartman and Owens, 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 strong support of the regional representation model described in HB 3086 with the -4 amendment.**

The TRCP strongly opposes both the -1 and -3 amendments. Regional representation, such as the utilization of the five river basin management areas, would provide an equitable and more diverse representation of the state. In addition to the five positions specific to the river basin management areas, the current statute stipulating one at large member residing west of the summit of the Cascade Mountains and one at-large member residing to the east of the summit should be retained to maintain the 7-member commission. The five river basin management areas have statutory precedent in ORS 536.022 as the regional representation for establishing the Oregon Water Resources Commission. This model has provided equitable representation for all Oregon citizens regarding the imperative issues surrounding water policy and would do the same when applied to wildlife and habitat management policies.

It is our recommendation that the governing statute should retain the stipulation of Commission appointments possessing a background in natural resources to ensure an understanding of all the varying interests and stakeholder viewpoints. Additionally, the commission appointments should continue to be nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, as is current statutory practice. We urge the committee to support HB 3086 as the base bill and we also support the proposed amendment to Commissioners qualifications to include experience in working with Tribes and understanding the deep and lasting relationships Oregon’s federally recognized Tribes have to lands, water, and natural resources that the Commission governs. Regional representation across the State and qualifications for an understanding of natural resources and tribal knowledge will ensure that appointed Commissioners will understand the unique challenges facing landscapes east of the cascades. Oregon’s rich tapestry of landscapes, wildlife, and perspectives on wildlife management is as diverse as the people who call it home. Our state has unparalleled diversity across our 60+ million acres and it’s of the utmost importance that our commissioners have a regional expertise and knowledge with all the ecoregions to best manage our fish, wildlife, and the habitat they need to thrive.

Currently, the statute aligns the commission representation by population density, leaving two-thirds of the state underrepresented within the commission structure yet containing a large portion of the state’s most necessary and impactful habitat and wildlife.

The TRCP believes this long-awaited update will pave the way for a truly diverse Commission structure, ensuring that management decisions for all of Oregon's awe-inspiring natural resources, wildlife, and habitats are well-represented. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the makeup for the guiding body of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Sincerely,



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