



Date: May 22, 2023

From: Bob Sallinger, Urban Conservation Director, Willamette Riverkeeper

To: Senate Rules Committee

Re: Opposition to HB 3086

Dear Chair Fahey and Members of the House Rules Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper to express our strong opposition to HB 3086 which would change the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission from congressional district based representation to river basin based representation. The -7 amendments in no way address our concerns.

At the core, our concerns revolve around transforming ODFW into an agency that takes a more holistic approach to managing the state's wildlife and engaging broader communities in wildlife conservation. For too long, ODFW has focused primarily on hunting, fishing and damage complaints. This is in part due to the manner in which the agency has been funded, but also in part due to the people who have been appointed to the commission. There has been a profound lack of focus on non-game species and especially imperiled non-game species. There has also been a remarkable lack of progress in advancing ODFW's two primary conservation plans: the Nearshore Strategy¹ and the Oregon Conservation Strategy².

We believe that it is imperative that ODFW step more fully into its stated mission "to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations." To us this means prioritizing not only game species, but also the 88% of Oregon species that are not hunted or fished. It means focusing on climate change and the profound impacts it is going to have on Oregon's terrestrial and aquatic habitats. It is about ensuring that ODFW serves and engages urban populations as well as its more traditional constituencies, both to build a culture of conservation in future generations and because of the increasing understanding of the role that urban ecosystems play in protecting biodiversity. It is

¹ [ODFW Nearshore Strategy](#).

² <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/>

about ensuring that the largest and most diverse possible pool of candidates is available for these complex positions, so that a wider array of perspectives are represented on the board. And finally it is about rebalancing the management paradigm from an emphasis on the utilitarian/ extractive value of wildlife towards the intrinsic value of wildlife, a shift that has long been underway in the public at large, but an arena in which ODFW has lagged behind.³

It is only in the past few years, thanks in large part to the leadership of Governor Kate Brown in actively seeking commissioners with a broader view of ODFW's conservation mission and a commitment to engaging communities that have been historically marginalized in the ODFW leadership, that we have seen a shift to this broader mandate. No commission structure is perfect, but congressional districts present the best option by far to achieve the types of outcomes enumerated above.

We view HB 3086 as a shift back towards business as usual; it is an approach that is inherently hostile towards building upon the strides that have been made in recent years by rejecting expanding the commission to reflect Oregon's changing demographics and relegating 78.7% of Oregon's population to two districts.

Regardless of what structure is ultimately chosen, we believe that the legislature and governor have a fundamental obligation to ensure that future ODFW commissions do a far better job of protecting the full range of Oregon's wildlife species, building a much broader and more diverse base, stepping hard into the profound challenges presented by climate change, and embracing an ethic that prioritizes protection.

We urge you to reject the River Basin approach and instead add a single position to reflect the new congressional district and an additional at-large seat to maintain an odd number of commissioners. This is an approach that is being taken with most other commissions affected by the new congressional district.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments,

Respectfully,

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³ <https://content.warnercnr.colostate.edu/AWV/OR-WildlifeValuesReport.pdf>