



Oregon Coastal Caucus

Rep. David Gomberg, Chair
Sen. Dick Anderson, Vice Chair
Sen. David Brock Smith
Sen. Suzanne Weber
Rep. Boomer Wright
Rep. Cyrus Javadi
Rep. Court Boice

May 2, 2023

The Honorable Tina Kotek
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301

Madam Governor,

We are writing to urge you to support the river basin model for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Commission (OFWC). It is our assertion that the decision-making body tasked with managing wildlife and habitat across the diverse landscape of Oregon should equally represent that diversity in its representative structure.

The regional representation accomplished through HB 3086's river basin management area model would provide an equitable and more diverse representation of the state. The model has statutory precedent in ORS 536.022 as the representation structure for the Oregon Water Resources Commission. The 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.

The current congressional district model restricts OFWC membership to the Northwest portion of the state containing the most dense human population. However, the OFWC manages wildlife and habitat resources which are not tied to large human populations but rather are widely dispersed throughout the state. Oregon has vast and varied landscapes, populated by different wildlife with differing needs based on the regions. Proper management must be rooted in representation from the differing regions of the state.

Expanding the regional representation of the OFWC does not reduce diversity; by contrast, it expands it tremendously. Not only are some of the fastest growing Hispanic communities located on the eastern side of the state but Tribal entities are more disbursed throughout the state. Tribal communities, and other minority communities, and socio-economic demography do not tightly cluster as do Oregon's congressional districts.

HB 3086 has support from a broad coalition of stakeholders in the hunting community, angling community, natural resources communities and five Tribal entities. The Coquille Indian Tribe, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, the Siletz Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, and the Burns Paiute Tribes are on record with testimony in support of OFWC representation by major river basin geography and oppose expanded congressional district-based representation.



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Tribal ecological knowledge of fish, wildlife, lands, and waters is place-based and is mirrored by the river-basin model of representation. The representation structure must be organized to empower sharing of the Tribal ecological knowledge with the OFWC in setting fish, wildlife, and habitat policy. State law directs the OFWC to provide for “the productive and sustainable utilization of wildlife resources for *“all groups of users”* (ORS 496.090(6)). Tribal use and needs vary across the state. Non-tribal use and needs vary across the state. Clustering the OFWC representation to Northwest Oregon exacerbates the current muting of Tribal voices.

HB 3086 does not alter the power of the Governor to appoint members of the OFWC, nor does it change the role the Senate holds in confirming those appointments. We are confident in the representation of Oregonians through this structure of appointments and confirmations, as assigned in statute to our elected officials.

Therefore, the Oregon Legislative Coastal Caucus calls on Governor Kotek to support the river basin model for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Commission. The Coastal Caucus will remain engaged in the effort to support HB 3086 with provisions for Tribal recognition. We encourage you to increase diversity and equity with better regional representation through the river basin model put forth in HB 3086.

Sincerely,

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CC:

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House Speaker Rayfield

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House Minority Leader Breese-Iverson

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Representative Helm

Representative Hartman

Representative Sanchez