



February 4, 2025

Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah Finger McDonald, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Re: Trout Unlimited Supports House Bill 2984 (\$1.5 million for OCRF water projects)

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit dedicated to conserving coldwater fish such as trout, salmon, and steelhead, and their habitats.

TU supports House Bill 2984 because it would provide \$1.5 million to a grant source housed within Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) that is remarkably effective in finding and funding good projects for Oregon’s native species and landscapes.

Background

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) is overseen by a citizen advisory committee, and pays for projects that “serve to protect, maintain or enhance fish and wildlife resources” as elaborated in ORS 496.252. Generally speaking, the fund’s expenditures may be directed toward efforts to *restore* fish and wildlife and their habitats, *engage* the public in related outdoor recreation, *educate* Oregonians on conservation, and *research* native species.

Past Appropriations

OCRF has received a few noteworthy injections of cash since its inception. Initially, its authorizing legislation required OCRF to unlock its first \$1 million of appropriations by soliciting \$1 million of public donations. In 2022, TU and conservation partners advocated for investments at several state programs—including OCRF—focused on preparing Oregon’s waterways and wetlands for drought; that effort resulted in a \$4 million appropriation to the fund *specifically* for drought and aquatic habitat resilience work. In 2023, the Legislature appropriated another \$1 million to OCRF for drought resilience efforts.

OCRF Today

The OCRF committee has been very effective in spending down its appropriations. In the six years since the Legislature established the program with HB 2829 (2019), OCRF and its advisory committee have garnered a reputation for finding and funding strong projects with a wide variety of purposes across the state. Indeed, the program has directed over \$7.5 million to 167 projects over that timeframe—and more dollars will soon go out the door. (Just yesterday, the OCRF committee voted to approve funding for 17 more projects totaling \$1,027,519, which will next go to the ODFW Commission for approval). The Fund

and its governing board are firing on all cylinders, but running low on cash; it's essential that the Legislature top-up the program for next biennium.

The Value of OCRF Projects

OCRF has funded incredible youth education projects, stream restoration projects, wildlife monitoring projects, and more. A full summary of projects (and interactive map) is available on OCRF's website.¹ TU has been fortunate to receive funding for 3 projects in the past, including:

- **Link Creek Restoration:** A youth education and habitat restoration project on Link Creek in the Metolius River watershed. The project engaged 201 students from Central Oregon and Portland over the course of 7 field trip and involved planting 525 plants and 20 aquatic species habitat structures in Link Creek upstream of Suttle Lake.²
- **Deschutes STREAM Connections:** A youth education program based on a modified version of the "STEM" (science, technology, engineering, math) model. The project provided field trips and after-school programs for underserved 3rd-8th grade youth in Jefferson and Deschutes Counties, allowing students to explore local streams and engage in watershed stewardship and outdoor skill-building activities.
- **Sheep Creek Restoration:** A watershed-scale habitat restoration project in Northeast Oregon's Grande Ronde basin. TU partnered with youth corps organizations to restore 4.5 miles of Sheep Creek, and used OCRF funds to construct 40 beaver dam analogs, 10 hand-built wood structures, and install riparian plantings.

For photos of some Trout Unlimited projects funded with OCRF dollars, see [Attachment 1](#).

Water Project Language

With regard to the bill specifics, TU would recommend that the Legislature and ODFW interpret the language "relate to water" broadly. Over the past three years, OCRF has done a great job of funding projects focused on drought resilience, which can apply to terrestrial species, birds, and other conservation or recreation work. We understand and expect that the water-specific lens contemplated by HB 2984 would be broadly construed; for instance, applying towards youth education about watersheds, amphibian species conservation, and other efforts that have a connection related to aquatic habitats – even if not strictly focused on doing hands-on projects in the water.

Thank you for considering this input, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

James Fraser
Oregon Policy Director
Trout Unlimited
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¹ <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/OCRF/projects.html>

² For more about this project, see "The missing link for the Metolius" on TU's website: <https://www.tu.org/magazine/conservation/from-the-field/the-missing-link-for-the-metolius/>.

Attachment 1

Photos of TU projects using OCRF funding



Sheep Creek post-restoration.



Sheep Creek mid-restoration.



Link Creek riparian planting.



Blue Lake field tour.