



February 20, 2025

Senator Janeen Sollman, Chair
Senator David Brock Smith, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

Re: Trout Unlimited Opposes SB 221-3 (More Hatchboxes in Coos County)

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit dedicated to the conservation of cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. TU has more than 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, including many members in Oregon.

Trout Unlimited opposes SB 221-3 because a fish incubation nursery (i.e., “hatchbox”) program already exists in Coos County, under the “research” framework of the applicable ODFW fish management plan and other agreements.

Senate Bill 221 as introduced is a “study” bill related to the salmon and trout enhancement program (STEP) housed within Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW). Hours before this Committee’s February 19th hearing, the “-3” amendment was posted on OLIS, which essentially cuts and pastes the content of another bill (SB 220), and re-purposes SB 221 as a hatchbox bill.

TU’s position is that this Committee should direct its attention on fish conservation proposals towards SB 222-1 (a sister bill related to detecting and controlling the spread of invasive smallmouth bass, also heard during the Committee’s February 19th meeting), for the following reasons:

1. Hatchboxes are *one tool* in the toolbox for restoring and conserving salmon stocks, with specialized application for certain scenarios.

Hatchboxes increase the number of fish hatching from the egg-stage in a system. They primarily serve to: (1) re-seed habitat that isn’t used by spawning fish; for example, in habitat far above a recently-removed fish passage barrier, and (2) ensure fish production in areas where spawning gravel is limited.

To be successful in producing increased numbers of returning adult fish, hatchboxes must be complementary to other approaches and actions (such as addressing invasive fish species and water quality). There aren’t many published papers regarding Chinook salmon hatchbox programs, but Conley (2020)¹ found that hatchbox progeny: (1) were significantly shorter in length than natural-produced progeny during the fall, (2) exhibited different dispersal patterns from natural-produced fish, and (3) had different smolt migration timing (a single pulse vs. two pulses for wild fish) and patterns than wild fish. Essentially, hatchbox fish were less effective than wild fish and did show

¹ Conley et al., *In-Stream Egg Incubators Produce Hatchery Chinook Salmon with Similarities to and Differences from Natural Juveniles* (2020) (available at: <https://afspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/nafm.10409>).

signs of domestication effects and hatchery selection, which warrants careful balancing of the benefits and risks in using hatchboxes.

2. Hatchboxes are *already* being used in Coos County.

With the background on utility and limits of hatchboxes (see above), TU's position is that using hatchboxes in the Coquille River specifically, for certain purposes, has value given the low numbers of returning adult fall Chinook. *However*, there is *already* a hatchbox program in the Coquille River and Coos River (both in Coos County, like the program described in SB 221-3), as referenced in this Committee's hearings on February 19th.

Our understanding is that the existing hatchbox programs in Coos County are for fall Chinook salmon only, and operate under the *research* and adaptive management frameworks of ODFW's Coastal Multi-Species Plan (CMP), as well as other plans and agreements between parties including ODFW and the Coquille Indian Tribe.

Generally speaking, the CMP limits usage of hatchboxes in coastal watersheds to species conservation efforts, and mostly phases out other hatchbox programs that existed at the time the CMP was approved by the ODFW Commission (in 2014). There is a general carve-out to this rule which authorizes hatchbox usage in *research*; we do not see any similar overlays or conditions on the hatchbox program described in SB 221-3. Moreover, there is no limit on *species* that the SB 221-3 concept could apply to, and TU may have concerns about using hatchboxes for species other than fall Chinook in Coos County.

TU's testimony on this bill does not regard existing research or conservation programs operating under the CMP, but rather, is focused on the content of SB 221-3.

3. TU recommends this Committee focus its attention on the smallmouth bass issue addressed in Senate Bill 222-1.

In the 2023 legislative session, Senator Brock Smith was a chief sponsor of HB 2966 (enrolled) that authorized ODFW to: (1) permit fishing contests that remove non-native game fish such as bass from Oregon waters, and (2) waive statutory protections for non-native game fish (such as the "waste" restriction) if beneficial to native species. TU supported HB 2966.² The Committee's hearing on February 19th addressed two bills related to salmon conservation and addressing related limiting factors, and TU recommends that the Committee focus its attention on the concept in SB 222-1, which would further the efforts allowed by HB 2966 (2023).

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on this legislation, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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² <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/89808>