



February 20, 2025

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

Re: Trout Unlimited Supports SB 222-1 (Early Detection and Control of Invasive Bass)

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 supports SB 222-1 because an important part of protecting Oregon’s trout, salmon, and steelhead is addressing the issue of invasive fish species such as smallmouth bass which predate upon juvenile salmonids.

Senate Bill 222 *as introduced* is a broadly-stated mandate for Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) to “establish a program to manage population levels of species that prey on salmon” and apply to federal agencies for permits to control predators that are protected by federal law. TU does *not support* SB 222 as introduced.

The “-1” amendment to SB 222 significantly narrows the focus of the bill in a constructive way. The amendment would direct ODFW to (1) establish a program that monitors introduction of smallmouth bass to coastal rivers, and (2) “support programs to eradicate smallmouth bass” in those systems. It also appropriates \$1 million to ODFW for next biennium to implement the new program focused on bass detection and control.

TU supports SB 222-1 because—as the Committee heard in testimony on SB 221 and SB 222 during the February 19th hearing—smallmouth bass have been extraordinarily damaging to some fish stocks in Oregon, including fall Chinook salmon in the Coquille River. Unfortunately, bad actors have transported and introduced bass to various systems around the State in recent years, where those bass then predate upon native fish. Such “bucket biology” is likely to continue (and is a problem for fish managers and conservationists across the country).

In the 2023 legislative session, Senator Brock Smith was a chief sponsor of enrolled bill (HB 2966) 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 2966.¹ SB 222 with “-1” amendment would further the efforts of that 2023 legislation

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/89808>

SB 222-1 can proactively set up ODFW for early detection and eradication efforts of smallmouth bass. Oftentimes, introduction of invasive, non-native fish species involves only a small number of individual fish moved from one waterbody to another. Fortunately, relatively new “eDNA” technology allows biologists to survey for presence/absence of species in a waterbody with minimal labor and relatively low cost by taking and testing water samples. This bill would provide ODFW the capacity to monitor, detect, and nimbly react to illegal stocking activities while still relatively manageable.

Lastly, TU recommends that the Legislature and ODFW consider *broadly* the amendment’s direction to “support programs to eradicate smallmouth bass” in affected coastal rivers. Certainly, it makes reasonable sense to support ongoing large-scale bass removal efforts in the Coquille River. But we would like to see ODFW commit resources to longer-term and bigger-picture solutions that could comprehensively and completely address the smallmouth issue, such as studying and developing “YY” technology for smallmouth bass (i.e., pursue the science of producing “YY male smallmouth bass” which would produce only male bass progeny, ultimately driving an entire population of smallmouth bass to extirpation; similar efforts are underway for other fish species which can be invasive and ecologically-damaging outside their home range, such as brook trout).

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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