

February 23, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Rep. Helm and Rep. Owens, Vice Chair Rep. McDonald, and all Members of the Committee,

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation supports HB 2977, which would generate much-needed funding for Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to carry out its mission and mandate. The Xerces Society is a national non-profit dedicated to the conservation of insects, other invertebrates, and their habitats. Oregon is where Xerces was founded and where its main operations remain today. Our biologists work on a range of species, including native bee and butterfly pollinators, beetles, and mollusks.

A state's Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a roadmap for proactively conserving fish and wildlife to prevent species from becoming endangered. Extraordinary time, effort, community consultation, and expertise go into crafting these comprehensive plans. Yet implementation of the crucial actions they outline are generally underfunded or unfunded. **Passage of HB 2977 would help to ensure ODFW is equipped with the resources it needs to execute Oregon's Conservation Strategy (OR's SWAP).** Importantly, the funding established by HB2977 would allow ODFW to work on conservation efforts for Oregon's 294 species of greatest conservation need (SCGN), which include 64 invertebrates.

At Xerces, we focus on invertebrates because they are at the heart of a healthy environment. Invertebrates pollinate most flowering plants, including many of the fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds that both humans and wildlife depend on. The vast majority of birds, bats, and freshwater fish depend on invertebrates as food. Invertebrates clean our streams and rivers by filtering water, they help clean up plant, animal, and human waste, and they support food production by controlling pests. One study found that native insects are worth more than \$70 billion a year to the U.S. economy.

Unfortunately, many insect and other invertebrate species are in trouble, with some species experiencing severe population declines; for example, the western monarch butterfly has declined by 95% since the 1990s and the once-common western bumble bee has declined by 90% since the early 2000s. Indeed, over 20% of the state's SCGN species are invertebrates. In spite of the enormous importance of invertebrates for ecosystem function, it has long been the case that key sources of federal funding for wildlife agencies cannot be directly used for invertebrate conservation. For example, Pittman-Robertson funds are constrained to birds and mammals. **Passage of HB2977 would create the opportunity for ODFW to engage in increased conservation of invertebrates.**

We note that ODFW's ability to conserve *insect* species (a subset of invertebrates), at present, is also constrained by statute: they are not included in the state's definition of wildlife. We believe steady funding for conservation of SCGN species not otherwise covered by traditional

federal funds would allow Oregon and ODFW to update its mission to include conservation of declining insects, including essential pollinator species like bumble bees and butterflies. In North America, state wildlife agencies like ODFW are the first line of defense against the ongoing loss of wildlife species because they have the local expertise and community connections to develop and execute conservation actions while considering the needs of local stakeholders. HB 2977 would provide necessary resources to ODFW to prevent the federal listing of species under the Endangered Species Act. Funding OCRF will support ODFW in conserving the state's rich and biodiverse natural heritage.

People from across the country and around the world come to Oregon to experience its incredible natural beauty and its remarkable diversity of ecosystems, wildlife, and geologic wonders. Over the last several years, Oregon has annually reported record-breaking visitations to the state park system. Indeed, **outdoor recreation supports \$15.6 billion in total consumer spending, supports 224,000 full and part-time jobs in Oregon, and provides for \$9.3 billion in wages.** According to Travel Oregon, ~60% of total visitor spending came from out-of-state visitors in 2023.

Investing in ODFW will ensure that Oregon's natural heritage remains an asset for Oregonians, and a source of enjoyment for Oregon enthusiasts, now and into the future. It is more important now than ever that we set up our state wildlife agencies for success. We hope you will report HB2977 favorably out of committee.

Sincerely,



Rosemary Malfi, Ph.D.
Director of Conservation Policy
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
rosemary.malfi@xerces.org