

DATE: March 13, 2025

TO: Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Ways & Means Natural Resources Subcommittee

FROM: Bird Alliance of Oregon, Oregon Wild, Trout Unlimited, Wild Salmon Center

**RE: Private Forest Accord Funding Needs in Oregon Department of Forestry's Budget (SB 5521)**

Dear Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations that represent conservation signatories to the Private Forest Accord, we appreciate your consideration of these comments regarding the Oregon Department of Forestry's budget (SB 5521).

The Private Forest Accord (PFA) was the result of months of negotiations brokered by the Governor's office between 13 timber industry representatives and 13 conservation and fishing groups to broadly reform the Oregon Forest Practices Act. A foundational goal of this process was to modify Oregon's standards for logging on private forest lands to achieve a federally approvable Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

If an HCP is not finalized and approved by 2027, all of the PFA changes roll back to the previous Oregon Forest Practices Act (OFPA) standards. In July 2024, the state submitted its comprehensive draft HCP to USFWS and NOAA. Full funding for natural resource agencies to ensure successful implementation of the PFA and a federally approvable HCP is critical in the 2025-2027 biennium, and should be included in the CSL/base budget in future years. Underfunding these programs in the next biennium puts the viability of the PFA and a federally approved HCP at risk.

Specifically, we respectfully request full funding for two key programs at the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF):

- 1) Full funding for Small Forestland Owner Investment in Stream Habitat (SFISH) Program at ODF (\$10M):** The PFA included new resources for small forestland owners, including the SFISH program that provides grants to small forestland owners to replace or upgrade culverts and stream crossings. Ongoing investment in this program is a core component of the PFA's new requirements to provide increased technical and financial assistance to small forestland owners, particularly as the new rules are now in effect. The SFISH Program was funded at \$6.67M in an ODF POP in the 2023-2025 biennium, but should be fully funded at the \$10M requested in the 2025-2027 biennium to ensure these commitments are met.

- 2) **Full funding for Adaptive Management Program at ODF (\$6M):** The Adaptive Management Program is a foundational component of both the new rules and the HCP that establishes a process to evaluate the effectiveness of the new rules in meeting biological goals and objectives and determine if policy changes are needed. In the 2023-2025 biennium, the Adaptive Management Program was funded at \$4M in an ODF POP which was less than the \$6M requested. This program should be funded at \$6M in the 2025-2027 biennium, but does not currently appear to be funded either in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GBR) or ODF's budget (SB 5521).

Continuing to underfund this program will make it challenging to conduct the research necessary to assess the effectiveness of the rules and meet the standards of an approvable HCP. Ongoing budget shortfalls for this program will also make it challenging to recruit and retain qualified expert stakeholders to participate in both the Adaptive Management Program Committee (AMPC) and the Independent Research and Science Team (IRST).<sup>1</sup> Adaptive Management is a critical component in achieving the goals of the PFA to provide a collaborative, science-driven, and less contentious process for considering future rule changes.

Although not in ODF's budget (SB 5521), the third component of PFA funding in the 2025-2027 biennium is the PFA Grant Program under the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) budget (HB 5009). This program represents a commitment in the authorizing legislation from 2022 (SB 1501) for the state to contribute \$10M annually and \$2.5M from industry annually for this fund until federal approval of an HCP, after which the industry contribution increases to \$5M annually. This program provides dedicated grant funding for fish passage barrier removal, stream habitat restoration, and other mitigation projects.

Now is the time to secure the PFA into the future and to ensure that Oregon has its best chance to secure federal approval of the PFA HCP. Thanks for your consideration of these comments and our request for full funding for the Private Forest Accord (PFA).

Sincerely,

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Statewide Conservation Director  
Bird Alliance of Oregon

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Oregon Director  
Trout Unlimited

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State Forest Policy Coordinator  
Oregon Wild

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<sup>1</sup> Two signatory organizations to this letter Oregon Wild and Wild Salmon Center are current members of the AMPC and IRST that received participation grants in the 2023-2025 budget and identify a potential conflict of interest.