

March 25, 2025

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

My name is David Moskowitz, I am a wild fish and rivers advocate speaking to you from Northeast Portland and testifying in opposition to SB 512 as amended.

SB 512 allocates \$1.4 million General Fund dollars to study several random topics related to Rock Creek Hatchery - each one which would be a poor investment for anyone's money - let alone the average Oregon taxpayer.

By hearing SB 512 and its -2 amendments - the committee is giving life to a poor financial decision that will take Oregon down an economic rat hole and further along a flawed policy path - costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars over the next few decades.

In addition, Oregon will lose the opportunity to invest in one of Oregon's most important wild fish watersheds

Let's take a quick visit to the Umpqua (The Land of Thundering Waters) - it is a tale of two forks of the same river - the South Umpqua, where most of the native salmon and steelhead are in trouble - and the North Umpqua - which is home to six fairly healthy native salmon, trout and steelhead populations - as well as lamprey and other native fishes - the North Umpqua is as close to perfect as any place in Oregon and is one of Oregon's most wonderful places to raft, kayak, hike, bird watch, gaze at unique wild flowers, see a dozen spectacular waterfalls in an afternoon - on top of all of this - it is a place where wild fish support robust fisheries - mostly because there is a declining impact from hatchery interference.

The destruction of the Rock Creek Hatchery in 2020 - considered a disaster by some - is actually a blessing in disguise for the North Umpqua because Rock Creek Hatchery has been one of the most dysfunctional hatcheries in Oregon's system - regularly beset by fish kills, poor water quality and infrastructure problems.

Furthermore, Rock Creek Hatchery has raised salmon for harvest, not for conservation.

Beyond all the false assertions regarding the critical nature of Rock Creek Hatchery, there is absolutely no scientific basis in the whole of peer-reviewed scientific literature supporting the alleged conservation benefits for wild salmon and steelhead from hatchery production.

Frankly, spending money on Rock Creek Hatchery would be like building a resort hotel inside Mt. St. Helens' crater.

SB 512 -2 is the proverbial cart-before-the-horse as ODFW will begin reviewing and revising its Coastal Multi-species Management Plan (CMP) in 2026 - and the proposed cuts in fish monitoring and research effort currently part of ODFW's budget scenario - meant to inform the CMP process - will likely be reduced further if this bill passed - especially since the proposed research focus in SB 512-2 have little to do with the key questions necessary to answer within the CMP.

In another cart-before-the-horse moment, Oregon's Hatchery Resilience Assessment Report - to be presented to Ways and Means one week from today - is meant to provide a roadmap or a blueprint for Oregon's hatcheries for the next 100 years.

This committee is way out over its skis on this bill - both fiscally, ecologically and scientifically.

Oregon's Hatchery System is now 150 years old. The concrete is crumbling, the rebar is rusting, the stainless steel is no longer. Climate change is here and raising water temperatures as well as affecting streamflows.

ODFW already faces revenue shortfalls in multiple fish division programs and SB 512 -2 actually will exacerbate its funding gap.

The Committee would have done well to set aside SB 512-2 and have some faith to allow the North Umpqua show us all how productive wild fish can be when we let them do what they know what to do.

As Bill Ruckelshaus, former EPA Director, so wisely noted "Nature provides a free lunch, but we need to control our appetite."

As a member of ODFW's Hatchery Assessment Working Group for the overall Hatchery Resilience Assessment Report, I can report that ODFW's own hatchery resilience and risk analysis ranked Rock Creek lowest - and not simply because the facility burned down - but also because that fire also severely burned the Rock Creek watershed - reducing large woody debris pieces to mere ashes that was placed as part of restoration projects just in the past decade - these were restoration trees placed in-stream during previous efforts to restore the watershed from excessive logging and roadbuilding. First logging and roadbuilding, then a catastrophic wildfire - Rock Creek itself will be hazardous to fish survival for a long time. ODFW will not be

able to operate Rock Creek Hatchery without water chillers - which are not even currently present at the adequate voltage in order to power the site.

Every dollar spent at Rock Creek prevents ODFW from climate-proofing and right-sizing every other hatchery in Western Oregon - and that does not even account for the \$220 million in deferred maintenance that is backlogged from Big Creek to Cole Rivers.

ODFW's next biennium budget will require \$8.8 million in expenditure cuts to the 2025-2027 budget. \$2 million of these cuts are in hatchery management, a 2.13% decrease in hatchery program spending. In addition, \$1.7 million in cuts may be necessary to critical monitoring programs - among them research in the Rogue-South Coast Region affecting multiple rivers.

These budget woes will exist EVEN if ODFW is able to pass a license fee increase and extend the Columbia River endorsement in this legislature.

Because legislators, policymakers, and many stakeholders lack the essential information necessary to determine if SB 512-2 is the best use of our state's limited resources, that alone should have given the Committee pause before sending another proposed expenditure into what is turning into a literal burn pile of good money following bad.

Better communication among the natural resource committees in developing and hearing legislative and budget provisions would likely make the Ways and Means process more transparent and effective.

I would like to re-remind the Committee that the 2023 Legislature directed a budget note to ODFW to conduct a broad review of Oregon's hatchery system - taking a holistic and comprehensive examination of Oregon's infrastructure.

ODFW is poised to present their findings - it should be required listening and reading for every member of the Legislature.

The best course of action would have been to pause all investment in Rock Creek Hatchery and become familiar with the Budget Note report to be better informed to analyze the best course of action given the available funds.

It may seem strange for a wild fish advocate to be promoting a plan to address hatchery infrastructure.

Indeed it is. Particularly since ODFW's budget is currently disproportionately allocating available funds towards hatchery fish production which is an agency activity that is ecologically destructive and financially unsustainable.

These poorly prioritized expenditures in the department's budget are clearly evident in the fact that even the hatchery program costs that are capable of assignment are essentially equivalent to the entire budget of the ODFW Wildlife Division, as well as exceeding expenditures for every other category.

Quite simply, SB 512 and as amended in the dash 2 is out of synch and out of touch with the realities of the Umpqua Basin, ODFW's coastal salmon planning and out of touch with the larger ODFW agency budget for 2025-2027.

Submitted by David A. Moskowitz

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