



March 28, 2025

Senator Lew Frederick, Co-Chair
Representative Emerson Levy, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: **Trout Unlimited Input on ODFW Budget Bill (HB 5009)**

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy, and Members of the Subcommittee,

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

TU participated in the stakeholder process for crafting ODFW's budget. HB 5009 appropriates money from the General Fund to the State Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for biennial expenses.

Trout Unlimited appreciates that the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) for ODFW¹ maintains current service level for many important efforts in the Department's Fish Division and Habitat Division (including ODFW's Water Program). We especially support funding for certain items already in the GRB, but we recommend adding funds for a couple key initiatives at ODFW that are not in the GRB, as detailed below. Lastly, TU participated in ODFW's Hatchery Resilience process last year, and we recommend that the Legislature use that information to inform infrastructure investments moving forward.

Items in GRB that TU Supports

The GRB includes a number of policy option packages (POPs) from ODFW's agency request budget (ARB)² that TU supported during the ODFW budget-building process. We especially particularly support the following POPs in the GRB, and encourage the Subcommittee to ensure these remain in the Legislature's budget:

- 101 – Instream Water Rights & Land Use Resolution
- 102 – Fish Screening Capacity in Klamath Basin
- 106 – Klamath Reintroduction Monitoring
- 122 – Fish & Wildlife Passage Infrastructure

¹ See ODFW, 2025-2027 Governor's Recommended Budget, available at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/25-27/2025-27%20GRB_ODFW%20635.pdf .

² See ODFW, 2025-2027 Agency Request Budget, available at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/25-27/2025-27%20ARB_63500-ODFW.pdf .

Items Not in GRB that TU Recommends Funding

Trout Unlimited recommends that the Subcommittee support funding for the following items, which are not in the GRB:

1. Provide full funding for Private Forest Accord Grant Program.

TU is one of several signatories on a group letter regarding Private Forest Accord (PFA) components of ODFW's budget. We cross-reference that input here. TU urges the Subcommittee to provide full funding for the PFA Grants program within ODFW because that is an important component of fully implementing the PFA (per SB 1501 (2022)).

2. Reject cuts to wild fish monitoring efforts in Reduction Package 70.

Many recreational fisheries in Oregon – including catch and release fisheries on wild fish such as summer steelhead in Columbia tributaries, or harvest opportunities for coastal coho salmon – can only occur because ODFW keeps a close eye on population numbers and trends. Cuts to monitoring staff can result in closures of beloved and economically valuable opportunities.

Reduction Package 070 of the GRB³ proposes \$6.3 million in reductions at Fish Division – Inland Fisheries, including several important monitoring positions (for Coastal Chinook Research and Monitoring, and for Life Cycle Monitoring). Notably, the GRB flags that these reductions may result in fishery or harvest closures.⁴ TU respectfully recommends funding the monitoring positions proposed for reduction in Package 070 of the GRB.

3. Fund POP 103 for Chinook Production in the Klamath Basin.

TU places a high priority on the Klamath-related requests for new General Fund dollars in the next biennial budget (including POPs 102 and 106, as referenced above). In fall 2024, fall Chinook salmon and coho salmon returned volitionally to the Oregon portion of the Klamath watershed within weeks of the Klamath dams being removed. However, the nearest population of *spring Chinook* salmon is hundreds of miles downriver in California, meaning natural repopulation of the upper Klamath by that species is unlikely to occur on similar timescales.

Trout Unlimited agrees with the existing plan to rely on unassisted, natural repopulation of the upper basin by most salmonid species (as provided by the governing implementation plan).⁵ We also support the effort to actively reintroduce spring Chinook in the upper watershed as provided by that plan. POP 103 in the ARB would have provided \$167,959 in General Fund for 0.50 FTE and expenses to produce and reintroduce spring Chinook salmon in the Oregon portion of the basin. This is a modest but highly

³ See pp. 439-441 of GRB at https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/25-27/2025-27%20GRB_ODFW%20635.pdf.

⁴ See p. 440 of GRB (describing cuts to fish monitoring that “will impact the ability to monitor long-term watershed restoration benefits and the ability to verify the accuracy of decisions around coastal coho harvest (*which may reduce the frequency of holding these fisheries*)” and position reductions that “will limit the agency’s ability to assess the impact of the hydroelectric system along the Columbia River and the Snake River *and to provide fishery opportunities.*”) (emphasis added).

⁵ See ODFW and The Klamath Tribes, *Implementation Plan for the Reintroduction of Anadromous Fishes into the Oregon Portion of the Upper Klamath Basin* (December 2021), available at: https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/docs/klamath_reintroduction_plan/ODFW%20and%20The%20Klamath%20Tribes_Upper%20Klamath%20Basin%20anadromous%20reintroduction%20implementation%20plan_Final%202021.pdf.

important piece of the fish reintroduction effort, and we respectfully request funding POP 103 of the ARB.

Hatchery Resilience Assessment

In 2023, a legislative budget note directed ODFW to conduct various assessments of the state-owned hatchery system, including its climate vulnerability (SB 5506 (2023)). The budget note required ODFW to present a report on those efforts during the 2025 session. As part of ODFW's assessment, the Department held a series of public webinars and small-group discussions last year regarding the hatchery system.

TU participated in all of those processes, including the small group meetings. We look forward to seeing the Department's presentation and report to the Subcommittee. Moving forward, Trout Unlimited recommends that the Legislature use and rely upon the information gathered in the hatchery resilience process to inform strategic and well-prioritized legislative investments in state-owned hatchery infrastructure.

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

Sincerely,

James Fraser
Oregon Policy Advisor
Trout Unlimited
james.fraser@tu.org