



DATE: April 1, 2025

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

FROM: Wild Salmon Center

**RE: Priorities for Funding in 2025-2027 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget (HB 5009)**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) budget under HB 5009. Wild Salmon Center is a nonprofit organization based in Oregon that works with local partners to protect and restore healthy forests and abundant clean water to support the strongest remaining runs of wild Pacific salmon. We use science to drive policy, lead planning processes, and support implementation of durable conservation protections.

Healthy forests, thriving wild fish populations, and abundant supplies of cold clean water support sustainable economies and communities across the state. Over the next biennium, it will be more important than ever to maintain critical funding levels for natural resource agencies and invest in projects and strategies that support a climate-resilient Oregon.

Wild Salmon Center respectfully requests your consideration of the following priorities for ODFW's budget under HB 5009:

**1. Prioritize full funding for the Private Forest Accord (PFA) Grant Program (\$20M)**

The Private Forest Accord (PFA) is the first comprehensive update to Oregon's logging rules on private forest lands in decades. It provides significant new protections for fish and stream-dwelling frogs and salamanders, for cold clean water, and for the people who rely on these resources across more than 10 million acres of private forestlands. A core component of this agreement is for the state to secure a federally approved Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) by December 31, 2027. Without a federally approved HCP by the deadline, all of the changes under the PFA will roll back.

A critical action to the success of the PFA and ensuring a federally approved PFA HCP by 2027 will be for the state to fully fund core programs at ODF and ODFW for the 2025-2027 biennium. Three programs totaling \$36M—1) the PFA Grant Program at ODFW (\$20M), 2) the small forestland owner SFISH Grant Program

at ODF (\$10M), and 3) the Adaptive Management Program at ODF (\$6M)—were not included in the base budget or in the Agency Request Budgets (ARBs).<sup>1</sup> These programs are foundational to securing an HCP and represent commitments in the PFA’s authorizing legislation, 2022’s SB 1501. Further, these core programs should be integrated into CSL/base budget into the future. Specifically, in ODFW’s budget (HB 5009) we respectfully request:

- a. **Full funding for the ODFW PFA Grant Program (\$20M GF; \$4M included in HB 5009, \$16M shortfall):** This program provides dedicated grant funding for fish passage barrier removal, stream habitat restoration, and other mitigation projects. The PFA authorizing legislation (SB 1501) commits an annual investment of \$10M from the state and \$2.5M from industry into this fund until federal approval of an HCP, after which the industry contribution increases to \$5M annually. For the state, this represents a legislative commitment of \$20M per biennium.
  - **Funding level in HB 5009:** ODFW’s budget bill (HB 5009) funds the PFA Grant Program at \$4M for the biennium. This is \$16M less than the \$20M needed to meet commitments made in SB 1501.
  - **GRB funding level:** The GRB established a Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA) of \$14M for all three programs at ODF and ODFW without specifying the funding split. This was \$22M less than the \$36M total need for all three programs.

**2. Prioritize adequate funding to increase drought resilience, support smart water management, and alleviate data gaps.**

ODFW’s Water Program and Habitat Division is essential to moving towards a sustainable water future for Oregon, recovering threatened salmon, and sustaining economies and cultures that depend upon healthy rivers. ODFW is the only state agency specifically charged with stewarding our fish and wildlife and their habitats. The Water Program has taken years to build to its current staffing level and is tasked with ensuring our rivers and streams have enough water to support aquatic ecosystems.

- a. **No cuts to current service levels of ODFW's Water Quality and Water Quantity Program (fully funded in GRB):** Limited water quantity and poor water quality are hurting native fish and aquatic wildlife, and climate change is expected to further increase water temperatures and reduce the amount of water available. ODFW’s Water Program is critical to securing and protecting instream water rights, assessing areas of coldwater refuge for native salmon and trout, and expanding the state’s network of real-time data collection on stream temperature and flows.
- b. **Fully fund the following Policy Option Package (POP) priorities:**
  - **POP 101 Instream Water Rights & Land Use Resolution (\$300K GF; fully funded in GRB):** This policy option package funds critical DOJ

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<sup>1</sup> Wild Salmon Center staff are currently members of the AMPC and the IRST under the Adaptive Management Program at ODF that received participation grants in the 2023-2025 budget and identify a potential conflict of interest.

support to allow ODFW to address legal challenges to the agency's actions to protect Oregon's fish and wildlife habitats.

- POP 122 Fish & Wildlife Passage Infrastructure (\$13.25M Lottery Bonds; fully funded in GRB): This policy option package authorizes spending of lottery bond revenue (\$8.75M for Fish Division and \$4.5M for Habitat Division) on infrastructure projects to improve fish passage and wildlife connectivity.

### 3. **Prioritize sustainable, strategic, and science-based investments in management of wild and hatchery fish.**

WSC focuses on protecting and conserving “salmon strongholds” on the Oregon Coast, where wild salmon populations are strong and diverse and where habitats are highly functioning and intact. The following programs support these objectives and we respectfully request full funding in HB 5009:

- a. Fully fund ODFW coastal monitoring programs (\$1.7M GF; not included in GRB): For decades, monitoring programs coastwide have provided essential data for the future management of wild and hatchery salmon and steelhead. The GRB did not include \$1.7M needed for existing ODFW monitoring programs, including funding for the Oregon Adult Salmonid Inventory and Sampling Program, which provides data supporting abundance, spatial distribution, temporal distribution, and hatchery fish spawning with wild fish. Without this funding, ODFW will not be able to complete watershed-specific, place-based surveys that provide population estimates that help indicate population health.
- b. Fully fund POP 103 - Chinook Production in Klamath Basin (\$167,959 GF; not included in GRB): For the past three years, ODFW has studied the feasibility of spring Chinook re-introduction to the upper Klamath Basin following the removal of the four dams on the lower Klamath River. Spring Chinook were extirpated from the upper Klamath Basin when the dams were built in the early 20th century. ODFW requested \$167,959 in General Fund under the Agency Request Budget (ARB) to implement a re-introduction production program. Without this funding, the re-introduction of spring Chinook salmon will not occur in the 25-27 biennium.
- c. POP 106 Klamath Reintroduction Monitoring (\$305,883 OF - PCSRF; fully funded in GRB): This policy option package provides funding from the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) to support one permanent full-time Biological Science Assistant and seasonal time for two existing positions to monitor Chinook, coho, steelhead, and lamprey populations post-dam removal.

Where investments in hatchery management are made, they must be grounded in science, aligned with assessments completed during the ODFW hatchery resilience process, supportive of Tribal and cultural values, consistent with the

Coastal Multi-species Conservation Management Plan, and representative of a strategic investment for Oregonians.

- a. Any new investments in hatchery infrastructure should be informed by the ODFW state hatchery system assessment completed in 2024 and the best available science. Over the past year, ODFW engaged multiple private contractors to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the statewide hatchery system. This assessment identified key challenges, including the impacts of climate change, deferred maintenance, and the economic viability of state-owned hatchery facilities. These assessments must inform future decisions in hatchery infrastructure investments to provide long-term benefits to the rivers, fish, and all Oregonians.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide more detailed comments regarding the ODFW budget bill (HB 5009), and please contact us if we can provide further information as you consider these critical funding needs.

Sincerely,

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Wild Salmon Center

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