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Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony in support of HB 5009: Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget

Submitted by: Lauren Link, TNC OR State Policy Advisor

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of HB 5009, the budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for the 2025-27 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is a driver of Oregon's conservation strategy, protecting the health of species across the state in marine reserves and rocky shores, forests and wetlands, and grasslands and the sagebrush steppe, supporting voluntary conservation for private landowners, and playing a key role in managing and enforcing habitat mitigation standards as Oregon transitions to a clean energy future. TNC supports the state's investments in wildlife and habitat management and restoration in a changing climate and urge fully funding the agency budget at the continuing service level.

In addition, we also recommend you prioritize the following funding options as you consider the budget for this agency:

Investing in our Natural and Working Lands: TNC supports ODFW's commitment to mitigating climate impacts through their work to prioritize projects that benefit both people and nature. TNC supports **Package 108**, which provides continuation of \$2.8 million Other Funds expenditure limitation for the Natural Climate Solutions Fund to invest in projects that not only sequester and store carbon, but also support habitat and floodplain restoration, reduce wildfire risk, address invasive grasses in rangelands, and estuary restoration.

This Fund has also invested in two Natural Working Lands Biologists that have been essential in conducting community engagement, administering programs, and implementing projects. We support the inclusion of the limited duration (1.50 FTE) positions to complete the projects. All of these projects are currently underway and without the requested expenditure limitation and positions, implementation would be halted, and communities would not see the benefits of these projects.

Expanding Agency Capacity in Mitigation and Climate Resiliency Work: TNC supports **Package 125**, which repurposes existing General Fund within the Wildlife Management program to leverage Federal Funds for a position (1.00 FTE) to coordinate with other climate policy leads across the agency and help integrate climate science into planning, research, and implementation programs. This position will expand ODFW's capacity to incorporate climate adaptation and resiliency into agency programs and to implement more strategic mitigation across the state. ODFW's technical assistance on renewable energy siting projects is essential for ensuring that renewable energy development is well-sited, adequately mitigated, and responsibly operated; we are excited to see that this position will add capacity to do this critical work.

Continue Investments in the Private Forest Accord (PFA) Grant Mitigation Program: TNC supports fully funding the PFA Grant Mitigation Program, as it is a core component of the negotiated agreements under the PFA (SB 1501) and shows Oregon's commitment to making needed mitigation investments as a buffer against potential impact on species. Oregon has a statutory obligation to commit \$20M per biennium to provide dedicated grant funding for fish passage barrier removal, stream habitat restoration, and other mitigation projects. Currently, the PFA Grant Mitigation Program is funded at \$10M, which is half of what is needed to fulfill the agreement. Full funding for ODFW to ensure successful implementation of the PFA is critical in the 2025-27 biennium.

Continue Investments in the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF): TNC supports continued investments in the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, which invests in research, science, and on-the-ground projects that help conserve Oregon's diverse species while also identifying, prioritizing, and restoring Oregon's ecosystems in ways that benefit wildlife and people.

TNC is committed to working with ODFW to ensure the agency has the necessary funding, the position authority, and the staff capacity to manage and implement these critical programs. Thank you for your consideration and your continued attention to the needs of Oregon's natural environments.