



April 23, 2025

Co-Chair Helm

Co-Chair Owens

Vice Chair Finger McDonald

Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

RE: NFS Opposes SB 221A – Expanding hatchboxes in Coos County without sideboards

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, Vice Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

Native Fish Society¹ opposes SB 221A. While we acknowledge the crisis facing fall Chinook salmon in the Coquille watershed, we must respectfully oppose this bill in its current form.

Our opposition centers on several key concerns:

First, this bill is unnecessary. As revealed in testimony before both the House and Senate Committees, hatchboxes are already being deployed in Coos County. ODFW currently works with the Coquille Indian Tribe, local STEP groups, and the Oregon Hatchery Research Center on hatchbox programs for fall Chinook in both the Coquille River and Millicoma River systems. These existing programs operate under the guidance of the Coastal Multispecies Management Plan (CMP).

Second, it is unlikely that expanded hatchbox programs will have a substantive impact.

Previous testimony by ODFW on similar hatchbox bills from prior legislative sessions outlines the various pitfalls and drawbacks of hatchbox programs stating, “It should also be noted that, from an adult production perspective for fisheries or reintroductions, egg incubation programs would likely not be very successful at replacing existing hatchery programs that feed and rear fish longer.”²

Third, the bill lacks critical sideboards. The CMP currently allows hatchboxes in Coos County only for fall Chinook and limits all programs to a collective maximum of 100,000 unfed fry. SB

¹ The Native Fish Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to restore abundant wild fish, free-flowing rivers, and thriving local communities across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

² Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (2021, March 18). House Bill 3150 Written Testimony by Tom Stahl, Conservation and Recovery Program Manager, House Committee On Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2021 Oregon Legislature. Available at: <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/197924>



221A's broad language creates confusion about whether these critical limitations would still apply. The bill contains:

- No requirements to comply with existing or future ODFW statutes and regulations
- No obligation to comply with ODFW's assistance in ensuring programs are scientifically sound (as required by Sec. 1(2))
- No size limitations on hatchbox programs individually or collectively
- No transparency requirements regarding results or effectiveness
- No restrictions on broodstock source, potentially allowing the use of wild fish or out-of-basin hatchery fish
- No sunset provision, creating an indefinite program without evidence of success

Fourth, this bill may override existing management plans. By directing ODFW to "encourage entities" to establish hatchbox programs, the bill effectively authorizes activities that may conflict with existing ODFW policies, the CMP, and the Coquille Fall Chinook Conservation Hatchery Program Operational Plan.

Fifth, there appears to be no fiscal allocation for ODFW, despite directing them to ensure any program "is scientifically sound," which would require additional capacity and resources for any additional or new hatchbox programs arising from this bill.

We must address the root causes of wild fish decline in the Coquille watershed. This means investing strategically in efforts targeting key limiting factors, particularly predation by smallmouth bass. We encourage committee members to consider supporting programs like those proposed in SB 222A that focus on monitoring, suppressing, and finding long-term solutions for smallmouth bass predation in Oregon's coastal watersheds.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to oppose SB 221A in its current form.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Fairbrother
Legislative & Policy Director