



Native Fish Society

7830 SW 40th, Suite 6

Portland, OR 97280

Our Mission:

Conserving native fish biological diversity and protecting their habitats

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**TESTIMONY ON THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
FEE INCREASES in HB 2223
BY Bill M. Bakke, Executive Director**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is an important state agency that has not lived up to its potential. That potential can be reached if the Legislature provides strategic funding and oversight.

The Legislature has provided the mandate to ODFW to prevent the serious depletion of native species. ODFW regularly states that it has a two-part mission that requires it to prevent the serious depletion of native species while providing the use and enjoyment of native species for present and future generations. However, the Oregon Attorney General, in a 2002 opinion, asserts that ODFW's over-riding mission is to prevent the serious depletion of native species.

When species are declared "sensitive," or listed for protection under the state or federal Endangered Species Act their condition is one of serious depletion. Most of Oregon's watersheds have salmonids at risk of extinction.

The agency budget drives policy. The key question is whether agency policy and institutional structure is able to deliver on its Legislative mandate. To determine the answer to this question we recommend that the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources seek answers to the following questions.

- What evidence demonstrates that ODFW has effectively implemented its legislatively mandated mission?
- What evidence is there that shows that the agency leadership and the Fish and Wildlife Commission are accountable for that mission?

- Is the agency budget actually constructed to fully implement its mission?
- Is the agency management of fish and wildlife based on the best available science?
- Will the Agency fee increases be used to implement its mission?

For example, the proposed budget reductions by ODFW makes a deeper cut in natural production (\$922.4 million and 25 positions) than in hatchery production (\$235.4 million and 9 positions), thus indicating the agency preference for providing access over protecting species.

The Legislature should direct the license fee increases and ODFW's budget preference to provide oversight to stabilize ODFW's program and make it consistent with its mandate to prevent the serious depletion of native species.

Some Legislative direction the Committee should consider providing includes:

1. Directing the agency to report its hatchery maintenance backlog expenses and a plan to repair or close hatcheries;
2. Directing the agency to determine the cost to produce a fish that is caught in a fishery. This will indicate which hatcheries are too expensive to operate and which are not;
3. Directing the agency to complete a risk analysis of each hatchery program on native species. High risk hatcheries will need to be reformed or closed;
4. Directing the agency to use the best available science when developing and implementing policy.
5. Directing the agency to report to the Legislature with a restructuring plan that will fully implement its overriding obligation to prevent the serious depletion of native species.

If the Legislature is an active agent of change the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and its commission will become one of the best in the nation, a position it once was able to claim.

For more information:

Bill M. Bakke, Executive Director, 503-977-0287, David Moskowitz, Confluence Consulting, 971-235-8953