



October 8, 2019

Comments on the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund Advisory Committee

General Comments:

The Conservation Angler appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft administrative rules for the Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund Advisory Committee. The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund created by HB 2829 during the 2019 legislative session is a critical opportunity to increase support for Oregon Conservation Strategy implementation, as well as to diversify the backgrounds, interests, involvement and commitment of Oregonians engaged in ODFW activities. It is also the starting point for engaging the financial support for ODFW conservation efforts from a sector of the public that needs (and wants) to provide it.

TCA wants to take a moment to recognize the commitment and persistence in pursuing this issue of several Commissioners here today – Chair Finley and Commission Labhart – who worked over a significant time with the Task Force examining ODFW funding opportunities, and on subsequent legislative efforts to create a funding stream that supports the broader Agency and Commission mission. We are grateful for your work. It is an important step forward to support ODFW in their efforts in towards providing access to Oregon’s wildlife for more people across the state.

TCA is supportive of the draft rules. Given the urgency to establish an advisory committee to guide Commission spending, the changes made in the current draft to prioritize diverse representation on the advisory committee and engagement of diverse audiences in the expenditure of the funds are important. There remain opportunities to improve the draft rules, however.

Specific Recommendations for Changes in the Proposed Draft Rules

Amendment One

OAR 635-098-0000: The current purpose statement roughly characterizes the Commission’s mission: “to carry out activities that serve to protect, maintain or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon.”

It would be helpful to add a few useful terms from the Commission Mission found at ORS 496.012 that add specificity to these rules.

The Commission could amend the sentence on line 9 to add “or restore indigenous” so that the amended purpose statement was:

“The purpose of the Conservation and Recreation Fund appropriated to the State Department of Fish and Wildlife is to carry out activities that serve to protect, maintain, enhance or restore indigenous fish and wildlife resources in Oregon.”

Adding the word “restore” is important because many wildlife species require restoration and are the subject of multiple restoration efforts. Restoration is a different activity than “enhancement” and it deserves inclusion as a significant activity Oregonians participate in daily statewide.

The word indigenous is important because it focuses activities for those fish and wildlife resources that are not introduced or exotic. It is consistent with the Department and Commission mission.

Amendment Two

635-098-0020 (2):

Currently as drafted in line 32, “Improving engagement of the public in hunting and fishing opportunities and in other outdoor recreation opportunities related to and in support of healthy fish, wildlife and habitats;” The Commission should amend this section to read:

“Improving engagement in outdoor recreation opportunities including wildlife watching, hunting, fishing and other activities that support healthy fish, wildlife and habitats.”

The current draft language misses an opportunity to prioritize a wide range of public engagement. The Conservation and Recreation Fund is additive to ODFW’s overall budget. Nothing in this phrase diminishes hunting and fishing opportunities or participation, nor the funding for those core programs.

Wildlife watching and related recreational activities are the most popular wildlife activities in Oregon. HB 2829’s emphasis on engaging new audiences to learn more, participate more deeply and begin to make a financial contribution to support wildlife in their communities will ultimately enhance all of Oregon’s wildlife management activities.

Amendment Three

635-098-0040 (1)(b):

This section provides that “Six members of the advisory committee shall live in or possess demonstrable expertise related to each of the ecoregions described below.” TCA recommends that this line be amended:

“Six members of the advisory committee shall ~~live in or~~ possess demonstrable scientific expertise related to each of the ecoregions described below.”

The focus should be on ensuring that committee members have strong scientific expertise in the respective ecoregions without regard to their residency.

Amendment Four

635-098-0040 (1)(c):

For the At-large positions, the commission should add “expertise in urban conservation” to the list of interest areas delineated here. Oregon’s population is mostly urban. Urban conservation presents important conservation priorities not captured in the ecoregional approach in section 635-098-0040(1)(b). Expertise in urban conservation science and opportunities would be an important interest area to try to capture within the at-large positions and could translate into greater fundraising capacity as well.

Amendment Five

OAR 635-098-0050(2)(b) and (d):

This section sets voting requirements and requires establishing a five-person quorum for any meeting where decisions are made. This is standard and acceptable.

Sub-section (2)(d) then requires that any committee recommendation to the Department and Commission receive five affirmative votes to move forward. This is an unreasonable potential bottleneck to project approval. No other ODFW advisory committees require this level of affirmative support. Standard procedure would require simple majority of any quorum for acceptance.

Recommend that the proposed rules require a simple majority of the committee to approve any recommendation made to the Department and Commission.