



November 30, 2020

Mary Wahl, Chair
Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
Curt Melcher, Director
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
4034 Fairview Industrial Blvd. SE
Salem, OR 97302

Re: Meaningful Public Participation with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

Dear Chair Wahl and Director Melcher:

I am writing to suggest consideration of changes to your current public participation process in place for the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission meetings, and to propose some resolutions of these issues.

Meeting Dates: Avoiding Conflict with Washington

Oregon's meetings often conflict with Washington's Fish and Wildlife Commission (WFWC), and since Oregon and Washington share a common boundary, there are frequently many concurrent issues that both Commissions take up at or near the same time. The Oregon and Washington schedules for 2020 conflicted four times, and in 2021 there are 3 direct conflicts (April, August, and September). There are 3 additional conflicts where OFWC meetings are scheduled on the same days with WFWC conference calls (I will also note that Oregon's December 17 FWC meeting conflicts with my birthday – though there are few other places I would rather be!).

Is it too late to consult with Washington on the 2021 conflicts, and on a regular and ongoing basis to avoid future multiple conflicts?

Meeting Dates: Providing an opportunity for a weekend session

WFWC typically holds a three-day meeting – committee meetings on Thursdays, and then a two-day meeting on Friday and Saturday. What I have noticed is that many more general citizens can participate during the Saturday session which may reflect the work week restrictions for some interested citizens.

While I understand the fiscal issues raised by holding a partial Saturday session, it is a tangible opportunity to increase public participation in Oregon. Oregon should consider moving to a two-day meeting schedule to allow committee or workgroup sessions and for Saturday involvement options.

Open Public Comment Periods

Oregon has provided periods for general open public comments on topics not already on the agenda. This has been an especially important public involvement tool for many interested citizens.

WFWC provides an open public comment before each of their meetings (both on Friday and Saturday). They hear from a wide variety of citizens, particularly on the Saturday morning meeting. The Oregon Commission should make such a public comment opportunity available at every FWC meeting.

Registration Requirements for Public Testimony and Open Public Comment

Since the initiation of virtual FWC meetings due to the COVID-19 precautions, public testimony has required a 48-hour in advance registration online. This extensive pre-registration requirement does not appear to be necessary. I make this statement based on the nearly real-time ability to register to provide agenda-item specific testimony or open public comment during those specific periods at the WFWC.

Oregon should review the capacity of the current online systems to determine if a more real-time registration deadline is possible. If the current system being used cannot be adapted to achieve this public participation opportunity, we would urge Oregon to consult with the WFWC administrators regarding the opportunities to acquire and use an online system that provides for these opportunities for the public – including both the general public and the stakeholder organizations.

Using Virtual Portals in the Future When In-person Meetings Resume

Oregon has met the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting to virtual meetings. More and diverse groups of people are able to engage with the Commission and ODFW in a meaningful way. While most stakeholder organizations, including Conservation Angler, likely prefer in-person meetings because of the opportunity to cultivate important relationships with the Commissioners, ODFW staff as well as other members of the public, not everyone has the dedicated and budgeted time to attend meetings in Salem and around the state. Also, as mentioned above, not every interested person or organization can afford the time for a weekday in-person meeting.

TCA suggests that ODFW begin the process to enable it to make virtual participation a standard means of public access to the OFWC policy-making process once the precautions necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic are no longer needed.

TCA offers these observations and suggestions to improve and broaden meaningful public input on the critical fish and wildlife policy and regulatory issues Oregon faces now and in the future.

Very sincerely,

David A. Moskowitz (via electronic delivery)

David A. Moskowitz
Executive Director

Cc: Members of the F&W Commission
Shannon Hurn, Deputy Director
Erica Kleiner, Deputy Director for Administration
Michelle Tate, Commission Administrator
Jason Miner, GRNO

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