

Exhibit (F)

**Salmon & Trout Enhancement
Program (STEP) Oregon
Administrative Rule Amendments**

Supplemental
Public Correspondence received as of
September 13, 2023



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September 8th, 2023

Chair Mary Wahl
Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

Dear Chair Wahl,

Trout Unlimited (“TU”) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. Our organization has more than 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, including over 3,500 members in Oregon. TU’s mission is to bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Here in Oregon we have 20 staff members implementing habitat and flow restoration projects and leading policy initiatives at the state and federal level.

I am writing to the game commission to express TU’s support for the draft administrative rule changes being sought by staff with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) related to Oregon’s Salmon, Trout Enhancement Program (S.T.E.P.) that are currently being considered by the commission for adoption.

Here on my home waters of the Umpqua River we have two very important STEP programs that are crucial in providing fishing opportunities from Winchester Bay all the way up the mainstem Umpqua into the South Fork of the Umpqua River. Communities and businesses from Reedsport to Roseburg benefit from these programs.

I am aware that this was a very inclusive and collaborative process - nearly two years in the making, that engaged and sought input from several STEP groups/members of the public from around the State.

This effort by the agency is providing specific rules for the Salmon Trout Advisory Committee (STAC) and for STEP program volunteers, which don’t exist in the current rules. Agency staff involved in the process sought to reduce as many redundancies in the rules as possible, making the rules less burdensome and easier to understand. They also clarify the Department’s role in the STEP program - i.e. providing training/education to volunteers and specifically defines roles for the agency on project approvals.

Lastly, this draft administrative rule change will align the STEP rules with other Department OARs like Native Fish Conservation Hatchery, Hatchery Management Policy, Fish Health Management Policy, and Climate & Ocean Change Policy. It should be noted that STEP hatchery programs already follow these policies but this solidifies that in the administrative rule.

With regard to the STEP programs mentioned above for the Umpqua, I'd like to offer suggestions that I'm confident would be met with local support from anglers and local Umpqua basin communities alike.

I recently participated in the annual "Umpqua Salmon Derby" which is held each year over the Labor Day weekend and draws hundreds of anglers to the Reedsport area bringing much needed economic benefits to the community.

In recent years, there has been a significant downward trend in salmon numbers returning to the Umpqua basin. I believe there are a number of factors for this, including poor ocean conditions, climate change and I believe specifically predation in the basin from invasive species such as smallmouth bass, largemouth bass and an exploding striped bass population are all likely contributing to this decline.

I believe the Lower Umpqua STEP program could benefit anglers, local businesses and angling opportunity with two simple changes.

- 1) Increase production and releases of salmon smolts from the STEP facility located near Gardiner, Oregon.
- 2) Allow volitional releases of salmon smolts from the small creek leading from the hatchery facility into lower Smith River to disperse smolts, lower predation, increase survival and spread returning adults to upper reaches of the bay/estuary (currently all STEP reared smolts are released into the small creek feeding Salmon harbor near the mouth of the Umpqua which limits their distribution to the very lower reaches of the river)

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Finnerty", is written over a circular, textured stamp or seal.

Dean Finnerty – Trout Unlimited