

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
WAFWA Summer Meeting – July 2017
Expanding Agency Funding

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is involved in an extensive effort to secure sustainable, alternative funding for the conservation and management of Oregon's fish and wildlife. The Task Force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education met monthly in 2016. An extensive report was submitted to the legislature early in 2017 and two pieces of legislation are being considered during the current legislative session.

Budget Challenges Prompt a New Approach

The Task Force, created by House Bill 2402, is an outgrowth of the department's 2015 budget process. In 2015, increased operating costs, greater demand for services, and the lingering effect of the recession on the state's economy and fishing/hunting license sales lead to the potential need for a 60% across the board license fee increase. This was not feasible, so ODFW took a multi-prong approach to closing the budget gap. Costs were reduced through budget cuts and elimination of about 50 positions. Some programs were shifted off license dollars onto General Fund so everyone – not just hunters and anglers – shoulder the cost of programs that benefited all Oregonians. A modest fee increase was phased in over three biennia. While the legislature approved this package, it recognized this was a short-term solution to the long-term challenge of adequately funding conservation and management of fish and wildlife.

The Task Force Charge

HB 2402 established a broad based work group, appointed by the Governor, with representatives of hunting, fishing and conservation organizations, businesses, the outdoor recreation and tourism industries, diverse communities, and other interests. It was charged with identifying new, diversified and sustainable funding for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife. A facilitator was hired to assist with the process and the Task Force met monthly during 2016. Work included:

- Briefings on historic and projected funding for ODFW programs
- Research on funding mechanisms in place elsewhere
- Updates on national efforts to secure conservation funding
- Contracting for a statistically valid survey of Oregon resident opinions and attitudes about fish and wildlife management and the department.
- Defining funding levels needed to more effectively implement the department mission
- Evaluation of potential funding mechanisms based on agreed upon criteria
- Seeking input from more than two dozen interest groups and legislative committees on draft recommendations and findings

In order to determine the type of funding mechanisms to consider, the Task Force first needed to establish a revenue target, or funding need. The Task Force directed ODFW to identify staffing and resources needed to meet four objectives – expanding conservation efforts; improving fishing and hunting opportunities; connecting Oregonians to the outdoors; and addressing deferred maintenance needs. The Task Force reviewed and the department materials and ultimately established a funding target of \$87-million/biennium.

More than half of the new funding would be directed at expanding conservation efforts, including increased monitoring of species and habitats of concern; collecting, managing and distributing data; enhanced enforcement of natural resource laws; and restoring and protecting habitat through partnerships with landowners, land managers, and organizations. More than 25% of the new funding would be earmarked for improving fishing and hunting opportunities by developing additional fishing locations, expanding public access, restoring habitat, increasing enforcement and other actions. The Task Force also recommended cancelling upcoming license fee increases. About 10% of the new funding would be dedicated to increasing participation in fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing and other outdoor activities, additional marketing and outreach, providing more public access, and diversifying participation in outdoor recreation. The Task Force recommendations also included bonding to address deferred maintenance at hatcheries, wildlife areas and other department facilities.

Evaluating Funding Options

More than 100 potential funding methods were considered. Options ranged from expanding the marijuana tax to taxes on recreational equipment to voluntary contributions. Evaluation criteria was based on the *Investing in Wildlife* report produced by IAFWA in 2005. Two options best met the criteria and provided sufficient revenue to meet the projected need. Revenue would be deposited in the new Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund dedicated to the conservation and management of Oregon’s fish and wildlife.

BEVERAGE SURCHARGE	Cost per six pack
2.19% surcharge applied at wholesale level to the cost of beverages subject to the bottle bill	Soda = 7 cents Domestic beer = 11 cents
OREGON INCOME TAX SURCHARGE	Cost at \$50,000 income
0.62% surcharge on Oregon taxable income Applied on individual tax returns. Low income filers exempt	Family of 4 = \$17.64/yr Single, no dependents = \$20.86/yr Married, joint filing, no dependents = \$18.59/yr

* Projected Revenue Generated = \$86.9 million / biennium (Legislative Revenue Office)

2017 Legislative Session Considers Alternative Funding

The Task Force provided its recommendations to the legislature in early 2017. The full report and all meeting materials can be found at <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/20151/Committees/JTFFFW/Overview>.

Two pieces of legislation are being considered to implement Task Force recommendations. HB 3270 creates the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and refers a beverage tax to the 2018 general election ballot for consideration by voters. HB 2213 (which originally created a Sunset Advisory Committee) was amended to create the Fund, establish a statewide advisory committee to recommend projects supported by the Fund, and appropriates \$11-million in General Fund in support of Task Force recommendations. Copies of both bills can be found online at <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/>.

Although the legislation establishing the Task Force has expired, Task Force members and their organizations continue to work on strategies for sustainable, alternative funding. Significant efforts are underway to expand the coalition and increase awareness of the issue. In the coming months, the coalition will organize a series of a meetings throughout the state to increase awareness of the importance of adequately funding conservation and outdoor recreation. These conversations will help expand the coalition and build the foundation for future attempts – through the legislature or via a ballot measure – to secure sustainable funding for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife and habitat in Oregon.