

# New director must give ODFW new direction

The management of Oregon's fish and wildlife has never been in a more compromising position than it is today.

ODFW faces a \$32 million budget shortfall. Plagued with depressed deer and elk numbers and increasing predator populations, coupled with a decline in hunter numbers, it seems the plight couldn't get much worse. That's unless you consider the severe decline in managed habitat on much of the state's federally managed lands, over which ODFW has no control. Now the agency is looking for a new leader to right this listing ship.

Then add pressure from non-hunting groups who recently wrote a letter to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Governor asking that the new director reform the agency to be less dependent on license and tag dollars and be more "conservation minded."

Excuse us?

Hunting and fishing has been the funding source of conservation since the 1930s. In fact, of ODFW's 2013-15 projected revenues, \$131.9 million comes from Pittman-Robertson funds (a federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment and firearm-related accessories). Another \$103.8 million of the agency's budget comes from license and tag fees. That's \$235.7 million of ODFW's budget – the vast majority – derived from hunter and angler dollars.

Hunters and anglers are on the forefront of wildlife conservation. Success stories abound, including the return of elk herds in the early 1930s, reintroduction of mountain goats in the 1950s, and reintroduction of California bighorn sheep in the 1950s and Rocky Mountain bighorns in the 1970s. These efforts were all funded by sportsmen.

The real question is: What should we expect of the new director? First and foremost, the new director should be a true hunter and fisherman. His or her focus should be fish and wildlife, not politics and people. Too often politics steer the management of the department rather than sound science.

The director should also manage the agency within its budgetary means, but that doesn't have to be the Herculean task it's often made to resemble. Taking seriously ODFW's mandate to optimize wildlife populations will also address the need to optimize the agency's revenue. Build better deer and elk herds, and hunters will beat a path to the point of sale machines.

Conversely, if hunters are unsuccessful year after year, eventually they will find somewhere else to devote their time and money. The downward trend in hunting license and tag sales that parallels the decline in

deer and elk numbers leaves little doubt.

A serious look at predator population control is a key part of the simple equation: more unmanaged predators prowling the landscape equals fewer deer and elk available to hunters, which equals fewer license and tag dollars.

ODFW has a choice to make: restore our big game resources and reestablish the department's traditional funding base or become a non-game wildlife agency with a skeleton staff dependent on elusive and unpredictable general funds. Which choice will the agency make? Its new director will exert considerable influence on that decision, and that's why OHA will work diligently to ensure the new director embraces a hunter's vision of conservation.

Ty Stubblefield of Roseburg is the Oregon Hunters Association Field Administrator. He can be reached at [ty@oregonhunters.org](mailto:ty@oregonhunters.org).