Dept. Fish & Wildlife; is it worth the money?

Fishing Matters
by Bruce Harpole

Are you, the taxpayer, getting your money's worth from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife? To answer this question we must first examine the overall State budget.

The State of Oregon has an overall two year projected General Fund and Lottery dollars budget for 2005-07 of just under $12 billion dollars. About $10 billion of that money comes from personal income taxes (that's us). The other $2 billion comes from lottery, corporate income tax, insurance, tobacco tax, and other sources. The State of Oregon's two year proposed expenditures for 2005-07 are divided as follows in descending order;

1. Education $6.5 billion (55%)
2. Human Services $2.5 billion (21%)
3. Public Safety/Judicial $2 billion (17%)
4. Other $460 million (4%)
5. *Natural Resources $260 million (2%)*
6. Economic & Community Development (1%)

The Dept. of Fish & Wildlife is one of the Natural Resources agencies. The $260 million spent on Natural Resources is divided as follows,

1. Parks and Recreation Dept. $72.3 million (35%)
2. Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board $43.4 million (17%)
3. State Forestry Dept. $37 million (14%)
4. Dept. of Environmental Quality $27.5 million (11%)
5. Dept. of Agriculture $24.5 million (9%)
6. Water Resources Dept. $19.5 million (8%)
7. *Dept. of Fish and Wildlife $18.8 million (7%)*
8. – 14. Another seven Natural Resources Depts. $6.8 million (3%)

The Fish & Wildlife Dept. has a two-year budget of $228 million and funds come from the following sources:

1. Other Funds $112 million (49%)

(Other funds are composed mostly of hunter/angler license and tag fees)

2. Federal Funds $97 million (43%)
3. State General Fund & Lottery $18.8 million (8.3%)

So our research has shown us that as a percentage of the $12 billion General Fund/Lottery budget, ODFWs' cut of the pie is only .0016% or 16 cents out of every $100 of General Fund money. ODFW also receives only 8.3% of their budget from State funds. The majority of the

ODFW biennial budget is funded through means other than the state's general or lottery funds. Now let's examine what ODFW does with it's money.

All the Natural Resource agencies are charged with the responsibility of "managing Oregon's natural resources for present and future generations while supporting a sound and sustainable economy". All of these agencies have a stake in Oregon's fish and wildlife, but obviously the agency with the most control is the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. ODFW spends its money in the following fashion:

1. Fish Division $123 million (56%)

(natural production, propagation, marine, interjurisdictional fisheries)

2. Wildlife Division $41 million (19%)

(game hunting, wildlife habitat, wildlife diversity)

3. Administration $29 million (13%)

(human resources, information, education, administrative services)

4. Oregon State Police $12 million (5%)

(enforce game laws to protect natural resources)

5. Capital Improvement $10 million (4%)

(new research hatchery, new headquarters, repair facilities)

6. Habitat Division $6 million (3%)

(manage water and land resources)

In business terms, ODFW's product is fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing. Hunters, anglers and wildlife viewers annually spend approximately $2.1 billion in the State of Oregon, according to 2001 numbers. The $2.1 billion of economic activity from fishing and huntinggenerates an estimated $86 million annually in income taxes for the State. If we subtract $9.4 million (1/2 the ODFW bi-annually funding from the State) the State comes out ahead by nearly $77 million. That's an 819% annual return on investment. Don't you wish your investments did that well?

So why did our Governor reduce the amount invested in ODFW by $5.5 million from the 2003-05 budget to 2005-07. Darn good question. If State government was run like the private sector our governor would be pumping investment capital into one of his best producing products, fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing. Eventually, they would run into a diminishing return, but there is obvious room for growth in the fishing and hunting "product line". As it now stands, a tightening of State funds is constricting ODFW's output. Also, a growing disenchantment among anglers and hunters, caused in part by a reduction in the availability of harvestable fish and game, is leading to fewer tags and licenses being sold thus weakening ODFW's ability to self fund. If the State would reinvest just a small portion what fishing and hunting generates, we would have a prosperous agency that would create even more revenue for the State. A $2.1 billion industry with an 819% ROI is being squeezed out by an unappreciative State.

For a comparison let us look at ODFW and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Both receive about 37-38% of their funds from public fees. Both generate similar levels of economic activity. The great disparity is in the level of investment by the state. The Parks &

Rec. Dept. receives nearly four times the amount of general fund/lottery revenues. The State is expanding it's funding in parks while reducing it in fish and wildlife.

The answer to our initial question is an obvious YES. In fact, fish and wildlife are not only worth the money, they are moneymakers for the State of Oregon.

You can contact Bruce Harpole at the Oregon Fishing Club, 541-967-8301,ofc@ofc.org. OFC offers 43 private fishing locations in NW Oregon.