



Department of Fish and Wildlife Agency History

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1878-1921 – A Time of Organization and Change

Appointed in 1878, the fish commissioner for the Columbia River was the earliest state official engaged in the regulation and protection of fish, wildlife, and forests. A three member Fish Commission responsible for regulating the commercial fish industry replaced the fish commissioner in 1887. With increasing interests in game and game fish, the Fish Commission was replaced by the fish and game protector in 1893. The responsibilities of the fish and game protector included the enforcing of game laws and regulating the commercial fish industry.

The fish and game protector was replaced by an act of the 1898 Legislative Assembly, which established the Board of Fish Commissioners. Members of the board included the governor, secretary of state, and a fish commissioner appointed as executive officer by the governor. This agency was replaced in 1901 by a Fish Commission composed of the governor, secretary of state, and state treasurer. The commission appointed a master fish warden as administrator and confined itself to the regulation of commercial fishing. The responsibility for enforcing game laws as well as forestry laws was now regulated by the game and forestry warden created in 1899. This arrangement remained unchanged for ten years.

Regulation of fish and game activities was not placed into a single agency until 1911 with the establishment of the Board of Fish and Game Commissioners. This board was authorized to appoint a master fish warden and a state game warden. In this same year, the Legislative Assembly created the State Board of Forestry consisting of the governor, the acting head of the Forest School of the Oregon State Agricultural College (Oregon State University), and five appointees. The creation of a Board of Forestry separated the function of forestry from that of fish and game.

The Board of Fish and Game Commissioners was reorganized in 1915 to consist of four appointees and the governor. In 1920 it was further enlarged to nine members, with eight selected by the Legislative Assembly and the ninth selected by the appointed eight. Part of the board was designated a Fish Commission and part a Game Commission. The 1921 Legislative Assembly abolished this board.

1921-1975 – A Time of Stability

During this period the functions of fish and game conservation were administered by two separate agencies. The State Fish Commission administered commercial fishing laws and appointed a master fish warden while the Game Commission administered game and game fish laws and appointed a state game warden.

Fish Commission

In 1921, the duties of the Fish Commission were to:

- provide for the better protection, preservation, and propagation of salmon, shad, sturgeon, and other anadromous and food and shell fishes;
- see that all laws relating to the commercial fisheries of the state are enforced;
- provide license schedules and fees and methods of collection;
- fix open and closed seasons for commercial fishing on certain streams; and
- create a department of hatcheries and fish culture.

The commission's duties remained mostly unchanged for over 50 years. In 1975, although more simply stated, the commission's duties remained to preserve, protect, develop, cultivate, promote, and propagate all fish species under its jurisdiction and found within the state of Oregon (ORS 506.036 (2)).

The Fish Commission consisted of three commissioners appointed by the governor. These commissioners served staggered four-year terms, annually selected one of their members as chairman, and appointed a master fish warden who served at their will. In 1951 the master fish warden became known as the state fisheries director.

By 1973 the Fish Commission was operating with a budgetary appropriation of over six million dollars from the state general fund. A slightly larger amount was expected to be spent in federal funds. The commission also received \$500,000 in transfer revenue from the Wildlife Commission for the sale of daily salmon licenses and tags. These transferred funds were appropriated for the anadromous fish programs. In addition, the Fish Commission budget included \$500,000 to the Oregon State Police for enforcement of commercial fishing laws.

Game Commission

The Game Commission was established to formulate the general policies and programs of the state respecting the management of wildlife, game fish, and wildlife recreation. It was also responsible for setting hunting seasons, bag limits, and methods of taking wildlife and game fish as well as for operating facilities such as fish hatcheries, game farms, public shooting grounds, game management and public access sites.

The game warden's title was changed to state game supervisor in 1931 and again in 1949 to game director. With each change in title came an increase in administrative powers. The 1973 Legislative Assembly renamed the Game Commission to the Wildlife Commission to reflect a growing concern for managing all the state's wildlife and not just the state's game species.

In a report presented before the 1975 Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee the current wildlife management statutes and wildlife management goals were described:

- It is the policy of the State of Oregon that wildlife shall be managed to provide optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations of citizens of this state. In furtherance of this policy, the goals of wildlife management are to:
- maintain all species of wildlife at optimum levels and prevent the serious depletion of any indigenous species;
- develop and manage the lands and waters of this state in a manner that will enhance the production and public enjoyment of wildlife;
- permit an orderly and equitable utilization of available wildlife;
- develop and maintain public access to the lands and waters of the state and wildlife resources thereon; and
- regulate wildlife populations and the public enjoyment of wildlife in a manner that is compatible with the primary uses of the lands and waters of the state and provides optimum public recreational benefits.

The commission did not receive revenues from the state general fund but operated on funds appropriated by the Legislative Assembly from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and tags, excise taxes on sporting equipment, and federal funds.

Policing powers of the Game Commission were transferred to the Department of State Police when the police agency was organized in 1931. During the 1973-1975 biennium the commission transferred over \$3.5 million to the Oregon State Police for enforcement of hunting, fishing, and recreational laws and regulations.

By 1974 the commission consisted of five commissioners appointed by the governor. Two commissioners were selected from that portion of the state east of the Cascades, two from west of the Cascades, and one from the state at large. The commission selected one of its members as chairman and appointed a director of the Wildlife Commission who held office at the pleasure of the commission.

1975 – Present, A Time of Reunification

When the Oregon Legislative Assembly merged the separate state fish and wildlife commissions in 1975, it created a department that has had an impact on recreation and jobs in dollar amounts far beyond that imagined by most citizens. A major reorganization of the agency occurring in 1986 saw the duties of the department's single deputy director split into two separate jobs; deputy for operations and deputy for policy and programs. During this reorganization the former Environmental Management Section was elevated to division status and renamed the Habitat and Conservation Planning Division.

In recent decades, the Legislative Assembly has been active in considering bills related to the Department of Fish and Wildlife. For example, in a five-month session, the 1985 Legislative Assembly considered 90 related bills. During that session several important changes were made in wildlife law including some license fee adjustments.

The Legislative Assembly also created a Pacific States Legislative Task Force consisting of legislators from the four coastal states. This legislative group acted as a clearinghouse for opinions from fishing interests.

Several legislative changes in 1985 were designed to have a beneficial effect on department revenue. The department was given authority by House Bill 2374 to seek voluntary contributions from sportsmen for special management programs.

Considerable attention was focused on water policy and law and several changes were made to the water law in 1985. Creating most interest was the passage of House Bill 2990 dealing with the siting of small hydroelectric projects in state waters. Finally, 1985 legislation (House Bill 2111) provided for the exemption of STEP (Salmon Trout Enhancement Program) volunteers from having to obtain water rights for fish egg incubation boxes using less than 30 gallons per minute of water.

Current Organization

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission consists of seven members appointed by the governor for staggered four-year terms. One commissioner must be from each congressional district, one from east of the Cascades and one from the west. Commissioners formulate general state programs and policies concerning management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources and establish seasons, methods and bag limits for recreational and commercial use. The department consists of the commission, the director (appointed by the commission) and a statewide staff of 1300 employees and operates under ORS chapters 496 through 513.

The department headquarters are in Salem, with regional offices in Clackamas, Roseburg, Bend, and La Grande. Twenty district offices are also strategically located statewide. The department operates a variety of facilities designed to enhance fish and wildlife resources, including 34 fish hatcheries, 16 wildlife areas, public shooting grounds, hunting and fishing access sites, and several research stations.

There are three main program divisions within the department: Fish Division, Wildlife Division and the Habitat Division. Each division has a director along with deputy directors, program leaders and coordinators, and section managers.

The **Fish Division** manages fish populations by setting regulations for gamefish species, monitoring populations and operating 34 fish hatcheries which produce up to 80 percent of all salmon, trout and steelhead caught in Oregon each year. The division works cooperatively with other state and federal agencies on habitat and fishery management issues for inland and ocean waters, works with landowners to improve and protect habitat and coordinates law enforcement needs and activities with the Department of State Police.

The Fish Division includes the following program areas: Interjurisdictional & Marine, Fish Conservation, Fish Passage, Fish Propagation, Fish Screening, Fishery Restoration, Freshwater, Natural Production Program, Marine Resources Program, Corvallis Research Lab, and an engineering section. More than two-thirds of the agency workforce and greater than half the department's total budget are devoted to fish management, production and research. Through its administrative structure comprising six regional offices around the state, the division oversees the work of biologists on the ground in 23 districts, several research project sites, and marine resources program activities based in Astoria, Newport and Charleston.

The department's **Wildlife Division** has responsibility for more than 600 animal species, both hunted and non-hunted, manages game species by setting hunting and trapping regulations, relocates wildlife or applies other management techniques. The division manages non-hunted species through the Wildlife Diversity Program; works cooperatively with other state and federal agencies on habitat and wildlife management issues; works with landowners to improve habitat or manage animal damage complaints; and coordinates law enforcement needs and activities with the Department of State Police. Field biologists and technicians work from 22 district offices and operate 13 wildlife management areas around the state. These areas comprise more than 200,000 acres of agency-owned or leased lands managed for the benefit of wildlife and recreational access. Unlike fisheries programs, the Wildlife Division receives little General Fund revenue — depending primarily on hunting license and tag sales and excise taxes distributed through the federal Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Fund.

The Wildlife Division includes the following program areas: Access & Habitat Program, Bear/Cougar/Antelope/Sheep, Deer & Elk, Game Bird Program, Game Program, Small Mammals/Furbearers, Upland Game Bird Program, Wildlife Diversity Program, and Wildlife Mitigation.

The **Habitat Conservation Division** provides technical assistance to state and federal agencies, Oregon counties and other local governments, private consultants, landowners, industries and developers. The division coordinates development of comprehensive habitat conservation policies and standards, collects natural resource damage assessments, and maintains comprehensive databases to assist in informed decisions affecting fish and wildlife habitats. The division also provides headquarters staff level support for fish and wildlife field responsibilities ranging from forest management plan reviews to land and water use debates.

Sustainability became the watchword of the 1990s for fish and wildlife managers as they dealt with past land and water exploitation and tried to provide for future habitat needs. Because the agency has little or no authority to manage most lands and waters, it must work through the programs and activities of other regulators, such as the Water Resources or Forestry departments.

Program areas of the Habitat Division include Forest Practices, GIS, Hydropower, Instream Water Rights, Land Resources, Special and Stream Net Projects, Water Policy/Instream Contested Cases, Water, and the Waterway Alterations/Land Use.

The **Information and Education Division** educates and informs citizens, landowners, anglers, hunters, school and civic groups about fish and wildlife biology, habitat needs, state policy and regulations,

hunter safety, and other related issues. Staff persons include outdoor skills coordinators and regional outreach specialists.

The **Administrative Services Division** oversees the department's fishing and hunting licensing responsibilities, information systems, fiscal management, business services and realty, budget and contracts management and economic forecasting and monitoring for the agency. Organizationally, the division is divided into the following sections: Business Services, Fiscal, Information Systems, Licensing, Realty, and Budget Services.

The **Human Resources Division** serves 1,300 employees statewide. This division provides programs to recruit, maintain, train and reward an effective and diverse workforce in a safe environment.

The 2001 Legislative Assembly approved a bill to move the headquarters of the Fish and Wildlife Department "promptly" from Portland to Salem in an effort to enhance efficiency and accountability.

Current Department of Fish and Wildlife programs and records are described in a records retention schedule produced by the Oregon State Archives.

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