

July 2, 2001

Governor John Kitzhaber, MD
State Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Kitzhaber,

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), I am writing to you to share our concerns with the proposed move of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Headquarters Office, called for in Senate Bill 50.

I am confident that both you and the Legislature know of our organization as a professional scientific body – as gatherers, integrators, and translators of the state of the science that underlies fishery and aquatic resource decisions in Oregon. Indeed, because we focus so strictly on that role, we have been hesitant as an organization to involve ourselves in the decision-making process on SB50. For example, the Chapter did not testify on this bill, even though the proposed move seemed like a rather drastic response to apparent concerns with agency administration (notably, not its biologists). While we have thus refrained from involvement in the decision, we remain concerned with its potential impact on both natural resources management and on the lives of our fellow AFS members and other professionals within ODFW.

Specifically, if you approve (rather than veto) the move, we are concerned that: 1) the huge cost of the proposed move not result in diversion of funds that would otherwise be dedicated to the protection, restoration, and management of fish, wildlife, and habitat in Oregon; 2) all possible measures be taken to minimize disruption of management actions (licensing, restoration actions, research, and resource negotiations); and, 3) the financial and social impacts on our fellow professionals in the ODFW be minimized.

Particularly on the latter concern (#3), we understand there are some simple measures you can take to help. One example is minimizing the fiscal costs of the move to ODFW employees. As we understand it, employee moving costs are covered for moves greater than 50 miles, but not for moves of less than 50 miles. Clearly, a move from Portland to Salem would fall very close to that 50-mile mark. To reduce the impacts on our fellow professionals' lives, could this "50-mile rule" be waived if the move falls short of the 50-mile mark? If such measures are not taken, we are very concerned that the move may well result in an extensive loss of personnel from ODFW and with them a vast store of institutional memory.

We would hope, in fact, that if the final decision is to require the move, the State of Oregon would recognize the value of its fish and wildlife professionals by seeking not just to minimize the disincentives of a forced employee dislocation, but also consider a full suite of positive incentives that would encourage the best and brightest of ODFW employees to want to make the move. A good move package may prevent employees from seeking other employment.

We encourage you to exercise whatever options you have to make the move to Salem a positive opportunity for ODFW staff. This will help make the move to Salem a positive one for them; for those in Salem concerned with agency administration; and for the fish and wildlife resources we all seek to protect.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dennis R. Lassuy, President
Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

cc: Hon. Gene Derfler, Senate President
Hon. Mark Simmons, Speaker of the House
Lindsey Ball, Acting Director, ODFW