

Q: How familiar are you with CCA Oregon?

A: I have a very good sense of where you're coming from. I've been talking to Heath (Heikkila, CCA PNW Regional Fisheries Director) with regards to Senate Bill 1509 and I did a short little stint in the Governor's office, so I had opportunities to work with Shawn (Miller, CCA Oregon lobbyist) at that time as well.

Q: How do you see your relationship with CCA Oregon and what do you see CCA's role regarding working with you and the department?

A: I'm absolutely welcoming that. I do think that it's really been a partnership underutilized. I guess that's my short answer and I don't even know what we would disagree on to be honest with you. But even if we disagree on things, it doesn't mean we're not going to be awesome partners because there's so much that I know that we agree on already. So, I just kind of feel like it's an underused, underutilized partnership for both of us.

Q: Is there anything specific that CCA Oregon can do to play a role in helping further your agenda on issues we agree on?

A: I'll give you an example about where I think we're in lockstep and could use your help and then one where I'm just going to acknowledge that it's a tough issue. We're going to need help on our hatchery resiliency work. We were already thinking that we have to think about this as a system and how that system is going to continue to produce the abundance. That's our goal but we need to be better prepared for what's coming at us whether it's the stuff we can predict or the curveballs like fires. As you know we got a million dollars to do a third party assessment (on our hatcheries). We're in the middle of the public phase of that, and it's going to be a long-term lift. Like decades. We have to invest in our hatchery infrastructure. We think that we can make the case because hatcheries are good for Oregon and Oregon should invest in them. Simultaneous to that we're also proposing to defund a couple (hatcheries) as a placeholder because we know it's not sustainable. That's all for the governor and the legislature to decide but we had to build our budget, and it wasn't perfect timing with finishing this resiliency review so we put things up that at least initially makes sense for how we get to a more sustainable footprint.

Q: Looking at the ODFW's proposed budget for 2025-27 biennium we see a lot of contradicting messages. What's your response to somebody who says you're asking for a lot, but you're also taking a lot away?

A: It's a balancing act and I understand where folks are coming from. If we wanted to keep everything, you can imagine what the fee adjustment would have to look like. We cannot continue to ask anglers and hunters to carry the burden. We don't want to price hunting and angling out of the average person's ability to participate. One lever is you just go for it, you keep everything the same and you just increase the fees to whatever it needs to be, but that didn't feel like the right answer to us. It felt like we needed to also look hard at efficiencies as we always are, and then we also wanted to start thinking about what we were going to learn with that hatchery resiliency study and see if we could at least forecast some of the changes that would help us balance things.

Q: What do you hope for from CCA Oregon in relation to the 2025-27 budget?

A: I'm going to put it this way: You might not love everything about what we do, and we can keep debating that but when we get to the legislature, I hope that we're both on the same page that says we have to invest in hatcheries. We'll keep listening to what's important to CCA and how do we meet that versus these other constraints like with legislators and the Commission and other decision makers. But I think we can both be on the same page saying we need a solid hatchery system. Does that seem reasonable?

Q: You mentioned closing hatcheries. Where are you with the proposed Leaburg, Salmon (McKenzie) and Rock Creek hatchery closures?

A: We've put Rock Creek and Salmon as being defunded as kind of a placeholder until we see further results from this resiliency study. With regard to Leaburg and the Salmon Hatchery on the McKenzie, those are different from Rock Creek. One (Leaburg) is related to water quality issues and that's a shutdown based on DEQ. With the dam coming down at Leaburg (2032) that one's a little bit different than a budget kind of thing. I would just kind of put that one over as a specific location issue that we're working through.

In terms of Rock Creek that's just an example of just trying to take a hard look about what is the sustainable. Rock Creek has regular temperatures in the 80s. We're running all those numbers as part of this exercise, but I mean it is a big, big lift because it will take chillers, it will take a lot of changes and so our question is, 'Can we afford that and is that really where you want to make investments?' If we could take what we have in terms of insurance money and make some strategic investments in other places, doesn't that make more sense? Those are the kinds of things that we're trying to work through. Hopefully we can all agree that what we're really trying to do is sustain opportunities and to sustain our fisheries.

Q: Can you touch on the importance of recreational angling to the ODFW budget?

A: I feel like I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but it just can't be said enough that hunters and anglers are carrying the weight of conservation for fish and wildlife and habitat in Oregon. Even right now, going into our next budget cycle, it's somewhere around 50 percent of our budget. So, for me what I tell folks is that what we're doing is not getting any less complex and really we can't continue to think that anglers and hunters can carry all that load by themselves.

Q: If hunters and anglers cannot continue to fund the majority of the department's budget, how do propose to generate the needed funding?

A: I think we have to find some new dedicated funds and I think there are a couple ideas that are starting to kind of swirl. I worry about our fish division budget. The way I describe it is if you look on our hunting side there's no analog. We're trying to manage fisheries with 13 listed species here in Oregon. When we manage hunting it's nothing like what we have to do on the fish side. Some people wonder why the fish budget is so much bigger. Well, we've got hatcheries, we're trying to manage in the face of all of those listed species and the short answer is anglers are carrying the weight of that. Sure, it's

also how we get opportunity but they're paying for monitoring, they're paying for fish passage, they're paying for screening, water diversions, and conservation. And it's just not sustainable. We can't keep going back to anglers so where do you find the funds?

Q: Can you expand on where you're going to get those funds?

A: Big ideas take a long time so the way I'm telling folks is that as director I feel like with the recruitment it's almost a mandate that I really try to double down on new sources of revenue. Even with the Governor's office they're giving me some leeway. So, more to come on that front.

Q: A large percentage of salmon anglers argue the Columbia River Endorsement fee did not live up to its promise. When you're adding that fee to the budget, what do you say to those anglers?

A: I understand the perspective that's out there, that it didn't deliver what people felt like they were paying for. I get it and I don't know how to un-ring that bell because it's very emotional for a lot of people. Who knows what the legislature will do with this. There's a lot of history around the expectations and the reform, but when I look at what we're getting from that today, from that money, I feel like there's value there.

Q: Can you expand on that?

A: We're getting enforcement, we're getting monitoring that's letting us keep opportunities open because we have more creeling and we're getting the SAFE fisheries which a lot of people don't know, but a good proportion of that SAFE fishery is actually being caught by recreational anglers. I know it's going to be a lift because again when it was originally adopted, they wanted gillnets off of the mainstem (Columbia). That's not how it turned out with the Commission policy changes. I don't know if we'll get over that hump with folks like CCA and others, but I do see benefit to the money today.

Q: Oregon and Washington often do not see eye to eye on Columbia River issues. How do you rectify that relationship?

A: That is probably one of the hardest questions I've gotten so far. I don't know that I even have a good answer for you in terms of rectifying that. While we may not be in concurrence on some of these things, I look at things like the Columbia River Agreement and other areas we are really dialed in on together and it's going to make a difference if we can hold the line.

Q: CCA Oregon is pursuing a commercial gillnet buyback program for the Columbia River in 2025. Can you offer any kind of assurances that Oregon will not experience similar problems we saw in Washington?

A: There's a lot to unpack in terms of what happened with Washington and even with what is happening today. I don't want to sound evasive but having watched that, I will just say that we'll take whatever the legislature gives us in terms of direction, and we're going to do that in good faith but also recognizing that we have a Commission and a Governor involved.

Q: What's the justification for adding the new \$7 ocean endorsement fee?

A: That is a concept that we've got in the fee bill proposal. It'll have to go through the legislature but really the idea there is to add additional funds to the agency so we can do the monitoring that we need for some of our popular ocean fisheries. A good example is with rockfish. If we can't provide the data and monitoring, we probably will not be able to continue to keep some of those fisheries open.

Q: Where do you stand on commercial gillnets on the Columbia River in relation to the endorsement fee?

A: That's one where I don't know ultimately where all that will land and I really do understand that people have a lot of history and emotion and it's easy for me to show up and say, 'Oh, but you know we are getting good things out of these funds (Columbia Endorsement Fee).' Not everyone likes to hear this, but I look at some of the threats to our hatchery systems and the lawsuits we're facing and I kind of want to look at everybody around the room and just go while we're all arguing we have much bigger things to think about collectively that could have way bigger impacts. I mean some of the lawsuits that we're facing right now are disconcerting. I know that doesn't make people feel better about gillnets, but I would like to keep reminding people that we have a lot of shared interest in our hatchery systems. So, for what it's worth I know a lot of folks don't want to hear that, but I guess I do tend to focus on things where we all need to be pulling in the same direction.

Q: Characterize the importance of hatcheries in relation to opportunity to anglers in Oregon.

A: One of our 'go-to' stats right now that we're sharing with folks is 70 percent of salmon (and steelhead) harvested are hatchery fish. That says a lot. For us, it's about sustaining opportunities and really I think from a conservation perspective hatcheries are going to play more and more of a role. Even with reintroducing and re-establishing runs. What we're doing with sockeye in Wallowa Lake is a good example. I also think with climate change and some of the other things on the horizon I see our hatcheries playing a more and more important role even on the on the conservation side.

Q: Do you believe that hatcheries are important to sustaining wild fish runs?

A: I do think that they're critical. Hatcheries play an important part in terms of sustaining wild fish populations and as a source for re-establishing runs. I think that more and more it's going to be critical that we have the next generation of folks that care just as much about fish populations as we do now, and if we don't have hatcheries providing that connection, I think it's going to be harder and harder to have people show up and care.