

Source: <http://www.kptv.com/news/24257293/detail.html>

Article: Fish Hatcheries Safe From Oregon Budget Cuts

GRANTS PASS, Ore. -- New fish habitat projects are on the chopping block, while fish hatcheries are safe from prospective cuts to the upcoming budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife budget.

The [commission](#) overseeing hunting and sport fishing in Oregon meets Friday in Salem to set priorities for cuts to the 2011-2013 budget of \$311 million. The agency is developing plans for cuts from 5 percent to 25 percent.

Four percent of the department's budget comes from the general fund and 2 percent from lottery funds, with the rest coming from hunting and fishing licenses and federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing gear. That is minimizing the cuts to the agency.

Under orders from the governor, the department has drawn up a list ranking 64 programs based on priority, and how much will be cut if there are budget cuts of 5 percent, 15 percent or 25 percent.

The lowest priority program is one of the newest. Stream restoration in Western Oregon would see a 20 percent cut in its \$766,695 budget. A program to install fish screens over irrigation canals would lose up to \$1.3 million in lottery funds. Cuts of 25 percent would leave the department no longer able to do surveys for non-game species such as the Western meadowlark in Willamette Valley grasslands.

The cuts are focused on programs funded with state general fund and lottery money, said department spokesman Roger Fuhrman. Newer programs tend to be cut first. Hatcheries necessary to provide fish that anglers can catch and take home will be maintained.

While the Butte Falls Fish Hatchery outside Medford would be permanently shut down if cuts go to 25 percent, it is already in mothballs.

Jim Martin, a former state chief of fisheries who now represents sport fishing interests, said anglers depend on hatcheries because so many wild fish, whose numbers are dwindling, have to be released unharmed. The state's official commitment to wild fish has been met by restrictions on catching and keeping wild fish.

"Those hatcheries are the key to maintaining a fishery for the future," said Jim Martin, a former state chief of fisheries who now represents sport fishing interests. "If you shut down the fisheries, there's no license base. And the license base is the only way we're [funding](#) conservation in Oregon now."

Guido Rahr of the Wild Salmon Center said the short-term gains provided by hatcheries create problems over the long-term. Scientific studies show clearly that they have been a major reason for the declines that have put so many wild salmon and steelhead on the endangered species list. Hatchery fish are less successful in the wild and compete with wild fish for food and habitat. As climate change makes life tougher for salmon, the genetic resilience of wild fish becomes even more important.

Liz Hamilton of the Northwest Sport Fishing Industry Association said a recent report gave Oregon fish hatcheries higher grades than other facilities in the Columbia Basin when it came to adopting modern techniques that cause less harm to wild fish.