



Testimony of April Snell, Executive Director, Oregon Water Resources Congress
Before the US House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
THE STATE OF U.S. FISHERIES Oversight Hearing
Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC
May 1, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

Chairman Huffman and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on “The State of U.S Fisheries.” The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is writing regarding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) program and how it can greatly improve the health of fisheries. FRIMA is an essential cost-share program that helps water users and fishery agencies better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species while ensuring water delivery to farms and communities.

OWRC is a nonprofit association of irrigation districts, water control districts, water improvement districts, drainage districts and other government entities delivering agricultural water supplies to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. These water stewards operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, hydropower facilities, and other infrastructure. Fish screens and fish passage facilities are a vital component of water infrastructure connected to rivers with sensitive, threatened or endangered species of fish.

In Oregon and throughout the western United States, almost all water delivery systems are affected by state or federal Endangered Species Act listings, including salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and other anadromous fish species. New and upgraded fish screen and fish passage facilities provide immediate fishery benefits by keeping fish out of water delivery systems and allowing fish to be safely bypassed around reservoirs and other infrastructure. However, the design, construction, and upgrade of these facilities to protect the myriad of fish species is often cost-prohibitive for individual entities to implement without outside funding sources.

FRIMA helps fill a vital gap in funding and can catalyze cooperative partnerships and innovative projects that provide immediate and long-term benefits to irrigators, fishery agencies, and local communities. We encourage FWS to request increased appropriations for FRIMA and are disappointed the current Administration has failed to include any proposed funding in the USFW’s FY2020 budget. The current authorized amount for FRIMA is \$15 million, split equally between California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The program has a proven track-record of success, leveraging over one dollar for each federal dollar invested to implement efficient and environmentally beneficial projects.

I have attached a recent FRIMA support letter from state associations of the five participating states: Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA), Montana Water Resources Association (MWRA), Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC), and Washington State Water Resources Association (WSWRA). I encourage you to contact OWRC or any of the other associations for more information about how cost-effective and impactful the FRIMA program has been. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
April Snell, Executive Director



Montana
Water
Resources
Association



Oregon Water Resources Congress



Multi-State Letter in Support of Funding for the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act Program

March 28, 2019

We are an informal coalition of Western state associations writing to express our shared strong support for the full funding (\$15 million) of the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program. Providing appropriations for this essential cost-share funding program will help water users and fishery agencies to better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species while continuing to provide water supplies to farms and communities.

Background

Our associations, the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), the Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA), Montana Water Resources Association (MWRA), Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC), and the Washington State Water Resources Association (WSWRA) represent irrigation entities, other water suppliers, and the water users they serve in California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. The original FRIMA legislation, enacted November 2000 (PL.106-502), was supported and requested by the Pacific Northwest Partnership, an informal coalition of local governmental entities in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Montana. The FRIMA program was highly successful until the authorization for this vital funding mechanism expired at the end of 2015. A report by U.S Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) covering program years FY 2002-2012 provides state-by-state coverage of how the Congressional provided funding has been used in the program.

FRIMA was reauthorized in the WRDA/WINN legislation at the end of the 114th Congress in 2016. The authorization is for \$15 million and a fifth state, California, was added to the program. The original authorization was for \$25 million split between four states. There is currently no funding available for the program.

Program Need & Benefits

FRIMA is an essential cost-share program for irrigation entities and other water users with water diversions on streams and rivers within California, Idaho, western Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Funding for voluntary fish screen and fish passage construction helps meet a critical need in fishery protection and restoration while ensuring the continued viability of irrigated crops, community water supplies, and industries reliant on water withdrawal projects in our five states. Fish passage and fish screens are a vital component to fishery protection with several benefits:

- Keeps sensitive, threatened and endangered fish out of canals and water delivery systems
- Allows fish to be safely navigate around reservoirs, diversions, and other infrastructure
- Reduces water quality risks to fish species

All five of our states are affected by either state or federal Endangered Species Act listings of Salmon and Steelhead, Bull Trout or other sensitive, threatened or endangered species. The design and installation of fish screens and fish passage to protect the myriad of fish species is often cost-prohibitive for individual entities to implement without outside funding sources. Limited cost-share funds are available from local and state funding programs but the primary cost-share for fish screen and fish passage projects has been provided by the various irrigation entities and their water users. Project needs include both construction of new fish screens and fish passage facilities as well as significant upgrades of existing facilities to meet new requirements (new species, new science) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service and the FWS.

Upgrades are often needed to modernize facilities with new technologies that provide better protection for fish species as well as reduced maintenance and increased lifespan for the operator. Installing these new technologies not only helps fish but also improves operations and irrigation efficiency by keeping debris out of the water delivery infrastructure.

FRIMA projects provide immediate protection for fish and fills a large unmet need in the Pacific Northwest for cost-share assistance with fish screening and fish passage installations and improvements. FWS studies indicate that compared to other recovery strategies, the installation of fish screens and fish passage infrastructure has the highest assurance for increasing numbers of fish species in the Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, the installation of these devices have minimal impacts on water delivery operations and projects are done cooperatively using methods that are well accepted by landowners and rural communities.

Funding the FRIMA program is also a wise investment, with past projects contributing more than the required match and leveraging on average over one dollar for each federal dollar invested. FRIMA provides for a maximum federal cost-share of 65%, with the applicant's cost-share at 35% plus the ongoing maintenance and support of the structure for passage or screening purposes. Applicants operate the projects and the state agencies monitor and review the projects.

FRIMA fills a vital funding gap for fish screens and fish passage projects that are needed to better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species, which also benefits the economy, local communities, and the environment we share. FRIMA funds projects that are ready to be constructed and will provide immediate improved protections for fish and immediate jobs for the construction of the projects. Dollar-for-dollar, providing screening and fish passage at diversions is one of the most cost-effective uses of restoration dollars, creating fishery protection at low cost, with low risk and significant benefits.

We strongly support the full appropriation of \$15 million for the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act Program for FY 2020. Thank you for efforts to fund this valuable program.

Sincerely,

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