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March 19th, 2024

Coos County Board of Commissioners

Dear Sirs,

Trout Unlimited is the largest and oldest cold water conservation organization in the United States with over 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, of which Oregon boasts more than 4000 members. We also have approximately 15 full-time staff members working across the state on habitat projects and policy initiatives at the state and federal level.

I am writing to you today to share our strong support for the “Winter Lake Phase III project”.

Trout Unlimited has made a number of investments in the Coquille River over the past 6+ years. Our staff and volunteers have worked with staff from ODFW, the Coquille Indian Tribe and other stakeholders, to monitor and remove invasive bass from the river, participating in multi-day events such as the “Bass Blitz” to address the bass issue.

Trout Unlimited supports the recent effort to establish a conservation hatchery on the lower Coquille to help prevent the extirpation of the fall Chinook salmon.

Since the inception of the Winter Lake Project on the Coquille River, Trout Unlimited staff and volunteers have also committed resources of volunteer and staff time, working side by side with ODFW during the pre-project monitoring phase and providing comments and participating at several public hearings in the early stages of the project.

Trout Unlimited staff are subject matter experts in a variety of areas related to cold water conservation, particularly in the area of habitat restoration. Staff in Oregon over the past ten years have completed a large number of cold water restoration projects across the State. Improving habitat for Trout, Salmon and Steelhead on hundreds river miles. We know that habitat restoration works!

Unfortunately, many of our iconic runs of salmon and steelhead in Oregon are in decline. This trend has recently been exacerbated by the effects of climate change, poor ocean conditions and predation. Fall Chinook, Spring Chinook, Winter and Summer Steelhead generally, are all trending downward. One bright spot is our runs of Coho Salmon.

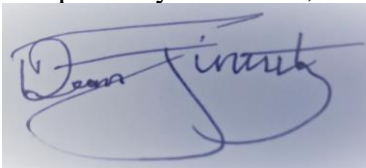
The tremendous efforts and investments in habitat restoration here in Oregon over the past two plus decades has started to really make improvements in our Coho populations. They are the one pacific salmon specie that has been trending in the right direction over the past several years.

America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization
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Restoration projects like the one at Winter Lake, and others like it - is what's really turning the tide for our Coho. These salmon provide a wonderful recreational fishery, not only on our rivers, but also along our near shore coastal communities, infusing much needed tourism and recreational dollars for our "cash strapped" southwest Oregon communities. A 2021 study by the American Sportfishing Association calculated that statewide, anglers contributed \$1.5 billion to the economy and supported 13,120 jobs. Gas stations, hotels, restaurants, area fishing guides and other tourism industry services ALL benefit from increased returns of coho, provided by the habitat created at Winter Lake.

We enthusiastically support the continuation of the Winter Lake project and look forward to the benefits that will be realized when its completed.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Finnerty", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Dean Finnerty
Trout Unlimited