

Salem Report

By Representative Brad Witt
House District 31



I'm back in Salem as the 2019 Legislative session is getting under way. I was honored as Oregon Chief Justice

Martha Lee Walters administered the oath of office, marking the official start of my 8th term in office. It is truly a privilege to serve the people of House District 31, and I want to hear from you in the coming months to make sure the legislation we approve best serves our area and all Oregonians.

Our first activities included training for lawmakers and staff, familiarizing us with the facilities, rules and procedures, and reinforcing the best ways to establish a collegial and professional work environment that best serves the needs of our constituents.

My priorities this session include legislation designed to reduce the risk of school mass shootings. The security of our children and classrooms is a state and national concern, and I hope these are measures that all Oregonians can support.

- HB 2289 would establish a school safety task force to review safety features for school facilities, develop recommendations for legislation, and then report back to the legislature.

- HB 2290 requires the development and implementation of a student threat assessment policy while ensuring the services of a behavioral health specialist for school districts.

- HB 2287 authorizes school districts to allow firearm safety courses on school property in cooperation with the local law enforcement agency.

- HB 2291 is an Oregon Tax Credit for Gun Safes and/or locking mechanisms, \$50 per individual, or \$100 per joint filing, applying to tax years 2020-2026.

I know many folks in House District 31 enjoy hunting and fishing as I do, and I've been hearing about problems you've had with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's new electronic licensing system. I reached out to ODFW to share your concerns, and they were very responsive. The electronic licensing system will save the department nearly \$2 million over the next biennium, and while there is still a paper option, more people are opting for the electronic license reporting. When tagging your trophy, you report the same

information you would on the paper license. Connectivity can be a problem in remote outdoor areas, but both ODFW and Oregon State Police know this, and as long you input the required information on site, the data will sync up with your license when your phone gets into service range. Harvest of big game, including turkeys, requires annual reporting, which was done by telephone, but is easily done online. However, you must verify your account first, before you can successfully get into the system. Families reporting to ODFW can use the same computer terminal, but each person above the age of 12 must have a separate email account for reporting purposes. The department safe-guards personal information by withholding it from the customer data base.

I very much appreciate ODFW's responsiveness to the concerns I raised on your behalf. They are actively working to correct problems, and things should go much more smoothly a year from now, when we repeat our annual reporting procedure. One of the important ways I can serve the people of House District 31 is to interface with State Agencies regarding your issues and concerns. By working together we'll try to find more effective ways to operate state agencies to benefit everyone.

While I serve on several committees, I chair the House Natural Resources Committee and we began our meetings this week with informational briefings from state agencies talking about their programs and concepts for legislation they'll bring forward this session.

Former Oregon State Forester Jim Brown spoke to our committee. Having had the pleasure of working with Jim when I served on the Oregon State Board of Forestry, I respect and admire his dedication to Oregon's natural resources, as did Governor Kulon-goski, who made Jim his Natural Resource Office Director. Jim shared with the committee results of surveys showing Oregonians want a high quality of life that includes jobs, education, public safety, human resource services, and a quality environment. In all areas of the state, but especially rural areas such as House District 31, the environment and economy are interconnected. Oregon's forestlands have the best biodiversity of any landscape in Oregon as well as the cleanest waters.

During Jim Brown's tenure as Oregon State Forester the Department of Forestry worked on sustainable forest management practices, implementing a plan for integrated multi-value forest with the opportunity for innovative management. The Oregon Forest Management Plan was adopted with the agreement that if the plan didn't work, it would be revisited. If there are any problems or shortfalls, as elected officials with oversight responsibilities, we owe it to the public to seek constant improvement. Jim spoke to the point that sustainable forest practices include a balance between working landscapes, institutional infrastructure, social economic benefits, and a healthy ecosystem. It's the kind of balance I believe we need when dealing with every natural resource issue. I liken it to a stool with three legs under a bucket of milk. If you shorten any one leg, then the milk will spill. We can't afford to waste the milk, or Oregon's natural resources. The House Natural Resources committee members must be mindful of balancing the needs of all Oregonians when making public policy. We must listen to the debate, but not be unduly influenced by the loudest voices, instead we need to keep balance in mind and make our decisions based on the broader public interest.

The Natural Resource Committee also received an update from Larry Warren, Director of the Oregon Marine Board (OMB). This small agency works to provide and enhance opportunities for recreational boating, through contracting and grants. Funding for the OMB comes from boat registration fees, federal grants, and marine fuel taxes. That money is used to contract with county sheriff's offices and the Oregon State Police for marine law enforcement, and grants for recreational boating facilities. Some of the legislation they hope to advance this session includes improving waterway access, licensing boat rental operations, and combatting aquatic invasive species.

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