

NEWS RELEASE
Oregon Fish and Wildlife

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Commission selects Dr. Debbie Colbert as new ODFW Director

SALEM, Ore.—The Fish and Wildlife Commission today voted unanimously to select Dr. Debbie Colbert as the new ODFW Director.

Colbert will be the first woman to ever be appointed as permanent ODFW Director position in the agency’s [long history](#). The first state Fish Commission was legally recognized in 1887 and a combined fish and game agency has existed in Oregon since 1893.

Colbert will now lead an agency still managing sustainable fishing and hunting opportunities while leading in addressing the modern conservation challenges affecting all fish and wildlife in Oregon such as climate resiliency and water availability. ODFW has 1,200 full time employees and is managed through a regional structure that allows for management at the local, watershed level via 33 offices across the state (including field offices, fish hatcheries, wildlife areas and research stations).

The Commission received more than 270 questions and comments about the new director on its online forum, and several thousand more emailed comments. Dr. Colbert and the other finalist, Kaitlin Lovell, currently with the City of Portland, gave opening and closing statements and answered a representative sample of questions received during a [public Q&A this morning](#). The questions were asked by represented ODFW staff and covered topics like funding for conservation, bridging the rural-urban divide, the role of hunting and fish hatcheries, employee safety in the field and engaging field staff with local expertise in policy decisions.



“I will continue to bring a sense of urgency on delivering results in the face of growing complexity and challenges,” Dr. Colbert said in her opening statement. “I am also very committed to positioning the agency so it engages all Oregonians. Our tent extends to everyone who wants to protect and enhance fish, wildlife and their habitats.”

Dr. Colbert’s career includes stints in field work as a fish sampler for the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, as a researcher at sea for several months and studying nutrient cycling in Tillamook Bay. During her time at ODFW, Colbert worked for five years as Deputy Director for Administration and in her current position as Deputy Director for Fish and Wildlife Programs (since 2021). She also worked for the Oregon Water Resources Department and as Board of Trustees Administrator for Oregon State University. Debbie earned a B.S. in Biology, M.S. in Oceanography, and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Oceanography. She was selected as a 2022 National Conservation Leadership Fellow.

“These were two remarkably talented and exceptional candidates and we spent a lot of time considering them through a public process,” said Chair Wahl. “We owe these two people enormous gratitude and recognition for what they have done for the state of Oregon.”

Colbert, 54, currently lives in Corvallis with her family.