

Project Minutes

September 1st, 2022

Attending

Committee members: Lori, Doug, Blaine, Sara, Pam, Gary, Pat, Andrea, Carl

Staff: Emma, Kalei, Zach, Tim

Meeting Called to Order

11:30 am

Approval of May 26, 2022, Minutes

Pam asked that the minutes reflect that the Project committee recommended approval of the funding for the Estacada Lake project as the amount was more than \$10K

With that amendment, Gary made a motion to approve. It was seconded by Doug and passed unanimously.

Funds on Hand

The Project Committee Grantmaking budget is \$100,000 per year, or \$25,000 per quarter. The running total year to date is \$37,200. Current unrestricted project funds available are ~ \$73,500. Tim also reminded the committee that members have read-only access to both the funds available and projects that have been funded.

Project 22 - 13 CRNG Wildlife Water & Habitat Restoration Project

Oregon Wildlife Foundation staff are requesting \$15,000 over two years (\$7,500/year) for this project on the Crooked River National Grasslands that will replace and/or repair wildlife guzzlers and enclosure fencing destroyed and damaged by multiple wildfires over the last five years. Alternately, this can be considered a \$7,500 request for this year and we'll reapply in 2023 for the balance of the funds needed.

Numerous investments have been made across the Grasslands by the FS to improve and/or sustain habitat for a myriad of wildlife species with special emphasis placed on anchoring populations of upland game birds and mule deer to our public land.

The largest of the most recent wildfires impacting the Grasslands was the Emerson fire which burned 10,500 acres in the northeast portion of the Grasslands. Within the fire perimeter, many of the wildlife habitat improvement investments previously made were lost due to the severity of the fire. This project consists of two main types of infrastructure repair and reconstruction: 1) guzzlers, and 2) riparian enclosures.

1) Guzzler Repair/Reconstruction: seven guzzlers need to be removed and completely rebuilt. Two additional guzzlers need to be repaired.

2) Riparian Enclosure Reconstruction: there are three enclosures associated with riparian habitat surrounding a naturally occurring spring within the fire perimeter. Prior to the fire, decadent riparian hardwoods were present, and this area served as a unique habitat within the surrounding high desert environment. These three livestock enclosures will be rebuilt or repaired utilizing wildlife friendly fencing designs.

This project is a partnership between OWF, ODFW, USFS - Ochoco National Forest, and RMEF

Discussion: staff presented two options for funding this request 1) recommend it for approval and put it on the Board meeting agenda for final approval of the amount as its more than \$10K in total or 2) approve \$7,500 this year and provisionally \$7,500 next year.

Blaine made a motion to recommend that the Board approve \$15,000 to be spent on this project over the next two years. Gary seconded the motion and it approved unanimously.

Project 22 - 14 Hart Mountain Bighorn Sheep Recovery

Oregon Wildlife Foundation staff are requesting \$10,000 in funding to support lethal removal of mountain lion from bighorn sheep habitat on the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in southeastern Oregon. The Wild Sheep Foundation are looking for partners to help them raise a total of \$100,000. These funds will be used to underwrite additional years of predator control as part of USFWS's bighorn sheep recovery plan for Hart Mountain.

Still further, staff request that the committee modify our grant guidelines to allow for predator control when and as there is scientific consensus that doing so supports the recovery of an endangered species.

The California bighorn sheep (BHS) herd on Hart Mountain declined from ~150 animals in 2017 to as few as 48 in 2020. Consequently, this herd is at risk of extirpation without prompt management intervention to restore it to a sustainable level. In 2022, the Hart Mountain BHS Management Plan & EIS was developed to identify management actions to aid recovery. The California BHS, an iconic species native to Oregon and the Refuge, was extirpated from the state by 1912. BHS were successfully reintroduced in 1954 when 20 were translocated to the Refuge. After reintroduction, the Refuge herd was robust enough to be used as a source for translocating BHS to other areas in and around Oregon. Immediate action is needed to address rapidly declining BHS numbers that place the herd at significant risk of extirpation from the Refuge over the next few years. An integrated management approach focusing on short-term predator control of mountain lions and long-term habitat management actions, including juniper removal and restoration of water sources, are specifically targeted to benefit and recover BHS and support a sustainable herd. This funding request focuses on specific recovery actions to implement short-term mountain lion control.

Discussion: staff are recommending modification of our funding guideline prohibition against funding predator control services versus making a one-time exception to our policy. Suggested approach was to consider modifying our guidelines as the first step and then take up the funding request itself.

Tim explained that our policy against funding predator control came about because of several funding requests from wildlife services for coyote removal. The project committee, at that time, determined that funding predator control projects was something we shouldn't be involved with.

After a robust conversation, a motion was made by Pam to make a one-time exception to our funding guideline prohibition and provide up to \$10K in funding to the project with the following provisos 1) funds should only be used for short-term control efforts, and 2) if possible, our funds be utilized in other ways if and as the control efforts are successful. The motion was seconded by Gary. The motion carried with Blaine and Doug voting no.

Tim indicated that we would notify Wild Sheep Foundation that we will join them in their campaign by committing \$10K to the project but will work with USFWS directly on payment so we can redirect our dollars to other aspects of the recovery program if the offending lions are removed prior to the service needing our funding.

Project 22 - 15 Ventenata Removal Pilot Project

Rick Christian, Christian Cattle Company, submitted a request for \$3,986 to treat 50 acres of their family's land that has become 90% Ventenata grass with Rejuvra. This grass is replacing native and planted perennial grasses. One application has been documented as having very high success rates of removing all annual grasses and allowing the perennial bunch grasses to fully recover for a period of up to 5 years.

Rejuvra is a relatively new herbicide developed by Bayer Environmental Science. The NRCS has developed cost-match for private landowners that use this product however funding isn't yet available.

Discussion: Tim indicated that the applicant didn't have a lot of experience with grants and pertinent information was missing. NRCS is very excited about the potential that Rejuvra holds for rangeland restoration.

The safety data sheet was provided as Pam raised a question regarding the toxicity of the herbicide to wildlife. While the NRCS isn't aware of any issues, that's part of the reason they want to pilot this on several plots of land before they make a large-scale commitment to application of the product.

A motion to decline this funding request was made by Sara and Pam seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

Project 22 – 16 Rebreather Units for Aquarium Research Dive Team

The Oregon Coast Aquarium is requesting \$9,000 to purchase two rebreather units, associated equipment, and training for their research dive team.

Time at depth is a research diver's most precious and limited resource, and rebreathers provide an unsurpassed means of extending it. With rebreathers, the Aquarium research dive team can maximize its pursuit of two key habitat conservation initiatives: (1) Performing kelp forest habitat restoration research directly, and (2) Connecting the public to the Oregon Coast and inspiring ocean conservation through (a) collecting ambassador animals for exhibitory display and (b) collecting footage of local habitats to be shared to the wider public through social media.

Discussion: it was asked what the split between research and marketing is in how this equipment will be used. Tim said that he didn't know. It was suggested that these requests are helping underwrite equipment that the applicant should be able to purchase on their own.

A motion to decline this funding request was made by Pat and seconded by Carl. The motion carried unanimously.

New Business

School of Ranch Fiscal Sponsorship Application

Mark Gross has developed a community-building and educational program in central Oregon called "School of Ranch" (www.schoolofranch.org) He is seeking fiscal sponsorship from the Foundation to develop the concept more fully with expectations of growth here in Oregon and elsewhere across the West. Amongst local sponsoring organizations, we're the closest fit with Mark's nonprofit and he plans to include "living with wildlife" content and embrace wildlife values as a core part of the developing curricula. The School of Ranch application is attached.

Discussion: We're the closest, in terms of mission, to what this project's mission is. There just aren't a lot of choices with respect to fiscal sponsorship. For the Foundation this represents an opportunity to influence the curriculum in the direction of wildlife conservation.

It was asked if the near-term plan is for this organization to become its own 501c3 as quickly as possible.

A motion to recommend Board approval of a fiscal sponsor arrangement with School of Ranch was made by Gary and seconded by Blaine. The motion passed with Pat voting against the motion and Pam abstained.

Revisiting Our Project Priorities

It's been difficult to show progress against our current priorities because oak woodland partners have only recently completed planning and prioritization efforts. The largest efforts in Oregon have also been awarded millions of dollars in funding support through OWEB's focused investment partnership program. These same collaborations also applied for funding from the America the Beautiful funding program. In short, the small amount of funding that we can allocate to oak woodlands might be better used elsewhere.

The same is true of wetlands (west of the Cascades) but for different reasons. There are already organizations dedicated to this habitat type and our assistance options are to help with acquisitions or restoration. Acquisitions can be expensive and the planning/permitting process for restoration work is often lengthy.

Staff would like the committee to consider pursuing full implementation of the Oregon Conservation Strategy (OCS) in lieu of choosing 1-2 habitat priorities.

The Strategy is also referred to as a 'blueprint for conservation in Oregon.' It divides the state into nine ecoregions and explicitly identifies both species and habitat types in each that need conservation and restoration support.

Still further, the Oregon Conservation Strategy identifies specific locations called Conservation Opportunity Areas where carefully designed projects can yield results for multiple strategy species.

To our knowledge, there aren't any conservation organizations that have made implementation of the OCS a focus of their work. Staff feel that this is something we can explain to prospective donors and the information within the OCS provides a roadmap of sorts regarding where work needs to be done and to a large degree, whom our partners might be.

Finally, with the success of the Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund, potential passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, and the addition of the Department's new Habitat division, the timing is optimum for OWF to go "all in" with respect to the Strategy.

Discussion: Making implementation of the OCS a priority doesn't preclude us from investing in other things. It does make it easier for us to explain what we're trying to accomplish with respect to wildlife conservation in Oregon.

A motion to recommend that OWF prioritize implementation of the Oregon Conservation Strategy as our organization priority was made by Andrea and seconded by Doug. The motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business

Fishhawk Lake Mitigation Funds

Do we:

- Manage the funds for long-term appreciation and expend only a portion of earnings each year, or
- Expend all the funds on a more aggressive timeline to support ecological improvements on a timelier basis, or
- Some combination of the above strategies

ODFW personnel have suggested that we use our dollars to cover up-front fisheries planning and engineering design for high priority projects within the basin.

We determined that we shouldn't do anything until we've seen a strategic action plan (sap) for the basin. That's in process with a final draft expected sometime this Fall.

We did, in fact, get our hands on a draft version which will be posted to the Project committee area of our website.

Discussion: The Fishhawk funds are currently invested in T-bills pending a decision regarding how the funds should be expended. Approximately \$190K will be allocated to the supplemental environmental projects as a condition of the settlement between DEQ and the Fishhawk HOA.

Building Project Management Capacity

We don't have a volunteer program at OWF but do get requests on a regular basis. We do forward them to our sponsored projects that do utilize volunteers.

We have talked about doing more conservation projects, particularly efforts that we lead ourselves. To do that, we need capacity that we don't currently have. We could do that through the employment of volunteers, but we haven't developed a program around that yet.

Tim said he would write up a more comprehensive proposal for the committee to consider.

Estacada Lake Project

The Project Committee recommended up to \$30,000 in funding for design and engineering for the Clackamas Estacada Lake Project and the Board approved an allocation of \$40,000 for design, engineering, and application preparation for this project, located just downstream from PGE's River Mill dam.

We ran into a bit of an issue with respect to ownership of the property where the project is to be built. Geoff Hales, with McBain & Associates is helping us determine whether the property is owned in whole or part by PGE, an adjacent private landowner, or is in publicly owned waters. Additional outreach may be necessary if it's determined that the project would take place, in part, on private property.

Clackamas Two Rivers Project

We continue to carry this project under Old Business. We can't seem to be get the USFS – Mt. Hood National Forest to return email or phone messages regarding this project which is located on the Forest at the confluence of the Clackamas and Collawash rivers.

This upper Clackamas River project was originally proposed for funding during the last cycle of the Clackamas Mitigation and Enhancement Fund by the Forest and McBain & Associates. It did not receive funding but is a good project and ready to submit again during the next cycle of funding. The purpose of the project is to improve side channel and mainstem habitat by adding woody structures.

Adding New Members to The Committee

We don't have a defined process by which new members are added to our Project committee. We do have someone interested in joining who's been a member of the Foundation for a long time. We're looking for feedback regarding how we bring new members onto the committee.

We'll revisit this topic at the next meeting of the committee. In the meantime, please share any feedback you have with Tim.

Gary asked how we can recognize the long-term service of Dave Cummings as our Project committee. Pam added that Dave was also the President of our Board of Directors, PGE liaison, and supporter of fundraising over many years.

Meeting Adjourned

1:36 pm

###