

Project Notes

September 1st, 2022

Project Committee Budget

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 \$91,000.

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

- Meets our match requirements
- Meets our funding guidelines
- Addresses several OCS species

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.

- Meets our match requirements
- Does not meet our funding guidelines

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.

- Meets our match requirements
- Does not fully meet our funding guidelines
- Addresses an OCS strategy habitat: Grasslands

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 exhibitry display and (b) collecting footage of local habitats to be shared to the wider public through social media.

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 a wildlife value as a core part of the developing curricula. The School of Ranch application is attached.

Revisiting Our Project Priorities

Several members of OWF's Board and project committee met at McMenamin's Kennedy School to discuss how best to expend or plan for expending the Fishhawk Lake mitigation funds that we currently hold for investments in the Nehalem River basin. We also discussed our existing project priorities (oak woodland/western Oregon wetland) and whether we should continue with them or look at a different way of allocating our limited resources across a set of different priorities. Notes from our meeting are attached

The TL/DR summary:

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 of 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.

Habitat 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.

Modification of Grant Guidelines

Staff urge the committee to modify our grant guidelines to allow for predator control when and as scientific opinion determines that doing so will support the recovery of an imperiled, sensitive, or endangered species. A congruence of scientific opinion would be represented by agreement of the land manager with ODFW personnel.