

Summary of Projects Recommended for Access & Habitat Funding

Funding for the Access & Habitat (A&H) Program comes from three primary sources. The majority of the revenue, approximately \$1.7 million per biennium, comes from hunting license sales. Biennial proceeds from deer and elk auction and raffle tags contribute ~\$1 million. An allocation of ~\$40,000 from the Green Forage and Deer Enhancement and Restoration programs combined make up the remainder of the A&H Program revenue. The total is over \$2.7 million per biennium.

The A&H Board (Board) recommended two project for funding totaling \$66,333 at the July quarterly meeting. If the Commission adopts the recommendations for both projects, \$414,686 of the \$2,698,419 A&H 2017-2019 biennial allocation will remain and \$48,440 of the \$1,560,121 NRCS Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program grant (Open Fields) funds will remain. All projects received letters of support from the local District Wildlife Biologist. A brief description of the funding requested, access and habitat benefits provided, as well as Council and Board votes follows.

The A&H Board recommends funding the following two projects:

#2017-13 Thirtymile Creek Grassland Restoration

- A&H Funds: \$16,333
- Cooperator Contribution: \$8,857
- Total Value: \$25,190
- Applicant: Western Rivers Conservancy
- Location: East Biggs (WMU)
- Habitat Acres: 109
- Completion Date: July 2018
- Council Vote: Yes: 5; No: 0
- Board Vote: Yes: 6; No: 0

Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) is requesting \$16,333 in A&H funds to restore 109 acres of former agricultural lands to native grasslands near the confluence of Thirtymile Creek and the John Day River. Funds will be used for herbicide treatments, seeding, and mowing.

Grassland habitats have declined dramatically in the Columbia Plateau with remaining grasslands at lower elevation heavily impacted by invasive non-native species such as cheatgrass and medusa head. Returning agricultural fields to grassland will provide important habitat for game and non-game species such as big horn sheep, mule deer, Grasshopper Sparrows, Pallid bats and any species that utilize grasslands. The project is in the Lower John Day River Conservation Opportunity Area (COA 153) and project actions align with the recommended conservation actions including; suppression of invasive weeds, restoring and maintaining grasslands, as well as, improving connections to riparian areas.

#2017-14 Desolation Creek Shaded Fuel Break

- Open Fields Funds: \$50,000
- Cooperators Contribution: \$53,500
- Total Project Value: \$103,500
- Applicant: Desolation Creek LLC.
- Location: Desolation WMU
- Habitat Acres: 230
- Project Period: August 1 through January 31
- Council Vote: Yes: 7; No: 0
- Board Vote: Yes: 6; No: 0

Desolation Creek LLC is requesting \$50,000 of Open Fields grant funds for mastication (chipping/pulping) of sub-merchantable trees and other fuels generated by implantation of a shaded fuel break along the southern half of the Desolation Creek Access Area. Approved by the Commission last year, the 13,440-acre Desolation Creek Access Area offers year round access to mixed meadow and forest habitats with quality turkey, deer and elk hunting.

The shaded fuel break will create 230 acres of early seral habitat beneficial for deer and elk in addition to mitigating risk of fire transmission from the heavily stocked Forest Service property along the southern board of the area. While fire can have positive results for wildlife, the condition of forests in the area tends toward fires of high intensity and size leading to longer recovery periods for ideal wildlife habitat.