



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND:

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) is a grant program that supports projects that protect and enhance the species and habitats identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy and creates opportunities for wildlife watching, urban conservation, community science, and other wildlife-associated recreation. Grants awarded from the OCRF must be reviewed and recommended by the OCRF Advisory Committee and approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

OCRF Advisory Committee meetings are open to public and have time on the agenda for comments from participating members of the public.

ISSUE 1

Expenditure Recommendation from the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund for the special project request “Let’s talk about beavers: Using social science to reduce conflict and enable coexistence in a changing climate”.

ISSUE 1 ANALYSIS

This agenda item pertains to an OCRF special project application titled “Let’s talk about beavers: Using social science to reduce conflict and enable coexistence in a changing climate”. The applicants for this project are the Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) Interdivisional Beaver Team, who have partnered on the project design and implementation.

There is a movement to restore beaver and beaver-modified habitat on the landscape in Oregon. However, beavers can be controversial because of the damage they can cause to human structures and crops. This project proposes to use novel social science practices to answer the question: How can private landowners be supported to take coexistence actions that are mutually beneficial for their needs and beaver populations in Oregon? The project proposes to build a community of practice made up of groups that work with private landowners on beaver conflict management and beaver habitat restoration. The goal is to identify a) best practices for landowner engagement, b) pinch points limiting landowner engagement, and c) opportunities to

coordinate future outreach and engagement campaigns. Results and lessons learned from this project will be used by the department and shared with stakeholders, and the broader conservation science community to catalyze wider discussion and adoption of human-beaver coexistence strategies.

This project is a high priority action in ODFW's Three-Year Action Plan for Beaver-Modified Landscapes.

At the March 6th, 2023 public meeting, the OCRF Advisory Committee recommended expenditure of \$137,501 from the OCRF to support the special project titled "Let's talk about beavers: Using social science to reduce conflict and enable coexistence in a changing climate".

Recognizing the importance of beaver to Oregon, and the challenges associated with their management, ODFW is in the final stages of creating ODFW's Three-Year Action Plan for Beaver-Modified Landscapes that identifies four interconnected pillars of action for advancing landscape-scale beaver habitat restoration in Oregon. These are Pillar 1: Data and Science, Pillar 2: Habitat Restoration, Pillar 3: Beaver Management, and Pillar 4: Outreach and Communication. This special project request will be used to better understand how to motivate beaver coexistence actions (i.e., habitat restoration and nonlethal conflict mitigation) to guide collaboration across the Action Plan's four pillars. In so doing, this special project request will help to contribute to wider efforts to provide resiliency to drought and other climate change-related natural hazards by encouraging beaver presence across the landscape. By supporting beaver habitat restoration, the special project also aims to benefit the fish, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, and birds who rely on beaver-modified habitat for their own survival.

This project addresses a Key Conservation Issue in the Oregon Conservation Strategy (*Challenges and Opportunities for Private Landowners to Initiate Conservation Actions*).

This special project request has fully addressed the OCRF's mission of outdoor equity in four ways. The Special Project Team will integrate recognition equity (acknowledging the rights, values, knowledge systems, and cultural identity of local groups) throughout the project by working closely with and being led by the needs of tribes. The team will focus on distribution equity (fair distribution of benefits and burdens of conservation between groups) by prioritizing the needs of rural landowners dealing with current or potential property damage from beaver. The team will focus on procedural equity (including all relevant groups in project decision-making) through the creation of a community of practice for peer learning. Lastly, the team will focus on management equity (the extent to which local people lead management activities) by focusing communication efforts on watersheds where locally-led, collaborative beaver restoration efforts are ongoing.

The OCRF Subcommittee on Special Projects met on February 23rd, 2023, to review the proposal, and on March 6th, 2023, the OCRF Advisory Committee approved the recommendation on the expenditure of \$137,501 from the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund for the Special Project "Let's talk about beavers: Using social science to reduce conflict and enable coexistence in a changing climate."

ISSUE 2

Expenditure from the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund up to \$8,000 to support insurance requirements for a limited number of projects that were awarded funding on December 16th, 2023, by the Commission.

ISSUE 2 ANALYSIS

This is a request for expenditure of up to \$8,000 from the OCRF to support insurance requirements for a limited number of projects that were awarded funding on December 16th, 2023, by the Commission. The department will use these funds to support projects that requested financial assistance to purchase specialized insurance that became a requirement after the grants were awarded.

In January 2023, the department received new guidance from the Oregon Department of Administrative Services (DAS) regarding the requirement of specialized insurance for grant programs. According to this new guidance, the State of Oregon requires grantees to have insurance commensurate with the project's activities. Under the Indemnity section of the departments grant agreement, the grantee promises to defend, hold harmless and indemnify the state related to the work they are doing under the grant agreement. Meeting insurance requirements assures fulfillment of this promise. The successful grantee must provide ODFW proof of required insurance before grant funds will be disbursed.

New DAS guidance was received by the department after the closure of the OCRF August/October 2023 grant funding cycle, so therefore was not available to project applicants at the time they were developing their budgets. In order to provide a transparent and equitable process for the grantees, while ensuring that the needs of the State contracting process are met, the OCRF Advisory Committee has recommended additional expenditures from the OCRF. Organizations approved in the December 2023 award would be eligible to request additional OCRF funds to meet these new specialized insurance requirements (see attached document 4 for a complete list of activities that fall under this consideration). Future grantees will be expected to meet the insurance requirements or include the funding request in their application's budget.

At the March 6th, 2023, public meeting, the OCRF Advisory Committee recommended the expenditure of up to \$8,000 from the OCRF to support additional insurance costs that have been incurred by applicants of the August/October 2023 grant funding cycle.

The department and the Advisory Committee have taken steps to ensure that all future applicants to the OCRF are aware of these new insurance policies, including hosting recorded informational webinars, updating the OCRF website, and creating a new guidance document (see attached document 4). These efforts should ensure that future applicants to the OCRF are aware of and plan accordingly to fund any and all insurance requirements for their proposed projects.

The OCRF provides a transparent and equitable process to all applicants, and one that supports the needs of the State and the applicant. Some proposed projects carry a greater risk to the grantee, grantee’s employees, volunteers, and the community. For projects in which the grantee is performing specialized activities (see attached document 4), grantees will now be required to meet the minimum General Insurance requirements plus any required specialized insurance. As such the OCRF is now allowing the applicant to include insurance costs within their proposed budgets as “other” expenditures.

OPTIONS - ISSUE 1 & 2

1. Approve Conservation and Recreation Fund expenditure recommendations from the OCRF Advisory Committee.
2. Reject Conservation and Recreation Fund expenditure recommendations from the OCRF Advisory Committee.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION - ISSUE 1 & 2

Approve Conservation and Recreation Fund expenditure recommendations from the OCRF Advisory Committee for both the Special Project Request and to support insurance requirements.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to approve expenditures from the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund of \$137,501 for the project “Let’s talk about beavers: Using social science to reduce conflict and enable coexistence in a changing climate” and \$8,000 to support insurance requirements for a selected projects that were awarded funding on December 16th, 2023, by the Commission.

Effective Date: March 17, 2023