



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Created in 1993 by the Oregon Legislative Assembly, the seven-member Access & Habitat (A&H) Board (Board) reviews project proposals that improve wildlife habitat and/or enhance public hunting access in Oregon. The Board has four regularly scheduled meetings to review projects but can call emergency meetings if needed. Project applications, submitted by landowners, corporations, organizations, and agencies, are initially reviewed by Board-appointed Regional Councils established in five geographic regions of the state. Regional Councils forward proposals to the Board with recommendations to approve or deny projects. The Board provides the next level of project review and then forwards proposals to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) for final consideration and approval to expend A&H Program funds.

Funding for the A&H Program, ~ \$3.3 million per biennium, is from three primary sources:

- \$4 from each hunting and combination license sold (approximately \$1.4 million per biennium)
- Proceeds from the annual Big Game Auction and Raffle tags (approximately \$1.9 million per biennium)
- Biennial allocation of approximately \$90,000 from the Green Forage and Deer Enhancement and Restoration programs

The A&H Program dedicated account balance was \$2,734,656 at the end of September 2023, of which \$2,435,059 is obligated to approved projects. If the Board recommended project is approved the commission the remaining limitation for projects during the biennium will be \$36,255. A&H Program funds deposited in the dedicated account can only be expended for program activities. As of July 1, 2023 contracted A&H projects provide hunters with access to over 2.4 million acres of private land and have improved over 21,000 acres of habitat for wildlife during this biennium.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A&H provides an opportunity for public involvement at Regional Council and Board meetings, which are advertised by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) news releases and on the Department webpage. Meeting materials are posted on the Department website. Members of the public may review documents and provide comments. Interested parties may attend in person or virtually to provide public comment during these meetings. The Board most recently met to review projects in Burns on October 17, 2023.

ISSUE 1

A&H PROJECT FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

ANALYSIS

2023-11 Open Fields Access Projects Extension

- A&H Funds: \$88,891.24
- Open Fields Funds: \$119,886.36
- Applicant: ODFW on behalf of project cooperators
- Access Acres: ~238,000 acres
- Project Duration: January 2024-June 2025
- Board Vote: Yes: 7; No: 0

Oregon Open Fields projects are funded via a Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant. VPA-HIP is part of the federal farm bill that is up for renewal this year, but current estimates but passage well into 2024. The current grant provides Oregon Open Fields funding through September 1, 2024.

There are ten Open Fields access projects that will end after the 2023-24 hunting season. This project will provide funding to extend those access areas for one year to ensure access through the 2024-25 hunting season. The projects are three Columbia Basin Access projects, four Willamette Valley Access projects, two Mid-Coast projects, and the Fort Rock Access project shown in the maps (Attachment 2). Project payments made prior to September 1, 2024 will utilize VPA-HIP grant funds while payments made after that date will utilize A&H funds.

This project extension will provide time for federal farm bill passage while providing both our constituents and landowners program consistency.

OPTIONS

Option 1. Approve A&H Board recommendation.

Option 2. Reject project proposals.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Option 1. Approve the extension project recommended by the A&H Board.

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to approve the Open Fields Access Projects Extension project recommended for funding by the Access & Habitat Board.

Effective Date: December 15, 2023