

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
Oregon Plan Quarterly Implementation Report
 Quarter: July 1, 2000 – September 30, 2000

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) was created by the 1999 State Legislature to support implementation of the Oregon Plan through funding local watershed restoration, providing tools and guidance to local groups, and developing partnerships and priorities to make restoration efforts more effective. Although OWEB has no specified implementation measures in the Oregon Plan, the agency's work statewide and regionally is fundamental to achieving Oregon Plan goals. This report summarizes agency accomplishments and issues related to the Oregon Plan for the period July 1, 2000 to September 30, 2000.

I. Statewide

A. Accomplishments

Project and Program Funding

Watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, local governments, agencies and citizens statewide are making improvements in watershed health. Each quarter, OWEB grants support on-the-ground restoration projects, watershed assessment and monitoring, local outreach and education, and watershed council support. OWEB maintains a database of all funded projects to track and report progress statewide and regionally. Soon, this database will be accessible through the OWEB website: www.oweb.state.or.us.

Watershed Improvement Grant Applications

On September 1, 2000, OWEB received 200 grant applications requesting approximately \$19.5 million for local watershed improvement projects. The applications include 109 applications for watershed restoration projects, 9 for land acquisitions, 29 for local outreach and education, 27 for monitoring, and 28 for watershed assessment.

OWEB Grant Applications Received, September 1, 2000

Project Type	Statewide	North Coast	Southwest Oregon	Willamette	Central Oregon	Eastern Oregon	Total
Assessment		5	10	8	3	2	28
Monitoring		3	7	7	2	8	27
Outreach	5	5	8	6	4	1	29
Acquisition				7	1	1	9
Restoration		15	26	18	17	33	109
Totals	5	28	51	46	27	45	202

Strategic Investments in Research

A subcommittee of the OWEB Board was formed to develop a strategic investment plan to address research needs to support implementation of the Oregon Plan. The strategic plan will guide OWEB's allocation of funds from the Restoration and Protection Research Fund, which earns interest from lottery proceeds dedicated to enhance parks and natural resources by Ballot Measure 66. The Fund is expected to receive approximately \$900,000 in the 1999-2001 biennium.

Development of a Small Grant Program

A subcommittee of the OWEB Board was formed to guide the development of an enhanced small grant program that better supports local efforts of councils and landowners to restore watershed health. An enhanced small grant program would make grants more accessible to projects requiring a relatively small amount of funds and would support local project priorities, restoration needs, and partnerships. The Board plans to consider a small grant program proposal at its January 2001 Board meeting.

Rulemaking for Land and Water Acquisition

OWEB is working with broad stakeholder input to develop rules that will govern the acquisition of land and water interests from willing sellers to benefit wild salmonid populations, watersheds, fish and wildlife habitat and water quality. Final rules are anticipated in October 2000.

Redgetop to Ridgetop Conference

In cooperation with the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), OWEB is planning the *Ridgetop to Ridgetop* Conference, November 6-9, 2000. The conference celebrates the success of local watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts in their work to restore the health of Oregon's watersheds. *Ridgetop to Ridgetop* is OWEB's 6th Biennial Conference and OACD's 52nd Annual Meeting. The conference features local accomplishments and lessons learned, focuses on shared challenges and potential solutions, and highlights opportunities for making progress. For information, see: www.oweb.state.or.us.

Restoration Strategy Guidance

OWEB staff has hosted two meetings with a broad advisory group to develop guidance for watershed restoration (i.e., local restoration action plan guide). Discussions have focused on the nature of the guidance, what would be sufficient to provide assurance under the NMFS 4(d) rule for "Watershed Conservation Plans," and other topics. A schedule for the completion of the guidance is being developed.

Monitoring Progress

OWEB staff has worked with a number of partners to make progress in monitoring implementation and coordination. An effectiveness monitoring plan was developed for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to provide information on the value of this incentive program and opportunities for improvement. The Oregon Watershed Restoration Inventory was expanded in cooperation with the US Army Corps of Engineers, DSL, and US Fish and Wildlife Service to establish project reporting requirements under the Corps Regional General Permit for instream restoration activities. OWEB coordinated with councils to obtain coverage for fish monitoring activities under the ESA 4(d) Rule Research Limit. Staff are continuing to work with state and federal agencies to set the groundwork for establishing an integrated data system and website for the Pacific Northwest region.

B. Issues

Watershed Council Support

In the 1999-2001 biennium, OWEB will grant \$4.2 million to support the operation of local watershed councils. This amount, however, falls far short of meeting a growing demand for funds. The Board recognizes the need for a more stable, long-term funding source and improved methods to ensure accountability of council support funds. OWEB plans to develop program guidelines to address these issues.

Support of SB 1010 Program

In September, the OWEB Board discussed various issues associated with implementation of Senate Bill 1010 and potential partnerships that could be formed to support this important water quality program. Issues discussed included variability in the local water quality plans and rules that are developing, managing the regulatory elements of the program, and local outreach associated with SB 1010 plans.

II. North Coast Accomplishments and Issues

A. Accomplishments

Watershed assessments are complete or underway in almost all North Coast watersheds. Reviewing the progress of assessments from North to South:

- The Lower Columbia assessment is nearly complete
- All of the Clatsop watershed assessments are near completion or in progress, with the exception of the Necanicum assessment, which is in beginning stages
- Assessment of the entire Nehalem is nearly complete, and councils there are now working on a draft action plan for addressing watershed problems
- In the Tillamook Bay system, the Trask and Netarts assessments are done and the Miami, Kilchis and Wilson are in progress
- The Nestucca-Neskowin assessment is done
- In the Mid-Coast, assessments of all watersheds are in progress, including the Salmon, Siletz, Yaquina, Alsea, Yachats, and all ocean tributaries between Cascade Head and Heceta Head. These should be complete within the next few months.
- In the Siuslaw system, assessment has not yet begun but funding has been secured and councils have requested proposals for doing the work.

Councils in the Mid-Coast and Siuslaw have recently completed large culvert replacement projects to improve fish passage. Projects occurred in cooperation with local governments (Lane, Linn and Benton Counties) and OWEB funding.

In June 2000, the OWEB Board approved the acquisition of 180 acres of Whalen Island located at Sand Lake Estuary, in partnership with Tillamook County, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and multiple others. Whalen Island provides critical habitat for many aquatic species, including steelhead, cutthroat trout, chinook, coho and chum salmon. The

acquisition places the island under management of OPRD to provide ecological and public education and recreation benefits.

B. Issues

In the North Coast, similar to other areas of the state, watershed improvement is limited by availability of technical assistance to plan and implement projects. Assessments are showing watershed problems and restoration opportunities, councils and landowners are interested in doing restoration work, but technical assistance to design and plan quality projects is limited. The need for increased technical assistance is evident in the type and number of project proposals submitted to OWEB in the current grant cycle. The number of local grant applications fell by roughly one-third in the North Coast and the overall quality of proposed projects decreased. In many cases, those providing technical assistance to councils have reached their capacity and as a result, restoration opportunities are being missed.

III. South Coast Accomplishments and Issues

A. Accomplishments

Member agencies of the Southwest Interagency Group (SWIG) and the Southwest Oregon Provincial Interagency Executive Committee (PIEC) have finalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that facilitates agency partnerships with watershed councils, particularly in relation to technical assistance and watershed planning. As a result of the MOU, a Rogue Basin Technical Team has been formed to do an assessment of basin conditions. This process will be tested in the Little Applegate Watershed and will evaluate the effectiveness of different watershed assessment methods, including the Oregon Watershed Assessment Manual and federal assessment tools. In addition, the MOU has produced a Technical Pool of watershed experts available to assist councils and landowners in the Rogue Basin.

Recently, representatives of various regional efforts in the Rogue Basin identified the prioritization of barriers to fish passage as a priority effort for fish recovery. Members of the Rogue Basin Fish Access Team (RBFAT) agreed to a strategic plan for the identification, prioritization and elimination of fish passage barriers throughout the basin. RBFAT members include OWEB, ODOT, DSL, ODFW and NMFS. Members are currently discussing the possibility of creating a Rogue Basin Aquatic Habitat Mitigation Bank to receive ODOT funds, passed through OWEB, for watershed enhancement projects that mitigate for impacts to wetlands and waterways associated with state road projects.

A regional pilot effort to integrate and address the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) is progressing. State and federal agencies have produced a *matrix* – a watershed conservation management plan designed to meet ESA and CWA requirements and go farther to realize watershed health. The matrix is now being applied to the Little Applegate Watershed (a 5th field watershed), and work has is complete on Yale Creek (a 6th field watershed in the Applegate). The matrix uses data collected by watershed councils and agencies on water quality and stream habitat parameters to assess current conditions against

agreed-upon standards. Standards for watershed conditions were developed cooperatively by DEQ, ODFW, NMFS, EPA and USFS, and include a range of proper functioning conditions. Assessments of current conditions against standards were entered into the matrix to illustrate watershed status. Factors contributing to current conditions were documented and added to the matrix. Then, based on goals and objectives for achieving the standards, partners developed restoration strategies, progress benchmarks and monitoring plans for each parameter. Partners are now finalizing the outreach and education component of this process.

B. Issues

The lack of stable, long-term funding to support watershed councils continues to be an issue. Most councils have secured funding for coordinators for periods of one or two years, and often less. Lack of stable, secure funds results in loss of quality coordinators and inconsistent council leadership.

As a result of recent policy changes at the US Army Corps of Engineers regarding permits for instream work, some watershed improvement projects in this region were abandoned or postponed.

The availability of technical assistance to support local watershed improvement planning and implementation is also a continuing issue. More technical assistance has been made available in the Rogue basin, but specialists, such as engineers, are often needed and not available to assist local projects.

IV. Willamette Accomplishments and Issues

A. Accomplishments

Conducting watershed assessments continues to be a focus of council work in the Willamette region. Many councils are almost exclusively involved in the assessment stage. Currently, a high priority need for councils is guidance on planning watershed improvement projects from information revealed in assessments. OWEB is in the process of developing a restoration action plan to meet this growing need.

During this quarter, OWEB funded and brought on two additional watershed council coordinators in the Willamette. Full-time coordinators now assist the Sandy Basin Council and the Coast Fork Willamette Council.

OWEB also funded a number of restoration projects that are now underway. Work is nearing completion on a 200-acre wetland restoration project near Fern Ridge Lake in the Long Tom watershed in Lane County. The project includes excavation of shallow ponds at 5 sites and restoration of riparian and wetland areas along Amazon Creek. 10,000 native trees, shrubs and

plants have been reserved for planting this fall. In the Johnson Creek watershed in Portland, work is underway to prepare a 50-ft. buffer along 6.5 miles of Johnson and Kelly Creeks for planting with native trees shrubs and herbaceous plants. Revegetation should result in 50% canopy closure within 5 years. In Yamhill County, the SWCD is gearing up to establish permanent grass vegetation along 34 miles of Yamhill County roads to stabilize banks and limit soil erosion into roadside ditches.

A high level of interest exists for acquiring land and water interests to support watershed enhancement. In the current grant cycle, OWEB received seven proposals for acquisitions in this region. OWEB is near completion in the development of rules to govern acquisitions of land and water interests from willing sellers to benefit fish and watershed health.

Overall, this grant cycle shows a considerable increase in the number of watershed project proposals in the Willamette. While the need for technical assistance in project design and implementation continues, an increase in on-the-ground restoration projects can be interpreted as progress. Councils, districts and other groups in this region are maturing in their interest and ability to enhance watersheds. They are taking advantage of opportunities for restoration and designing quality projects.

B. Issues

The capacity of councils to function effectively as a cohesive, productive group continues to be an issue. Some councils are having difficulty understanding their role and making progress; understanding how to proceed from council formation, to problem and opportunity identification, to planning and implementation of watershed improvement.

In addition, the need for public awareness and outreach on the Oregon Plan and what it strives to achieve is an ongoing, fundamental issue.

V. Central Accomplishments and Issues

A. Accomplishments

In the Hood Basin, Farmers Irrigation District is designing innovative approaches to improve fish passage involving horizontal fish screens planned for use in streams with ESA-listed steelhead. Significant fish habitat enhancement work is also occurring in the Hood Basin, mostly through the placement of instream structures.

Deschutes Basin Land Trust and Oregon Water Trust were instrumental in the acquisition of instream water rights on Squaw Creek, which has been dewatered in recent years. Partners are working to increase instream flows in possible anticipation of reintroducing anadromous fish above the Pelton-Round Butte Dam, which is now being considered for relicensing by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Five fish passage barriers on the Crooked River basin, a subbasin of the Deschutes, were removed or are being removed by Ochoco Irrigation District. The barriers were created by District ditches that crossed streams. The District is using siphons and inverted weirs to separate irrigation canals from the McKay and Ochoco stream systems to restore fish passage.

In the Upper Deschutes Basin, a moratorium currently exists on the use of ground water beyond existing water rights. Industry, municipalities and other stakeholders concerned about future supplies are investigating the feasibility of acquiring new water through conservation. Conserved water would be used to create a water bank to enhance flows in the Middle Deschutes. If established, the bank would be the only one in the nation with the sole purpose of enhancing instream flows. OWEB is now reviewing a grant proposal for funds to help create the bank.

B. Issues

No issues to present the Oregon Plan Implementation Team at this time.

VI. Eastern Accomplishments and Issues

A. Accomplishments

Watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, landowners and agencies implemented many on-the-ground enhancement projects in Eastern Oregon this summer. Regionally, projects focused on rangeland management to improve water quality and watershed health, and conversion of traditional irrigation systems to more-efficient sprinklers to conserve water.

In Harney County, partners completed projects to remove juniper. In Grant County, push-up dams were replaced with fish-friendly alternatives and other irrigation diversions were modified to improve fish passage. Councils in Grant and Wallowa counties completed maintenance on water quantity gauging stations to provide more accurate information about flows.

There has been less emphasis on doing watershed assessments in Eastern Oregon in comparison to other regions of the state. Far more requests from this region come to OWEB for on-the-ground watershed improvement projects that address recognized problems or take advantage of restoration opportunities. However, Baker County recently finished an assessment of Pine Creek and is preparing to begin an assessment of North Powder. Also, assessments of Malheur and Grande Ronde Basins are nearly complete; these began before the availability of the Oregon Watershed Assessment Manual.

One thing to add might be the Owyhee Pipeline project. (Allison is in the know on this). The OCA came to OWEB in June to request emergency funding. Due to our funding cycle and rules, we couldn't go outside the grant cycle. However, with the aid of the Malheur Owyhee Watershed Council, OCA was able to enter an agreement and do a portion of this pipeline this winter (and will request the south half portion for partial OWEB funding next year). You may want to contact Kathy Pratt or Ron Jones at 541 889-2588 #5 (Malheur SWCD & WSC number)

to find out the details. The council put a lot of work into making this happen, especially Kathy Pratt and Jim Nakano, their Chair. It was to be presented to the judge last week or so.

Overall, a strong spirit of partnership between landowners, councils, SWCDs and agencies fosters willingness and progress in watershed improvement in this region.

B. Issues

Eastern Oregon presents a large, sparsely populated area for a relatively few council coordinators and technical experts to cover. Councils and SWCDs receive more requests from landowners for doing watershed improvement projects than they can develop. Increased coordination and technical assistance is needed to design and plan restoration work and to prepare applications for project funding. In Malheur County, for example, over twenty landowner requests for enhancement work lay dormant because councils and districts lack the staff to investigate, develop and implement projects.

VII. Other Agency Activities that Support the Oregon Plan

Strategic Agency Plan.

The Board is working actively to develop a strategic agency plan that includes a vision for watershed enhancement, states the outcomes that OWEB will be accountable for achieving, and describes pathways the agency will take to achieve outcomes. The strategic plan will be finalized in Winter 2000.