

Pacific Northwest Watershed Restoration Venture Partnership Concept Proposal for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Goals: Focus collaborative funding to accelerate completion of whole watershed restoration in priority basins and to recover key habitats for Pacific salmon and trout in Oregon and Washington.

Overview: Leverage OWEB funds (\$500,000 per year for 3 years) with Forest Service Venture Fund grant (approximately \$300,000 per year for three years) and funding from other partners and stakeholders to accelerate completion of highest priority work in focus watersheds (to be determined.). These “venture funds” would be leveraged with resources of other agencies and non-governmental organizations such as Ecotrust, Oregon Trout, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Grant funds would be awarded to and administered by Ecotrust, who would facilitate the process for selection of watersheds and projects by Venture Fund participants. Ecotrust would market the work of the partnership to recruit new members, and produce annual accomplishment reports.

Background: For the past two decades the US Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region (“the Region”), along with many partners, has implemented a large, comprehensive watershed restoration program to benefit aquatic resources, particularly Pacific salmon, native trout and water quality. After nearly ten years of implementation, the most efficient approach, resulting in the greatest resource benefits is to work collaboratively to focus and integrate treatments for priority watersheds. This work is done by cooperatively identifying focus watersheds and applying treatments that address core problems. This approach integrates landscape-scale and sets these watersheds on a trajectory for natural recovery of aquatic resources and watershed conditions. Over 20 examples of this “whole watershed restoration” have been completed to date in the Region. A recent publication “Ridge Top to Valley Bottom, Restoring Whole Watersheds.” summarizes these accomplishments.

The Region is committed to expand these accomplishments. This Venture fund is an exciting new partnership for collaborative action in priority basins. In FY 05, a pilot effort was initiated, with \$240,000 of Forest Service funding to be applied in the States of Oregon and Washington. In Oregon, \$150,000 of in-kind and matching FS funds were leveraged with \$224,000 from OWEB and OR Trout to complete high priority work in the Middle Fork John Day, North Fork Umpqua, Alsea and Sandy River sub-basins. Based on the initial success of this program, the Forest Service will expand its investment in FY 06 combining with partner resources to provide “venture capital” for investment in restoration of important watersheds. It appears to be an excellent time to continue and expand OWEB/FS cooperation in the program. This funding is seed money applied to high visibility projects, then locally leveraged to expand accomplishments and ownership. The specific objective is to accelerate the rate of completion of active restoration in priority watersheds, currently estimated at about 2 watersheds per year within the Region.

Methodology: Using a peer-reviewed priority setting process, the Region has initially identified priority basins for active restoration emphasis. In Oregon, these include the John Day, Lower Columbia, Rogue/Umpqua, and Mid and North Coast (process available on request.). Discussions indicate these priorities match well with those of others involved in Regional and state-wide restoration. Forest Service “basin stewards” are working with local partners, State and Federal agencies and Tribal governments to complete initial selection of priority watersheds for collaborative action by the fall of 2005. Each basin partner group will submit recommendation for focus watershed(s), and begin identification of a program of priority work (based on watershed analysis) designed to promote processes needed for watershed and aquatic riparian recovery. Basin partner groups will leverage any “Venture funds” received with local resources to accomplish the needed work.

The Region is well-suited to help facilitate this work, with a decade of experience in watershed analysis/diagnosis, restoration project design/implementation and monitoring. Forest Service staff have provided technical support for many of the watershed councils in OR/WA for years, and are an active part of the network of partners needed to efficiently complete prioritization and action planning for this effort. The Region has developed and interdisciplinary Design Assistance Team of highly-skilled Forest staff to aid in the development of watershed treatment strategies, and the design and implementation of a wide range of treatments. The result is a program of work that addresses core problems, not symptoms, and results in multiple resource benefits for stream and aquatic ecosystems. Treatments address the whole watershed and include activities including road improvements and/or decommissioning, riparian planting/thinning, fish passage improvements, and in-channel treatments.

Final Product: This approach will focus cooperative actions to recover watersheds/habitat supporting listed Pacific salmon and native trout. Collaborative decision-making on priority watersheds will enhance the treatment and completion of restoration on a subset of the highest-value salmonid streams in Oregon. Specific outputs of this program are dependent on the watersheds and action plans submitted by each of the basin groups (fall 2005.) Priority work in one or more focus watersheds should be completed during the grant period.

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