



Oregon

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Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Roger Wood, Special Projects

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item Q: Restoration Priorities
January 16-17, 2008 OWEB Board Meeting**

I. Introduction

This staff report asks the Board to adopt watershed restoration priorities for the basins along the middle to north Oregon coast. This set of priorities covers all the coastal watersheds from Saint Helens on the Columbia River down to the Coquille River.

II. Background

The Board has identified the development of funding priorities as a significant need for application review and evaluation in OWEB's grant program. The authorization and mandate for development of regional restoration priorities comes from statutory direction. ORS 541.371(c) states that OWEB: "*Shall establish statewide and regional goals and priorities that shall become the basis for funding decisions by the board. In adopting such goals and priorities, the board shall adopt priorities for grant funding based on the Oregon Plan and on measurable goals. In carrying out this function, the board shall consider local economic and social impacts among the criteria.*" OWEB has also identified adoption of these basin priorities as an agency performance measure.

The ultimate goal is to establish investment priorities for each of the 15 Oregon Plan reporting basins in the state using information from Columbia subbasin planning, species recovery planning by federal and state agencies, action plans developed by local stewardship groups, and prioritization principles developed for the Board. As discussed in previous meetings, these priorities will help focus the review of grant applications for restoration projects and assist in informing funding recommendations.

In September 2002, the Board authorized staff to contract for the facilitation of efforts to develop restoration priorities in two pilot basins, the Lower Columbia and the Hood-Fifteenmile basins. The Board then allocated funding in May 2004 to coordinate OWEB regional priorities with subbasin plans in the Columbia Basin and to complete regional priorities in the remainder of the state. Since that time, the Board has been presented with and has adopted restoration priorities in the Rogue, South Coast, Willamette, Hood-Fifteenmile, Deschutes, Malheur, John Day, Umatilla, Grande Ronde, Innaha, and Powder basins. Adoption of the present batch of middle to north Oregon coast basins addressed in this report will leave the Umpqua, Klamath, Lake,

Harney, Owyhee, and Walla Walla basins yet to do. Funding for these remaining basins was allocated by the Board in September 2007 and the prioritization will be carried out during 2008.

III. Process

The area covered by these restoration priorities includes 66 fifth-field hydrologic units that for simplicity are combined into 12 units named for the larger river(s) in the vicinity or by the local watershed council(s). They are:

1. Lower Columbia
2. North Coast
3. Nehalem-Necanicum
4. Tillamook Bay
5. Nestucca-Neskowin
6. Mid-Coast
7. Siuslaw
8. Smith River
9. Elk Creek
10. Tenmile Lakes
11. Coos
12. Coquille

These restoration priorities were contracted to the Watershed Professionals Network (WPN). For this set of basins, OWEB and WPN re-designed the prioritization process to incorporate heightened participation by watershed councils and other local partners in defining limiting factors, designing the database format, collating and interpreting raw data, inputting limiting factors ratings, and proofing results. Subcontracts were established with a local lead entity for each of the 12 areas listed above to ensure that the local efforts necessary to accomplish the project's objectives were compensated. Finally, a new user interface was created to ensure the easiest possible access to the completed database.

Once the database template was created it was posted on an interactive Web site where the local partners could add and review their data and limiting factors analyses. The majority of data were entered at the fifth-field HUC scale and all the final report detail is at this scale, which is consistent with the standard set for all other restoration priorities adopted by OWEB. However, a significant amount of data were entered for the smaller, sixth-field hydrologic units at the request of some local partners who will find the database more useful at that finer resolution.

The point is that for a drainage of any particular scale, fifth-field, sixth-field, larger, or smaller, the detailed information on limiting factors will vary from site to site and from reach to reach and must be aggregated and summarized for the whole drainage. The larger the scale of the drainage, the more site-specific detail will be lost in whatever is recorded in the database. This site-specific variability is important to understand and to take into consideration as criteria are developed for how the adopted restoration priorities will be used in OWEB's proposal review and grant award processes.

Many of the local partners who helped with this project expressed the desire that OWEB commit to maintaining the database over time. This would require periodic review and update of the contents to reflect the latest information about watershed conditions, causal factors, and limiting factors. Our partners assert that the database can be very useful to them only if it is frequently updated, every two years at the very longest and ideally on an ongoing basis as new information becomes available. Beyond the matter of local utility, it is clear that the restoration priorities are

most useful to OWEB to prioritize and direct OWEB funding, if they reflect current reality. The challenge is in balancing the relationships between update frequency, staffing, costs, how OWEB will adopt updated material, and how OWEB will use the database for reviewing and ranking proposals. OWEB staff will develop and bring to the Board recommendations on how to keep the database current and useful.

Staff would like to acknowledge the efficient and professional efforts of the local partners, without whose assistance this project would not have been possible.

IV. Recommendation

Staff request the Board approve the approach and content of the restoration priorities described in the final report titled “Summary of the Watershed Health Indicators for the Oregon Coast Coho ESU – 2007” and included here as Attachment A.

Attachment

- A. Summary of the Watershed Health Indicators for the Oregon Coast Coho ESU – 2007