

Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund Expenditure Recommendations

The Oregon Conservation & Recreation Advisory Committee met 8 times virtually between March and August 2020. All of these meetings have been virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The members of the Committee have developed operating procedures, an expenditure framework, and a short-term expenditure portfolio to make recommendations quickly that demonstrate their charge. These early projects seek to support future fundraising efforts by providing more clarity to donors on the intent of the Fund.

At the June 22 meeting of the Committee, a variety of potential project concepts were identified and discussed by the members. After that meeting, Committee members sought out organizations with existing or proposed projects that demonstrate those concepts and the Committee's Expenditure Framework and Program Priorities (Attachment 7) and encouraged them to submit proposals for projects less than \$10,000.

Proposals were requested by July 13 and the Committee planned to spend approximately \$60,000 of the resources already raised in the Conservation & Recreation Fund. A total of 18 projects, worth \$143,682 of requests were received by the time materials were sent to Committee members on July 15. Four additional projects were received between July 15 and the July 20th meeting. Those project proponents were notified that the Committee would not consider their proposals until the next round.

Committee members received a scorecard based on the criteria agreed to at the June 22 meeting. Prior to the July 20th meeting, scores were collated and the top 10 scoring projects were highlighted for discussion. The Committee agreed that the funding total for this round of recommendations should remain at \$60,000. In advance of the meeting, the Committee Chair and other Committee members had worked with project applicants to identify where reductions in requested funds could occur. These reductions allowed the Committee to propose funding for eight projects and the total for funding to remain \$60,456. Four of the projects are recommended at the level requested and four of the projects are recommended for funding at slightly reduced amounts.

Projects that were not selected were not ruled out for future rounds of available funding. The Department informed applicants that the Advisory Committee hold their materials and consider them when more funds become available.

The projects and funding levels recommended today are:

#1 – Succor Creek and Beaver (Friends of the Owyhee)	\$8,066
#3 – Link Creek (Trout Unlimited and Caldera)	\$7,800
#4 – Gilchrist Underpass Wildlife Directional Fencing (Oregon Hunters Association)	\$10,000
#5 – Monitoring Efforts for Rare Carnivores (Cascadia Wild)	\$7,000
#6 – Feasibility Study: Restoring Sea Otters to the Oregon Coast (Elakha Alliance)	\$10,000
#9 – Applegate Northwestern Pond Turtle Project (North Douglas Betterment)	\$4,090
#12 – Crooked River National Grasslands Sustainable Trails Project (Ochoco Trails)	\$7,500
#16 – Portland Audubon Backyard Bioblitz (Audubon Society of Portland)	\$6,000

#1 – Succor Creek and Beaver (Friends of the Owyhee)**\$8,066**

Requested funding: \$9,066
Total project cost: \$19,066
Applicant: Friends of the Owyhee
Partners: Oregon Natural Desert Association
Location: Malheur County

Funds are requested for supplies, printing, and consulting services for a short-term, detailed beaver survey along Succor Creek in the Owyhee sub-region of the Basin and Range Ecoregion. The end of the project will be marked by a significant data bank for decision making with a keystone educational public presentation, publication, and/or guided hike. In collaboration with Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Friends of the Owyhee is pursuing the creation of a hiking trail in Succor Creek State Natural Area that is surveyed to extend near some of the current beaver habitat. As a part of this project, Friends of the Owyhee will release a digital version of the trail. When the trail is completed, they would like to include an informational sign discussing beaver habitat in desert riparian areas, and design funding is requested here.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$8,066, with \$1,000 less than requested by removing the signage to be developed at end of the project.

#3 – Link Creek (Trout Unlimited and Caldera)**\$7,800**

Requested funding: \$8,800
Total project cost: \$27,800
Applicant: Trout Unlimited
Partners: Caldera and Deschutes National Forest
Location: East Cascades
Elements of project supported: educator salaries, Caldera staff, travel, indirect costs for TU

Funds are requested for educator salaries, Caldera's coordination, travel, and indirect costs for a project through which Trout Unlimited and Caldera will engage public school students from Central Oregon and urban youth from Portland, with the strong technical expertise for implementation of the restoration work conducted by US Forest Service. Each student will have two field experiences available to study Link Creek and the Metolius River and support a project to improve habitat for Sockeye and spring Chinook salmon (seasonal field trips during fall, summer and spring provided). In the event a virtual learning option is required due to continued school closures, project proponents are committed to creating 3 seasonal virtual field experiences. If conditions allow, students will be able to plant native, plant species along Link Creek after the wood placement is completed, and track how the habitat improves and is used by multiple species of wildlife, including salmon and trout.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$7,800, with \$1,000 less than requested by reducing the amount paid to Caldera for staff support.

**#4 – Gilchrist Underpass Wildlife Directional Fencing (Oregon Hunters Association)
\$10,000**

Requested funding: \$10,000
Total project cost: \$1,000,000
Applicant: Oregon Hunters Association
Partners: Oregon Department of Transportation
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Mule Deer Foundation
Oregon Wildlife Foundation
US Forest Service - Deschutes NF
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Protect Animal Migration
Oregon Department of Forestry
Coastal Farm and Ranch
Location: East Cascades

Funds are requested for fencing supplies and installation for directional, wildlife fencing needed to guide animals to the newly constructed Gilchrist under pass on Highway 97. The Oregon Department of Transportation chose to construct the underpass as an opportunity to replicate the wildlife passage success of the Lava Butte underpass completed in 2012. ODOT was not able to fund the necessary directional fencing to make the underpass an effective migratory barrier solution. Data provided by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in a seven-year mule deer collaring study identified the Gilchrist location as a key migratory crossing site. ODOT data collected at Lava Butte underpass showed an 87 percent decrease in wildlife/vehicle collisions. Since ODOT was unable to identify a fund source, a coalition of wildlife advocacy and hunter-conservationists organizations joined with state and federal agencies to raise the funds for fence construction. Funds raised since early 2018 total 70% of the estimated \$1,000,000 project cost estimate. The effort overall has been rewarding, though a fund gap of \$300,000 remains. The benefits of barrier-free, animal passage include reducing wildlife loss, economic loss from animal/vehicle collisions and less human injury or death. In addition to large ungulates, Lava Butte videos have documented a suite of over forty wildlife species using that crossing.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$10,000.

#5 – Monitoring Efforts for Rare Carnivores (Cascadia Wild)**\$7,000**

Requested funding:	\$9,000
Total project cost:	\$40,000
Applicant:	Cascadia Wild
Partners:	Defenders of Wildlife Mt. Hood National Forest Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cascades Carnivore Project
Location:	East and West Cascades

Funds are requested for coordination, supplies, sample processing, and equipment for the existing monitoring effort for rare carnivores. The Wolverine Tracking Project was launched in 2000 by Cascadia Wild and in 2003 the project entered a formal partnership with the Mt. Hood National Forest to take over their volunteer monitoring efforts for rare carnivores. Defenders of Wildlife became a financial and outreach partner since 2016. As a community science initiative, the project is designed to address two critical needs

- a. conduct long-term monitoring of rare carnivores that supports and informs better wildlife conservation and management practices, and
- b. connect Oregonians to the wildlife and wild places that make Oregon such a special place to live.

Over the years, the project's success has been significant. The project proponents have started new working relationships with two organizations that help disadvantaged youth develop job skills and collaborate with RISE (Refugee and Immigrant Student Empowerment) program to connect high school students with wilderness areas – for most of them, it is their first experience spending time in nature.

This project provides critical information about habitat use and biological information of the target species to wildlife decision makers.

The project would hire a part-time, outreach coordinator who will help with volunteer recruitment, monitoring and management. Special focus will be to spread the word among underserved communities that have lacked the opportunity to interact and engage with wilderness and wildlife. Funds will also be used to purchase additional gear that will help expand the land area monitored by trail cameras. Additionally, some funds will be directed toward conducting research on gathered biological materials such as hair and scat to make species/sub-species assessments of target species (particularly Sierra Nevada red fox).

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$7,000, with \$2,000 less than requested for coordinated staff time.

**#6 – Feasibility Study: Restoring Sea Otters to the Oregon Coast (Elakha Alliance)
\$10,000**

Requested funding: \$10,000
Total project cost: \$168,000
Applicant: The Elakha Alliance
Partners: Coquille Indian Tribe
Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians
Oregon Community Foundation
Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Oregon State University, Department of Fisheries & Wildlife
OSU Port Orford Field Station
Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition
Oregon Wildlife Foundation
Oregon Zoo Foundation
Seattle Aquarium
UC Santa Cruz / USGS Cooperative Research Station
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Location: Nearshore marine

Funds are requested for a portion of an economic impact assessment and the outreach and public engagement strategy for a review of the feasibility of sea otter reintroduction to Oregon. The Elakha Alliance is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to investigating, planning, and implementing the translocation of sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) to the Oregon Coast.

Around the globe and in Oregon, a growing body of evidence suggests climate change and its ecological consequences are threatening the persistence of kelp. While the long-term declines in kelp followed the historical loss of sea otters, the recent collapse of the urchin predator, the sunflower sea star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*), has resulted in an accelerated loss of kelp, and an expansion of “urchin barrens” in Oregon. Since time immemorial, sea otters were a key cultural, and material resource for the indigenous tribes of Oregon’s coastal region. Furthermore, decades of research demonstrate conclusively that sea otters maintain and increase kelp habitat, due to their persistent predation of kelp herbivores such as sea urchins.

However, some key stakeholders have expressed concerns about the local effects of sea otter restoration on shellfish harvest. Rigorously evaluating and thoughtfully addressing these concerns is a critical step in advancing sea otter and kelp restoration in Oregon. 75% of the OCRF funds will be spent on the Economic Impact Assessment to bolster our Feasibility Study. 25% of the OCRF funds will be spent on our outreach and public engagement strategy focused on coastal tribal communities and fisheries stakeholders.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$10,000.

#9 – Applegate Northwestern Pond Turtle Project (North Douglas Betterment)
\$4,090

Requested funding: \$4,090
Total project cost: \$36,744
Applicant: North Douglas Betterment
Partners: Susan Applegate, owner of Applegate Pond
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Umpqua Community College
Location: Klamath Mountains

Funding is requested for contracted services and supplies for invasive species removal and nesting habitat improvement on Applegate Pond. Over the course of three years, this project aims to improve habitat for Northwestern pond turtles and other native wildlife by eliminating large-mouth bass and nutria, and controlling bullfrogs and bryozoans. Habitat enhancement projects will increase the suitability of the Applegate Wildlife Pond for native turtles through improvements to nesting, foraging, and basking habitat. All habitat improvements will follow standard protocols established in ODFW’s Best Management Practices for native turtles. Expected outcomes include increased use of pond features by native turtles and other wildlife (beavers, birds, amphibians, etc.). By involving local community organizations and students in implementation, this project will also enhance awareness of natural resource values.

OCRF funds will be used to meet nesting habitat improvement objectives for the Applegate Project. This includes excavating and constructing 10 to 12 improved micro-nesting sites, placement of four log basking structures, and foraging and upland plantings for turtles and other native wildlife.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$4,090.

#12 – Crooked River National Grasslands Sustainable Trails Project (Ochoco Trails)
\$7,500

Requested funding: \$9,500
Total project cost: unknown
Applicant: Ochoco Trails
Partners: Discover Your Forest
Oregon Hunters Association
Central Oregon Trails Alliance
Back Country Horsemanship of Oregon
Oregon Equestrian Trails
Oregon Wild
Location: Blue Mountains

Funding is requested for facilitator time, hiring a biological contractor, and logistical support for members and partners of Ochoco Trails. Ochoco Trails seeks to create sustainable trail networks in the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland that make the nearby small towns more attractive places to live and work, allow local residents to reap the health benefits of outdoor recreation, encourage visitors to come to enjoy our beautiful area, connect locals and visitors to public lands and reduce trail conflicts while protecting wildlife habitat and our natural resources for generations to come.

The Crooked River National Grassland Sustainable Trails Project is seeking funding for Phase 1 of a three phase project aimed at protecting the wildlife habitat provided by the Grassland while creating healthy recreational opportunities for residents of and visitors to the rural communities nearby.

The Ochoco Trails community group is working on developing a sustainable trails system for the Crooked River National Grassland. This will be a three phase project. The project proponents are currently seeking funding to assist in accomplishing Phase 1 of this project. Ochoco Trails has a successful track record in planning and developing sustainable trail systems for the Ochoco National Forest and seeks to replicate this success for the Crooked River Grassland, leading to a sustainable and broadly supported trails proposal that avoids impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat, minimizes user conflict, supports the local economy and communities, and provides educational and recreational opportunities in this unique Oregon landscape.

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$7,500, with \$2,000 less than requested by reducing the amount for facilitation/coordination.

#16 – Portland Audubon Backyard Bioblitz (Audubon Society of Portland)**\$6,000**

Requested funding:	\$6,000
Total project cost:	\$10,000
Applicant:	Audubon Society of Portland
Partners:	Urban Greenspaces Institute
Location:	Willamette Valley

Funds are requested for program support, photography, and improving the online platform’s research and engagement functions of the Backyard BioBlitz. The Portland Audubon Backyard BioBlitz is a fun interactive project that engages urban residents in collecting wildlife data in their own yards and neighborhoods and which provides participants with weekly reports and information about local natural history, wildlife stewardship, reducing wildlife hazards and avoiding human-wildlife conflicts. While it is appropriate for all skill levels, it is specifically designed to engage people who are at entry level and just beginning to appreciate the wildlife that surrounds them. It follows Audubon’s theory of change which seeks to move people along a continuum; from appreciation to understanding to action. Participants are asked to report each Tuesday on the wildlife that they observe that day within a one, block radius of their home. Participation can be ongoing or intermittent. Participants also have access to a Facebook Groups page managed by Portland Audubon on which they can post pictures, comments and questions about what they have seen.

Participants receive a weekly report on what was observed by participants the prior week as well as information to learn more about local wildlife, wildlife tips of the week, and opportunities to engage in local conservation efforts. This project was originally conceived and executed as a short-term response to a steep increase in wildlife inquiries and observations. Over the first ten weeks of this project, it was discovered that this forum is a powerful, interactive tool for engaging the community in wildlife watching and monitoring, and for getting information back out to the community about natural history, wildlife stewardship, wildlife hazards and reducing human-wildlife hazards. People engaging with the program include individuals ranging from experts to novices, families, school groups, media, wildlife professionals and elected politicians.

Portland Audubon has decided to convert this program from a short-term, Covid-19-related necessity to a long-term project and are seeking funding to create more robust scientific, education and outreach platforms suitable for a long-term project. The proponents would like to have this project upgraded by the late summer/ early fall when school begins in the fall for families, school groups, etc. to integrate this program into their post-Covid weekly structure. This program integrates and compliments several other Audubon urban wildlife programs including the Audubon Columbia Land Trust Backyard Habitat Certification Program (6,000+ yards enrolled in the Portland Metro Area), the Audubon Living with Wildlife Program (responding to 10,000-15,000 wildlife calls/year), as well as other new Audubon digital programming such as “Ask a Birder” and “What’s Happening this Week (in Bird Migration).”

The Committee recommends funding this project for \$6,000.