



Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund 2023-2024 Legislative Biennial Report



The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF), created in 2019 by House Bill 2829, helps fund projects that serve to protect, maintain, or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon and that support nature-based recreation consistent with the [Oregon Conservation Strategy](#).

The OCRF has flourished within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and in response to growing State needs, the Funds sunset was removed in 2021 by House Bill 2171. Due to the diverse nature of its mandate, the OCRF is well-positioned to serve a statewide need to grant funding timely, effectively, and equitably toward resiliency of our fish and wildlife species and their habitats, and helping connect our communities to the outdoors. Throughout 2023-2024, the Fund invested in projects that:



- Connect youth, families, diverse and underserved communities to the outdoors
- Engage Oregonians in the science and research needed to improve our understanding of Oregon’s diverse species
- Restore healthy ecosystems to benefit Oregon’s fish and wildlife and improve the resiliency of our environment for future generations
- Address the impacts of drought on all Oregon communities – humans, plants, and animals.

The OCRF program consisted of three primary workflows in the 2023-2024 biennium that are each addressed in the following pages:

1. Making expenditures to implement the purpose of the fund and the intended use of the Drought Package Allocations from the State Legislature.
2. Building capacity within the Committee and the Department for implementing the Fund by developing a Strategic Plan for 2024 - 2028.
3. Continuing to diversify funding and support for the missions of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund through the development of a Communications Plan.

Since the conception of the OCRF, the Fund has supported 167 projects across Oregon’s 8 ecoregions. A total of \$7.6 million has been awarded statewide towards conservation and outdoor recreation.

Since OCRF’s establishment 4 years ago, the Advisory Committee has awarded \$7.6 million for 167 projects around the state, with an average of \$45,000 per project. These projects range from examining the feasibility of restoring beavers to the Upper Crooked River Watershed to searching for elusive, rare carnivores in Mt Hood National Forest, to engaging Latinx families on their first camping trip. Funds deposited into the OCRF have primarily been legislatively-appropriated General Funds, but have also included \$1 million Federal American Rescue Protection Act funds as well as corporate /private donations (> \$1.3 million). Donations to the Fund also come from hunters / anglers as they purchase licenses from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, they have the option to contribute to the OCRF (> \$580,000 donated). The Fund also receives public donations (> \$75,000 received) which are managed in partnership with the Oregon Wildlife Foundation at OregonIsAlive.org.

Oregon is facing unprecedented drought conditions. Extreme drought conditions have already had significant economic impact on recreation and natural resource sectors, as well as on drinking water, fish and wildlife, aquatic

habitats, and other natural resources. The OCRF received \$5 million from the Oregon Legislature as part of a drought resilience package (HB 5202, 2022). In 2023 the OCRF received an additional \$1 million for projects that increase drought resilience of natural systems (SB 5509, 2023). The OCRF recognized the urgency to address drought impacts and has awarded the majority (\$4.4 million) of these much-needed funds to conservation partners for projects throughout the state.

The significant impact of drought on wildlife was recognized by the Oregon Legislature, with the dedication of \$5 million in proceeds from a 2025 lottery bonds sale, to be deposited into the Fund. These funds will improve wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity projects in priority connectivity areas (HB 5030 § 2; SB 5506 § 184, 2023), and are scheduled to be released in Spring 2025.

Funded Projects

Over the course of 2023 and 2024, the Committee offered three rounds of competitive funding opportunities and awarded 51 grants to organizations and agencies that can undertake projects that meet the intent of the Fund, some of which are highlighted below. More details on these projects and all 167 projects funded to date are described online: <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/OCRF/projects.html> .



Wolverine Tracking Project

Cascadia Wild runs the Wolverine Tracking Project, a community science project that conducts long-term monitoring of rare carnivores and connects Oregonians to wildlife and wild places. This project uses volunteers to collect data on Sierra Nevada red fox, wolves, wolverine, and fisher, in the Mt Hood National Forest.



Beaver Recovery Program for Upper Crooked River Watershed - Phase I

The Upper Crooked River watershed is a place where beavers historically occupied in high numbers. This project seeks to build a foundation of beaver support from private landowners and expand beaver managed floodplains in the watershed. The project will pave the way for more beaver projects implemented on private lands in the target geography.



People of Color Outdoors Guardians

People of Color Outdoors is a nature education program for children and families. The goal is to teach BIPOC children and families about native turtles, invasive species, climate change, and ways that individuals can help to support the environment. Each student will have field experiences available to study Smith & Bybee Wetlands and Whitaker Ponds.



Mapping Drought-Resilient Habitat for Fish and Wildlife

Springs are drought-resilient aquatic habitat and often form the headwaters of Oregon's most ecologically-important streams. This project from The Nature Conservancy in Oregon seeks to survey 60 springs across Oregon that are important for Oregon Conservation Strategy Species and representative of ecoregions and geology types.



A Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) for Evaluating Change and Resilience in Nearshore Marine Communities

The Oregon Dept of Fish & Wildlife Marine Program will purchase a new ROV to conduct video surveys of seafloor habitats, fish, and invertebrate communities to inform management and conservation.



Palensky-Hwy 30 Wildlife Underpass

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce and partners constructed an underpass to allow for amphibians and other wildlife to travel safely under Highway 30 to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.



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[The Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee](#)

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee was created to evaluate projects and advise the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on expenditures from the Fund. The Advisory Committee provides valuable oversight and expertise related to Oregon’s ecoregions. In four years, the Committee has completed seven rounds of expenditures.

The Commission adopted regulations to create the Advisory Committee in October 2019 (OAR 635-098-0030, 635-098-0040, 635-098-0050, 635-098-0060) and the Governor appointed the original members in January 2020. Committee members serve 4-year terms on a rotational basis. The Committee meets monthly and most meetings in 2023 and 2024 were virtual. The vacant Office of Outdoor Recreation (ex-officio) seat was filled by Jenna Marmon in September 2023, and the vacant Northern Basin and Range seat was filled by Jim Hammett in January 2024. All seats on the Committee are currently full.

During Fall 2023, the Committee revised the OCRF Oregon Administrative Rules for the Conservation and Recreation Fund, and the Commission adopted the [amended rules](#) in December 2023. The rules were revised to increase public transparency of OCRF process and to include an Urgent Grant option that developed a pathway outside of the normal grant solicitation window for time-sensitive, critical need projects. The Committee approved an urgent grant in April 2024, the Palensky-Hwy 30 Wildlife Underpass project for \$495,000. This project constructed Oregon’s first amphibian crossing.

In 2023 the Committee dedicated a significant amount of time to developing a strategic plan for the OCRF. The Committee worked closely with a strategic planning consultant, Cheralynn Abbott, Pivotal Resources, to develop the top priorities and goals of the OCRF over the next two biennia. The [OCRF Strategic Plan](#) for 2024 – 2028 was adopted in May 2024.

A high priority goal emerged from the strategic planning process and that is a focus on strategic communications and storytelling for the OCRF. As a result, the Committee is currently dedicated to developing a Communications Plan with the professional assistance of Quinn Thomas. The primary goals of this strategic communications plan will be to tell the story of OCRF’s conservation accomplishments, broaden and diversify participation in the grant program, and sustain support for this important conservation program.

Meet the Committee

Dr. Karl Wenner, Chair - Klamath Mountains Ecoregion

Mauricio Valadrian, Vice Chair - At-Large

Jane Hartline - Willamette Valley Ecoregion

Maret Pajutee - East and West Cascades Ecoregions

Jim Hammett - Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion

Sristi Kamal - At-Large

Mark Stern - At-Large

Kelly Timchak - Nearshore and Coast Range Ecoregion

Liza Jane McAlister - Columbia Plateau and Blue Mountains Ecoregions

Commissioner Mark Labhart, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (ex-officio)

Jenna Marmon – Planning and Design Lead, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (ex-officio)

The Committee's Spring 2024 Request for Proposals received a record-breaking 84 project proposals, and \$4.7 million in total requested funds. While the Committee was able to award \$1.2 million for twenty-four of those projects, this also demonstrates the demand for OCRF grants in conservation and recreation communities.

Outdoor Equity

Embedded within the mandate for the OCRF is a commitment to reach out and engage underserved Oregonians and communities who have not participated in conservation or outdoor recreation in the past. The Committee dedicated a portion of Conservation and Recreation Fund revenue to projects and organizations that are explicitly seeking to close these gaps in outdoor equity.

Looking Forward

In the coming biennium, the OCRF will continue to play a pivotal role in advancing ODFW's strategic conservation and recreation initiatives. The OCRF is a program built on partnerships, and in service of all Oregonians as well as our fish and wildlife resources. ODFW and the Advisory Committee will be doubling down on OCRF's efforts to build stronger relationships with diverse applicants, conservation partners, and philanthropic foundations. In the 2025-27 biennium and beyond, OCRF will continue to be a leader in conservation and community-based recreation in Oregon. OCRF will continue its routine grant solicitation schedule and call for diverse and high priority projects. The priority focus for projects in the coming biennium will be ones that advance species resilience and habitat connectivity in a changing climate, prioritize drought resilience on natural and working lands, and promote inclusion and belonging in the outdoors. OCRF does not operate on a permanent appropriation, and we know from the history of this program that demand for conservation actions and community engagement in outdoor recreation continues to outpace available funding. We also know from OCRF's history and experience that state dollars motivate private dollars in the conservation and recreation space, and OCRF will continue its work to leverage funding partnerships in the coming years. As long as the support for the OCRF program continues, the OCRF Advisory Committee and ODFW will strive to meet the demand and work with partners toward the best possible outcomes for fish, wildlife, and communities.