

January 19-20, 2011 OWEB Board Meeting Executive Director Update #C-7: 2010 Coastal Wetlands Grants

Background

This report provides an update on the status of the federal 2010 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Wetlands Grant Awards projects. The Coastal Wetlands Grants offer a significant partnership investment opportunity to restore and protect coastal wetland and estuary ecological values, promote strong partnerships, and provide a significant match to OWEB funds.

2010 Coastal Wetland Grants

In June of 2010, OWEB submitted three applications on behalf of coastal partners for project funding under the Coastal Wetlands Grant Program, after having received permission from the Emergency Board to apply for the federal grants in May of 2010. On December 22, 2010, the Secretary of the Interior announced the awards that included all three applications submitted by OWEB. Combined, the three federal grants total approximately \$2.4 million and require a total state match of just over \$1.5 million. The three projects are summarized below.

Coquille Valley Wetland Conservation and Restoration – The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board was awarded \$1 million to help acquire and restore approximately 622 acres of coastal wetlands in the Coquille Valley on the southern Oregon coast for permanent conservation, protection, and restoration by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). This project is the first phase of a larger initiative by ODFW to conserve and restore approximately 3,000 acres in the lowlands along the lower Coquille River encompassing some of the most productive wetland habitats on the Oregon Coast. The total cost of the first phase is \$2,506,000. Protection and restoration of freshwater wetlands would complement downstream estuarine restoration efforts on Bandon National Wildlife Refuge. This project would protect nesting, feeding, and nursery areas for a diversity of at-risk fish and wildlife species, including Oregon Coast Coho salmon, Coastal cutthroat trout, Bald eagle, Purple martin, Willow flycatcher, Western meadowlark, and Townsend's big-eared bat. The Nature Conservancy is providing technical and financial support for this effort through the Northwest Wildlife Conservation Initiative.

Miami Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Project – The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board was awarded \$317,700 to help acquire and restore approximately 76.2 acres in the Miami River Basin in Tillamook Bay, on the northern coast of Oregon, including 56.7 acres of nationally declining wetlands. This proposal is the second phase of a two-phase project to improve aquatic habitat by enhancing the increasing tidal channel connection, restoring the historic character of the site vegetation by reducing invasive species, and planting native vegetation, enhancing riparian corridors to reduce the water temperature, and permanently protecting the project area. The total cost of the second phase is \$567,700. The Miami River watershed is one of five watersheds that drain into Tillamook Bay on the north coast of Oregon. The Miami River watershed has lost much of its original estuarine, emergent, scrub-shrub, and forested wetland areas to diking, draining, and the conversion of land to agriculture. The Miami River wetlands support a wide variety of plants and wildlife, including all five species of Tillamook Bay salmonids: Coho (federally threatened), Chinook, Chum, Steelhead, and Cutthroat trout. The OWEB Board toured this site during its September 2010 meeting.

Tillamook Bay Wetlands Acquisition and Restoration – The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board was awarded \$1 million to help acquire four parcels totaling 100 acres of declining wetlands in Tillamook Bay on the northern Oregon Coast. This project also includes the restoration of 484 acres of intertidal marsh that includes 377 acres of land acquired through a 1999 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant. The total project cost is \$3,350,000. Numerous studies have identified the Tillamook Bay Estuary as a high priority for wetland conservation and restoration. This project is the largest wetland restoration effort proposed to date in Oregon. This project will provide nesting, feeding, and nursery areas for a diverse array of at-risk fish and wildlife species such as the northern red-legged frog, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Pacific lamprey, Chinook and chum salmon, and federally threatened Coho salmon. Tillamook Bay represents the southernmost boundary and the largest remaining population of chum salmon. Restoration of these tidal habitats is crucial to protecting this population.

OWEB has received state grant applications for the match for all three of the projects. Two of the projects are currently being reviewed by the Regional Review Teams; the third was reviewed last summer.

The next step for these projects is for OWEB to complete the review of pending applications and consider the award of state funding. These applications add to the list of acquisition projects that are backlogged for evaluation by staff. This is a concern because of the complex nature of the three projects; each involves multiple properties and both easement and fee title acquisition. Staff are considering options to effectively manage these projects and will report at a future meeting on progress made to address this issue.

Staff Contact

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