



May 28, 2020

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

Representative Helm, Chair
House Committee on Water

Representative Power
House Committee on Water

Dear Representative Helm and Representative Power,

I am providing this information in response to your letter of May 8th, 2020, regarding programs that could receive additional stimulus funding from federal or other sources to support critical conservation and water infrastructure related work in Oregon. Staff have identified the following programs with a nexus to these two areas of investment, as well as a set of recommendations for how these programs could be operated to help expedite funding to Oregon projects.

Investing in natural resources will create jobs in rural Oregon communities where they are most needed. Every \$1 million spent on watershed and forest restoration results in 15-24 new or sustained jobs. Furthermore, investments in restoration stimulates rural economies; 90 percent of project investment funds stay in local communities.

In addition to the near-term jobs benefit, a healthy outdoors is foundational to strong tourism and natural resource economies. These two sectors combined generate more than \$20 billion annually in economic activity, support more than 220,000 jobs, and are a critical piece of Oregon's identity that has been particularly hard hit by Covid-19.

Federal dollars can be maximized in several ways, one which is strategically investing in funding sources that can be utilized for a multitude of projects. Several federal funding programs listed below have been identified as potential sources that could be used to implement natural resource projects in multiple state agencies, as identified by the agency list in parenthesis at the end of each item.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) –

- Increased funding for this program
- Does not pass through state agencies
- Critical funding source for landowners

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility. (OWEB, ODF, OWRD)

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (PL-566) –

- Increase funding for program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will not be funneled through state agencies, but is critical for irrigation infrastructure funding

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program helps units of federal, state, local and tribal government (project sponsors) protect and restore watersheds up to 250,000 acres. This program provides for cooperation between the Federal government and the states and their political subdivisions to work together to prevent erosion; floodwater and sediment damage; to further the conservation development, use and disposal of water; and to further the conservation and proper use of land in authorized watersheds. (OWEB, OWRD)

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) –

- Increase funding for program
- Will not be funneled through state agencies, but is a critical funding source for landowners

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address. (OWEB, OWRD)

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (National Marine Fisheries Service)

Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) –

- Increase funding for the program
- Will pass through state agencies

The PCSRF supports conservation efforts of Pacific salmon and steelhead populations in the Pacific Northwest, California, and Alaska. Stream restoration projects implemented by local watershed groups, conservation agencies, land trusts, tribes, and other entities to manage restoration projects and work to expand habitat and improve land and water quality for salmon and steelhead. (OWEB, ODFW)

Coastal and Marine Habitat Collaborative Restoration Fund –

- Increase funding for the program
- Can pass through state agencies, and is also available to local communities, non-profits, and higher education institutions

This fund supports restoration projects that use a habitat-based approach to rebuild productive and sustainable fisheries, contribute to the recovery and conservation of protected resources, promote healthy ecosystems, and yield community and economic benefits. (ODFW)

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will pass through state agencies

The program provides grants to states and territories to participate in a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for candidate, proposed, and listed species. The program provides funding to states and territories for species and habitat conservation actions on non-federal lands. (ODFW)

Bonneville Power Administration (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation)

Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate match requirements
- Will not pass through state agencies

CBWTP works through locally based entities to acquire water rights voluntarily from willing landowners. Using temporary and permanent water rights acquisitions and other incentive-based approaches, the CBWTP supports grantees to assist landowners who wish to voluntarily restore flows to key fish habitat. Voluntary, market-based water transactions provide an effective and fair way to balance out-of-stream water uses with the need to maintain stream flow for imperiled fish. (OWRD)

US Department of Agriculture - Rural Development

Water Environmental Programs Direct Loans and Grants–

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate match requirements
- Will not pass through state agencies

WEP provides funding for the construction of water and waste facilities in rural communities and exclusively focuses on rural water and waste infrastructure needs of rural communities with populations of 10,000 or less. WEP also provides funding to organizations that provide technical assistance and training to rural communities in relation to their water and waste activities. (OWRD)

US Forest Service

Cooperative Forestry Assistance (CFDA 10.664) –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will pass through state agencies

The Cooperative Forestry Assistance fund provides financial and technical assistance to states and private land owners on variety of forestry issues, including forest management and stewardship, fire protection, insect and disease control, reforestation and stand improvement, and urban forestry. (ODF)

State and Private Forest Cooperative Fire Assistance (CFDA 10.698) –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will pass through state agencies

The Cooperative Fire Assistance provides funds to assist with rural fire management on non-federal forest lands. Funds can be used for prevention, control, suppression, and prescribed burns. By utilizing shared federal and state resources and capacity, rural communities can be better prepared for wildfires. (ODF)

Good Neighbor Authority (CFDA 10.691) –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will pass through state agencies

The Good Neighbor Authority allows the Forest Service to enter into agreements with state forestry agencies to do critical management work to keep forest systems healthy and productive. This partnership allows Oregon to manage our forests that keep our drinking water clean, protect rural communities from wildfires, and provide critical jobs in the natural resources and outdoor recreation sectors. (ODF, ODFW)

Federal Emergency Management Administration

Fire Management Assistance Grant (CFDA 97.046) –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements

States apply for funds after fire suppression costs have exceeded a fire cost threshold. This assistance is available for states, local, and tribal governments for mitigation, management, and control of fires on publicly or privately owner forests or grasslands. Eligible costs include expenses for field camps, equipment use, repair, and replacement, tools, materials, and supplies, and mobilization and demobilization activities. This fund allows state, local, and tribal governments to ability to weather the sustained costs of fighting wildfire. (ODF)

High Hazard Dam Rehabilitation Grant –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will be funneled through state agencies

This program provides technical, planning, design, and construction assistance in the form of grants for rehabilitation of eligible high hazard potential dams. High Hazard Potential is a classification standard for any dam whose failure or mis-operation will cause loss of human life and significant property destruction. (OWRD)

US Bureau of Reclamation

WaterSMART Basin Studies –

- Increase funding for the program
- Eliminate state match requirements
- Will pass through state agencies

Basin Studies are collaborative studies, cost-shared with non-Federal partners, to evaluate water supply and demand and help ensure reliable water supplies by identifying strategies to address imbalances in water supply and demand. Each study includes four key elements: (1) State-of-the-art projections of future supply and demand by river basin; (2) An analysis of how the basin's existing water and power operations and infrastructure will perform in the face of changing water realities; (3) Development of strategies to meet

current and future water demands; and (4) A trade-off analysis of strategies identified.

The WaterSMART program also has a variety of other grant programs, including but not limited to Cooperative Management grants, Reclamation and Reuse grants, and Drought Response grants, that agencies and their partners heavily utilize. (OWRD)

We also suggest the following be considered to maximize and streamline investments:

1. Ensure requirements for state (or all) match funding are eliminated. Many states currently lack those resources.
2. Ensure that broad restrictions are not placed on technical assistance, design, and permitting associated with completing on the ground projects. These are vital components often overlooked in stimulus packages.
3. Keep in mind that state agencies will need federal funds for staff to implement the grant programs, especially if states are in a place of reducing staff.
4. Reduce paperwork and reporting requirements, as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was very paperwork intensive.

We strongly support long-term economic development and job creation tied to our natural resources economy. As mentioned above, watershed health and forest restoration work stimulates local economies and provides much needed jobs to rural communities. Programs like the New Deal era Civilian Conservation Corps proved that investments made on public lands have immense and lasting public benefits.

These investments not only protect communities from hazards such as flooding or wildfires, they also safeguard public resources like clean air and water while providing jobs. Providing workforce opportunities in natural resources will be a necessary solution moving forward in a COVID-19-adapted future.

On behalf of the natural resources agencies, I thank you for your service in this time of crisis. We are all grateful for your consideration of our suggestions to help stimulate and sustain Oregon's natural resources economy.

Sincerely,



Jason Miner

Natural Resources Policy Director

Office of Governor Kate Brown