



April 20, 2019

Dear Members of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board:

We write to you today as the four statewide service centers in the Oregon Conservation Partnership. Our mission is to support voluntary conservation in Oregon through the work of watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts and land trusts. Our members include over 160 organizations that work across Oregon's diverse geographies to implement OWEB's mission to protect and restore native fish and wildlife for all Oregonians.

While we'd rather be providing this update in person, we are grateful to have the opportunity to share our thoughts in a brief letter. The impacts from COVID 19 are severe and are being felt by Oregon's conservation sector. Starting in mid-March, our members shifted to remote working and prioritized the health and safety of each other and the communities they serve. Our members started using web platforms like zoom, and discovered new ways to do their work. **While we are all 'hunkering down', we are not stepping away.** We have seen extraordinary collaboration and conservation continue despite these difficult times. Land trusts are visiting conservation properties in their cars and taking cell-phone tours with land owners, watershed councils are remote monitoring and district staff are working in the field with social distancing as well through remote meetings, VPN access, along with NRCS staff.

As statewide service centers, we are stepping up to support our members in new ways:

- We are **organizing a series of webinars** to respond to the economic uncertainty brought on by COVID 19.
- We are **building on-line cohorts** among staff with similar roles to share ideas and models for working remotely.
- We are **sifting through the federal stimulus packages** to learn about the loan programs that benefit land trusts, councils and districts and support their operations.
- We are **hosting board meetings** via zoom.
- We are **migrating content** that was planned for the CONNECT conference to on-line education opportunities.
- We are **contacting our Federal Delegation** to tell them about the conservation needs on the ground and sharing shovel-ready projects that also provide jobs.
- We continue to **coordinate with Agency staff** to develop a Q and A's to address COVID-related grant questions.

- We are working with other associations on **legislative drafts for 2021** and in providing feedback on budgets and POPs.
- We are providing **tools and training** for our members to work effectively remotely.

We were saddened to learn that OWEB is pushing “pause” on all of April’s open solicitation grants. For the districts, for example, time significant sage grouse monitoring will have to stop without the share of OWEB funding that would have been approved this month. Complex land acquisition projects will be delayed, which could impact other sources of funding. In the end, however, we understand and support your pro-active decision given the likelihood of decreased lottery revenue.

During this national crisis, we recognize there are many unknowns about the future of our work. Going forward success will require even more collaboration, creativity and the sharing of resources. We are here to support that shift for the community of professionals that protect and restore Oregon’s healthy watersheds and natural habitats.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

Sincerely,



Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts



Jan Lee, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts



Jeremy Baker, President, Oregon Conservation Education & Assistance Network

Vanessa Green, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils