

**For Immediate Release**

**October 25, 2017**

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## **State agency approves over \$300,000 to help bring back oaks and prairies in Oregon**

*Three different projects throughout state are part of a coordinated effort to conserve dwindling oaks & prairies*

*Lebanon, Ore.* -- Today, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board approved more than \$300,000 in funding for three projects to protect and restore Oregon's dwindling oak woodlands and prairies.

"Oregon is known for its conifer forests. But oak woodlands and prairies have always been an important feature of the natural landscape. Urban and agricultural development, plus decades of fire suppression, have reduced oak and prairie habitats by more than two-thirds statewide and more than 80 percent in the Willamette Valley. Much of what we still have is unhealthy. Landowners, conservation organizations and government agencies are working to bring Oregon's oaks and prairies back. This funding from OWEB will help catalyze more strategic investments to benefit people and wildlife," said Bruce Taylor of Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture.

The three projects are in the Klamath-Siskiyou, Willamette Valley, and East Cascades regions and will benefit hundreds of species that rely on dwindling oak woodlands and prairies, from songbirds and big game to butterflies and flowers. OWEB also approved approximately \$45,000 more to help the three oak-prairie partnerships develop a plan to help fund the projects that their strategic planning determine are most needed.

*Klamath-Siskiyou: \$100,185*

The Klamath Siskiyou Oak Network has a history of implementing multi-million dollar projects to conserve oak woodlands in the region. One species that will benefit is the oak titmouse, which has lost more than 50 percent of its population over the last 44 years, according to the Network.

"The Klamath Siskiyou Oak Network has done some great projects. But we want to restore and conserve not only enough acres for oak associated species, but acres in the most important places. That is what this funding is going to allow us to do – identify where future restoration dollars should be spent so that at the end of the day, we have enough healthy oak habitat in the right places to allow for plants and animals to disperse and migrate, both now and in the future as our climate warms," said Jaime Stephens, science director of the Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO), one of the partner organizations of the Klamath Siskiyou Oak Network.

In addition to KBO, the Network includes the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, and U.S. Forest Service.

*Willamette Valley: \$82,920*

The Willamette Valley Oak Prairie Cooperative has similar questions about their work: Which areas are most important for species that rely on oak woodlands and prairies in the valley? Where should we focus our work?

“Native oak and prairie habitats in the Willamette Valley represent some of the most imperiled environments in Oregon and have nearly disappeared from many areas in the Pacific Northwest. The Willamette Valley Oak-Prairie Cooperative is bringing a regional, coordinated focus to protect, restore and maintain oak and prairie in the middle and upper Willamette Valley. But to be most effective, we need a plan that will help us prioritize our actions,” said Michael Pope, executive director of the Greenbelt Land Trust, one of the core partners in the Cooperative.

Other core members of the cooperative include the City of Eugene, Institute for Applied Ecology, Willamette Partnership, and Pacific Birds. More than 20 other agencies and organizations have signed on to the partnership.

*East Cascades: \$102,286*

Around the eastern end of the Columbia Gorge near Hood River and The Dalles, the East Cascade Oaks Partnership is also working to conserve and restore remaining areas of oak woodlands and prairies. And the partnership will also be using funding from OWEB to develop a collaborative plan for conserving Oregon white oak habitat that supports biodiversity, demonstrates climate resilience, and persists despite population growth. The end result will be a guidance document to help formalize the partnership, and an action plan that the partnership can look to when developing projects.

“With a cooperative collective of partners, landowners and citizens learning to appreciate oak woodlands, to steward them carefully, and to strategically protect what remains, we may yet guarantee the conservation of these remarkable places and the hundreds of species that rely on them into the future,” said Lindsay Cornelius, natural area manager for Columbia Land Trust, one of the organizations serving on the East Cascade Oaks Partnership steering committee.

Other members of the Partnership’s steering committee include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Yakama Nation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Wasco Soil and Water Conservation District, Underwood Conservation District, National Wild Turkey Federation, Deschutes Land Trust, and Pacific Birds. The larger partnership also includes more than two dozen participating agencies, individuals and oak enthusiasts.

*About Pacific Birds:* Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture is a partnership that supports organizations working to protect bird habitats in the Pacific Flyway of Northern California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Alaska, and Hawaii. Its mission is to create the ideal environment for bird habitat conservation. Pacific Birds and its partners recently released a plan to help organizations working on oak and prairie habitat conservation and restoration focus their efforts in strategic and effective ways. Read more about that plan here: <http://www.pacificbirds.org/2017/10/prairie-oaks-and-people-a-new-conservation-strategy-released-for-pacific-northwest/>

*About OWEB:* The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is a state agency that provides grants to help Oregonians take care of local streams, rivers, wetlands and natural areas. Community members and landowners use scientific criteria to decide jointly what needs to be done to conserve and improve rivers and natural habitat where they live. OWEB grants are funded from the Oregon Lottery, federal dollars, and salmon license plate

revenue. The agency is led by a 17-member citizen board drawn from the public at large, tribes, and federal and state natural resource agency boards and commissions. Their most recent board meeting took place October 24-25 in Lebanon, Ore., where the board voted to approve these grants on October 25.

**Photos available here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B2q1EBK92GvpS0VGZkxpY0pnUUU>**