

April 24, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Lori Warner-Dickason, Policy Specialist

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item J: Sandy River Acquisition
May 15-16, 2007 OWEB Board Meeting**

I. Introduction

This staff report provides additional information related to the Sandy River acquisition, a project that was considered and funded at the March 14-15, 2007, Board meeting. Information provided in this staff report will assist the Board in considering awarding the balance of the funds requested for this acquisition project.

II. Background

At the March Board meeting, the Board approved an award of approximately half of the requested funds (\$364,000) for the acquisition of the Sandy River property by the Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC). Staff recommended and the Board approved a condition that the remainder of the requested funds (\$363,500) would be awarded upon Board approval of a long-term owner of the property.

The WRC is now requesting Board approval for the Columbia Land Trust (CLT) to receive title to this property and act as long-term owner. In the interim, the WRC will seek financing to provide the balance of funding to purchase the property prior to the May 11, 2007, expiration date of the purchase option. The WRC will hold title to the property for approximately 60 to 90 days. Upon approval and subsequent release of OWEB funds the WRC will transfer title to the CLT.

III. Long-term Owner Information

The CLT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit conservancy organization that was formed in 1990 to conserve 'signature landscapes and vital habitat together with the communities of the Columbia River region.' In the last seven years, CLT has grown from an all volunteer group to an organization with 11 full-time staff members.

The CLT currently owns approximately 4,300 acres, holds conservation easements or leases on over 1,300 acres, and has partnered to conserve an additional 2,400 acres within the Lower Columbia River region. As part of its conservation program, the CLT has established a science-based stewardship program focused on ensuring the long-term maintenance and enhancement of conservation values on all of its protected properties.

The Sandy River watershed is a relatively new conservation priority area for CLT. However, the land trust has been actively involved in restoration work within the Sandy River delta in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

The CLT has established a stewardship fund and endowment to finance ongoing stewardship activities on all of its conservation properties. This fund serves existing holdings and currently exceeds \$1 million. In most cases, new acquisitions require a fundraising effort. The WRC and CLT will work to secure additional funds to cover management expenses from a variety of foundation grants and private donors. Management expenses are expected to be relatively low, given the current condition of the property.

The CLT appears to be an excellent choice for a long-term owner of the Sandy River project. They have the stewardship staff, technical expertise, and organizational framework to be effective conservation landowners.

IV. Recommendation

Staff and the Board Land Acquisition Subcommittee recommend that the Board approve the Columbia Land Trust as the long-term owner of the Sandy River acquisition project, and approve the remainder of the requested funds in the amount of \$363,500.