



Oregon

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Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Carolyn Devine, Communications Coordinator

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item P: Communications Update
January 21-22, 2009 OWEB Board Meeting**

I. Introduction

This report provides an update on continuing efforts under the OWEB Communications Plan. The report is for informational purposes only.

II. Background

The statutes guiding OWEB's communications strategy state that the agency "shall provide educational and informational materials to promote public awareness and involvement in the watershed enhancement program." (ORS 541.370) In May of 2005, the Board adopted an Education and Outreach Strategy (Strategy) that had evolved into an umbrella plan that connected and supported all of OWEB's education and outreach functions: the Grant Program, Oregon Plan support, partnerships, and support of local voluntary efforts.

The Strategy is comprehensive and ambitious. OWEB has been limited in its capacity to implement the Strategy because of constraints on the availability of non-capital funding, and until this biennium, no OWEB staff person was committed full time to shepherd this program area.

At the retreat in July 2007, the Board decided to re-visit the Strategy. In December 2007, a Board Subcommittee was formed to lead this effort. Subcommittee members include Jim Johnson, Meta Loftsgaarden, and Patricia Smith. OWEB lead staff include Carolyn Devine and Tom Byler. The Subcommittee has met five times, and discussions have focused on the statutory guidance to the Board regarding OWEB's communications.

Building upon this direction, the Subcommittee began drafting a communications implementation plan. The purpose of this plan is to integrate OWEB's communications efforts and tools toward providing educational and informational materials to promote public awareness and involvement in the watershed enhancement program in a manner that is as strategic and effective as possible.

At the outset, the Subcommittee developed the following goals and outcomes for the communications implementation plan:

Goal

OWEB serves as the infrastructure that supports and catalyzes sustained voluntary, incentive-based watershed enhancement activities in Oregon.

Outcomes

- *Increased participation in voluntary on-the-ground watershed improvement activities.*
- *Increased awareness of Oregon's watershed enhancement accomplishments.*
- *Increased involvement in a wide-range of community-based watershed conservation and restoration activities.*

The Subcommittee recognized that utilizing all communications tools (Education and Outreach grants, the web site, press releases, publications, etc.) will be essential to support the larger agency mission of creating and maintaining healthy watersheds and natural habitats. The challenge is to determine the most strategic use of available funding and staff resources to make effective use of these tools.

III. Communications Implementation Plan Progress

Since the last Board meeting, staff focused on the following elements of the communications program.

A. Biennial Conference, November 5-7, Eugene

Staff strived to make the conference audience-focused and outcomes-based. Forty percent of the participants identified themselves as education/outreach coordinators. Two of the tracks, "Effective Organizations" and "Engaging Your Community," included 15 sessions that provided participants tools for improving awareness and participation in their on-the-ground restoration efforts. Ninety three percent of the participants who took the survey said that they are motivated to use at least one of the communications ideas learned from the conference, and 11 percent said that they plan to implement five or more ideas.

B. Education/Outreach Review Team

For the October 2008 grant cycle, OWEB formed a statewide team of education and outreach experts from around the state to help the agency evaluate the merit of Education and Outreach grant applications. In the past, this function had been performed exclusively by the Regional Review Teams (RRTs). The strengths of these teams tend to be more oriented toward on-the-ground restoration work, rather than education and outreach. For this grant cycle, staff will use both the RRTs and the statewide Education and Outreach Review Team (EORT) to evaluate these applications.

The EORT has 21 members. The members were selected with several qualifications in mind:

- Familiarity with education and outreach grant proposal writing and/or reviewing; experience with OWEB's process was helpful but not required;
- An understanding of outcomes-based educational planning in watershed awareness and education; and
- A willingness and ability to look at both the "big picture" of programmatic goals as well as the details of budgets and project management.

The EORT met on December 4, 2008, and scored each of the Education and Outreach applications using the following five criteria:

1. **Audience.** The proposal demonstrates a clear understanding of the audience's needs, applies appropriate learning strategies, and addresses barriers to learning.
2. **Activities.** The proposed activities are well-defined and will lead toward the outcomes described.
3. **Outcomes.** The end products and outcomes of this proposal provide educational and informational materials, have the potential to be accomplished successfully, and are supported by a well-considered budget.
4. **Project Evaluation.** The project incorporates evaluation for program improvement and effectiveness.
5. **Importance.** The project provides a valuable investment in furthering the broader goal of developing and maintaining healthy watersheds by promoting public awareness and involvement in the watershed enhancement program.

By the time of the January Board meeting, all RRTs will have reviewed the Education and Outreach grant applications within their regions. Staff will combine the evaluations of the RRTs and EORT in developing funding recommendations for the Board's consideration at the March meeting.

C. Communications and Message Refinement

OWEB is now accepting proposals to develop a marketing and messages plan for a multi-year public awareness and information plan on voluntary cooperative conservation projects to restore Oregon's watersheds. This implementation plan will serve as the basis for all media and communications to promote public awareness and involvement in the agency's watershed enhancement program. The work will take place between January 22, 2009, and September 30, 2009. The successful candidate will work directly with the Executive Director and Communications Coordinator, but also more broadly with the OWEB Board and key stakeholders. Staff plan to have the successful candidate selected by the time of the January Board meeting. If this is accomplished, staff will introduce the lead representative(s) to the Board at the meeting.

IV. Recommendation

This is an informational item. No Board action is requested at this time.