



Oregon

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Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Renee Davis, Deputy Director
Juniper Davis, Partnerships Coordinator

SUBJECT: Agenda Item G: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Technical Assistance (CREP TA) – Approval to Receive Program Funding January 27-28, 2015 OWEB Board Meeting

I. Introduction

This report updates the Board on Oregon's investment in Technical Assistance (TA) for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and requests Board approval to accept \$100,000 in additional funding for the program from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

II. Background

CREP is a voluntary program for agricultural landowners. The unique state and federal partnership allows landowners to receive incentive payments and conservation rental payments from the Farm Services Agency (FSA) for establishing long-term, riparian buffers on eligible land. The Oregon CREP was developed initially to address listed salmon streams; the program was later modified to assist in addressing stream water-quality issues (primarily temperature).

The Oregon CREP Agreement requires Oregon to pay for 20 percent of the overall program costs. CREP uses state funding for partial payment (25 percent) of all conservation activities (e.g., fencing, off-stream watering, site preparation, plant materials, planting). In addition to the direct landowner payments for conservation activities, OWEB provides funding for outreach, technical assistance, and program coordination. In recent years, NRCS has also provided funding through OWEB to support this work.

In federal fiscal year 2014, Oregon CREP was successful in enrolling 2,487 acres in the program, resulting in a total of over 42,000 acres enrolled over the lifetime of the program in Oregon.

III. CREP Technical Assistance and Associated Funding

CREP is managed by a multi-agency/organizational partnership. In addition to OWEB and FSA, the CREP partnership in Oregon includes NRCS, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, and the Oregon Departments of Agriculture and Forestry.

Beginning in the 2011-13 biennium, OWEB partnered with NRCS to provide just over \$1 million in TA for CREP as a competitive grant offering. This offering was implemented because the partnership recognized the program is most successful in those areas with a dedicated CREP

TA provider. Grants have been provided to provide direct TA to landowners interested in signing up for the program, along with critical coordination between landowners and the federal and state agencies responsible for managing the program.

In 2013, the partnership arranged for extensive CREP training, which included both technical and policy guidance, for all technicians, foresters and other employees associated with CREP projects to ensure that the program is implemented effectively at all levels. The training was well attended and positively reviewed by participants.

At the June 2013 OWEB Board meeting, the Board approved a spending plan that set aside \$750,000 for CREP TA. NRCS committed \$150,000 in match funding to the program. The Director then awarded eleven grants to CREP programs across the state, covering 22 counties. These grants are two years in duration and are set to expire December 31, 2015.

On September 17, 2014, NRCS notified OWEB that it would provide an additional \$100,000 to the CREP TA program to address unmet needs including: updated trainings in conservation practice implementation; resources and coordination to provide for cultural resource reviews of pending projects, grant program development; and capacity to extend technical assistance into new service areas.

IV. Recommendation

Staff request the Board approve receipt of \$100,000 in supplemental funding from the NRCS to support CREP and improve the local delivery of CREP in Oregon, and delegate authority to the Executive Director to distribute the funds through appropriate grants and agreements, with an award date of January 28, 2015 to be used for any grant agreement(s).