

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Strategic Plan

FINAL DRAFT

September 2009

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
775 Summer Street NE #360
Salem, Oregon 97301

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Message from Executive Director and Board

Dear Citizens, Stakeholders and Partners,

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is a state agency that helps local communities take care of Oregon's streams, rivers, wetlands and natural areas. Local community members and property owners decide jointly what needs to be done to conserve and improve rivers and natural habitat in their communities. OWEB supports those efforts by providing funds from the Oregon Lottery.

No matter where you live in Oregon, you're in a watershed. Healthy watersheds are vital to clean water and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife. Healthy watersheds are also vital to maintaining our quality of life and building a strong economy. Oregon has a unique approach to enhancing and maintaining these watersheds. The work is done at the local level by citizens, property owners and volunteers. This approach creates community and provides maximum value from public dollars. By working in partnership with local efforts, OWEB empowers watershed enhancement across Oregon.

Using input from partners, staff and board members, an ambitious strategic plan has been created to take us forward. The five goals and nine strategies that follow represent our best thoughts for how to continue our work on behalf of Oregon citizens, but do not capture all of OWEB's responsibilities and programs. The board and senior staff share an understanding that:

- 1) Oregonians hold a deep set of conservation values,
- 2) Building a high capacity local infrastructure to implement projects is essential,
- 3) Significant ongoing resources will be needed for watershed restoration and conservation,
- 4) Partnerships are essential to OWEB's work,
- 5) Monitoring and feedback will inform and improve our work, and
- 6) Public awareness will ensure continuing public support.

No one can predict the future. How the future will unfold is a complex interaction of numerous driving forces. OWEB must be adaptive and innovative to achieve ongoing success in the face of an uncertain future.

OWEB is proud to be part of an ongoing Oregon conservation legacy. We invite your thoughts, comments and support in the restoration and conservation of Oregon's natural resources.

Tom Byler
Executive Director

Diane Snyder
Co-chair

Daniel Heagerty
Co-Chair

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Oregon's Conservation Legacy

People have a deep and enduring connection to Oregon's natural environment—the cool and clean water of its rivers and lakes, the rich diversity of its fish and wildlife, and the inspiring beauty and variety of its landscapes. Generations of Native Americans have been sustained by the land's abundant natural resources. In the nineteenth century trappers, settlers, farmers and ranchers made the arduous trek to Oregon attracted by the special qualities of Oregon's lands and waters. Oregonians continue to deepen their tie to the lands and waters on which they live, work, and play.

This collective care and appreciation for the state's natural places and working landscapes has created a strong and enduring legacy of conservation in Oregon. Looking back, Oregon's conservation legacy is embodied in milestone actions involving incentives for recycling (the bottle bill), protecting unique and special places for the public to enjoy (the beach bill), and the development of land use planning laws to protect important land uses and prevent unchecked urban sprawl.

The most recent expression of Oregon's conservation legacy has been quietly and effectively taking place in communities around the state for ten years. Local groups—primarily watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts—are engaging farmers, ranchers, foresters, and other landowners to voluntarily work with other partners to take actions on their properties that help restore and protect our natural environment. Together, these local, cooperative actions are writing the most recent chapter to Oregon's conservation legacy.

These actions are possible because Oregon voters decided in 1998 to dedicate Lottery Fund dollars to support grants for clean water and to improve and protect habitat for fish and wildlife. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is the state agency responsible for administering these grants.

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is a non-regulatory public investment board that employs a locally-driven, collaborative conservation approach to watershed enhancement. OWEB solicits and awards grants to improve and protect watershed health and monitors project effectiveness so all partners can adaptively manage the resource. OWEB is led by a policy oversight board that represents state, tribal, and federal interests, as well as the public at large.

OWEB's grant programs support voluntary efforts that result in:

- Projects that restore and protect natural processes and functions of watersheds;
- A statewide network of councils, districts and other local groups that develop and implement restoration projects;
- Citizen awareness of watershed issues and participation in restoration and protection actions;
- Strong and lasting partnerships to address complex natural resources issues;
- Jobs and the purchase of goods and services in local communities.

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Mission and Vision

OWEB has been working from a mission statement since 2001. This strategic plan aligns that mission statement with statutory language and expands that mission statement with a vision statement. The vision statement was developed from discussions between Board members and management staff, input from staff and stakeholders, and OWEB's experience in implementing its mission over the past 10 years.

Mission Statement

A mission statement is a brief description of an organization's fundamental purpose. OWEB's mission is:

To help protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies.

Vision Statement

A vision statement articulates the dreams and hopes for an organization. OWEB's vision is:

OWEB is recognized as a leader in the conservation of Oregon's vast natural resources and enjoys strong public support for its contributions to community-based conservation and local economies.

The vision calls for Oregon's watersheds to include healthy river systems and well managed upland landscapes capable of sustaining and enriching Oregon's biological diversity, ecosystems, fish and wildlife habitat, and agricultural, forest and human communities.

Watersheds have three primary functions with regard to water. They capture, store and release water. The entire watershed, ridgetop to ridgetop, is essential to these processes. Floodplains of rivers are complex systems that evolved over time, shaped by the soils, topography, vegetation and other natural forces. In addition to water related functions, watersheds are also landscapes that create fish and wildlife habitats essential to the natural functioning of entire ecosystems.

OWEB's vision will guide future decisions about programs and funding priorities. This vision requires:

- *Integrated investments in projects that emphasize protection and/or restoration of watershed processes and ecosystem function required by Oregon's native fish and wildlife;*
- *A ridgetop to ridgetop approach to achieving healthy watersheds;*
- *Dynamic river and floodplain systems that interact with physical and ecological processes;*
- *High water quality that supports Oregon's native fish and wildlife species and human requirements;*
- *Involved community members including both public and private interests that build and sustain a watershed stewardship ethic;*
- *Monitoring to support adaptive management and investment efficiencies of the resource.*

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Goals, Strategies and Implementation Actions

The OWEB Board has established the following goals, strategies and actions in support of OWEB's vision. In order to effectively consider and implement the strategies and actions identified below OWEB staff will develop work plans and realign staff workload to achieve vision-driven priorities. Measures of progress and success will be developed and aligned with currently required reporting measures.

Goals

OWEB's goals are to:

- Goal 1: Restore and sustain resilient ecosystems through program and project investments that incorporate watershed and ecosystem functions and processes and community needs.**
- Goal 2: Support an enduring, high capacity local infrastructure for conducting watershed restoration and conservation.**
- Goal 3: Provide information to help Oregonians understand the need for and engage in activities that support healthy watersheds.**
- Goal 4: Build and maintain strong partnerships with local, state, tribal and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and private landowners for watershed health.**
- Goal 5: Ensure highly efficient and accountable administration of all investments.**

These goals are further described below, including strategies and actions.

Strategies and Actions

Adaptive Investment

- Goal 1: Restore and sustain resilient ecosystems through program and project investments that incorporate watershed and ecosystem functions and processes and community needs.**

OWEB faces the challenge of funding a mix of programs and projects across the state with many partners to build a broad restoration and monitoring infrastructure. Population growth and climate change will affect communities around the state and the watershed processes and functions upon which those communities and fish and wildlife depend. These driving forces are significant and their impact is uncertain. The key to achieving OWEB's vision is an adaptive, principled, and well structured investment strategy that incorporates monitoring and evaluation into local project development and program evaluation. Monitoring information is the basis for adapting investment and management activities to achieve the most effective and resilient outcomes.

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Strategy 1: Maintain and enhance restoration and protection programs that focus on watershed and ecosystem functions and processes, support sustainable working landscapes, and empower community-based conservation to address economic, social and environmental health.

Where are we now?

OWEB has worked for 10 years to enhance and maintain healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies. OWEB achieves this by working closely with local partners to provide watershed enhancement grants; providing funding to support the capacity of watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts; partnering with other agencies and organizations; monitoring and managing information; and reporting on implementation of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. OWEB's mission and work also support and complement governmental climate change policy and priorities through locally based, on-the-ground work to improve watershed health and resilience, which will become increasingly important to address the effects of climate change.

OWEB has developed tools to assist partners in the strategic development of restoration or conservation projects. OWEB adopted priorities for land acquisition grants in 2004. OWEB has also developed and begun to implement a framework, known as Restoration Priorities, that establishes priorities at regional geographic scales to assist in the evaluation of proposed improvement projects at the local watershed level. The framework was developed to categorize actions by the effect they will have on ecosystem function and process. Five general types of activities have been identified to address watershed function improvement:

- Actions that restore habitat connectivity;
- Actions that address impaired watershed processes that affect the aquatic system or water quality;
- Actions that address key habitats and water quality for at-risk and ESA-listed species;
- Actions that reduce human impacts and inputs to the watershed; and,
- Actions that address symptoms of impaired watershed processes that impact fish habitat or water quality, or affect specific wildlife concerns.

OWEB's Restoration grant applications require applicants to address how their proposal fits with the Restoration Priorities; this is one of the factors evaluated by OWEB's Regional Review Teams when developing funding recommendations for OWEB consideration. The Review Teams also consider technical merit, feasibility, likelihood of success, experience of the applicant, and the budget.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Re-examine the Restoration and Acquisition Priorities making them consistent with the vision and incorporate climate change strategies as they emerge from international, national, state and local sources.

Action 2: Board adopts final set of Restoration and Acquisition Priorities.

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Action 3: OWEB enhances access to, and knowledge of, adopted Restoration and Acquisition Priorities.

Action 4: OWEB enhances the grant application development and review processes to incorporate the Restoration and Acquisition Priorities to ensure projects are strategic and deliver watershed and ecological function and process outcomes consistent with the vision.

Action 5: Continue investment in the Willamette and Deschutes Special Investment Programs (SIPs) and work with partners to explore additional SIPs and other partnerships.

Action 6: Encourage and support programs that result in positive long-term economic outcomes for landowners while achieving sustainable watershed improvements.

Strategy 2: Implement monitoring and research programs to build knowledge and strengthen feedback about OWEB investments and critical uncertainties to support adaptive management for outcome improvements.

Where are we now?

The Board adopted a far-reaching and long-term strategy to guide coordinated monitoring efforts under the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds in 2003. From this strategy, OWEB initiated an effectiveness monitoring program in 2005. To date, effectiveness monitoring has been initiated on many of the top 25 restoration program areas funded cumulatively since 1999. These monitoring projects include detailed evaluations of riparian planting and fencing, fish barrier removal, irrigation efficiency, western juniper removal, dam removal, in-stream large wood placement, road removal and rehabilitation, wetland restoration, tide gate replacement, and others.

While OWEB has funded research since 2002, it is only within the last two years that OWEB has developed a research program. One competitive grant process and one targeted research opportunity occurred in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Reports and results are made available on the OWEB website. A coordinated effort with external monitoring experts and stakeholders is the grounded approach OWEB takes with its monitoring and research activities.

OWEB manages the Oregon Watershed Restoration Inventory (OWRI), which has tracked completed restoration work since 1995. Except for projects funded by OWEB or implemented under certain permits, all reporting to this database is voluntary.

The actions under Strategy 2 provide the building blocks for understanding the results of OWEB investments from the project level to the cumulative impact of all investments. The data collected through the implementation of this strategy will be assembled into information that will be shared under the Goal 3, Strategy 1, for the purpose of building awareness, success and support for OWEB actions.

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Where are we going?

Action 1: Undertake a monitoring and research program status review to describe the lessons learned, the current use of data and analyses, and the actions needed to successfully implement this strategy.

Action 2: Implement the appropriate compliance and effectiveness monitoring in key investment areas and the remaining one third of OWEB's top restoration investment areas.

Action 3: Assemble data, information, lessons learned, and stories from effectiveness monitoring that will be used to implement Goal 3 to build awareness and understanding.

Action 4: Continue to work with partners through collaborative workgroups and by providing funding through grants to high priority monitoring activities.

Action 5: Continue to establish and maintain databases internally and through grants used to store, analyze, and provide the backbone of information delivery through electronic and traditional forms of communication.

Action 6: Revise OWEB Research Priorities to align with Board goals related to climate change, Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, and Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Local infrastructure development

Goal 2: Support an enduring, high capacity local infrastructure for conducting watershed restoration and conservation.

Watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts and nongovernmental organizations are key partners in implementing OWEB's watershed enhancement program. Councils and districts account for roughly two-thirds of OWEB grants. They play a critical role in working with interested landowners to design projects, apply for grants, implement restoration projects, monitor project results, and provide local watershed education. The work of these local partners also provides significant community and economic benefits. Success of OWEB's mission and vision requires these partners to have sufficient capacity and funding to continue and enhance their work. In addition, watershed restoration and protection needs are so great, that more partners at the local level are needed.

Strategy 1: Establish and articulate policies related to the support and development of a diverse local infrastructure for watershed restoration.

Where are we now?

OWEB is exploring a diverse approach to building local infrastructure to support restoration and conservation. This includes watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, nongovernmental organizations and landowners. Partnerships are encouraged to organize at a scale that can be sustained over the long term. OWEB continues to explore issues related to the number of councils and the best ways to manage and fund a high capacity infrastructure.

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Where are we going?

Action 1: Work with watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, public and private foundations, tribes, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations to identify needs and funding partners to strengthen their ability to build capacity and develop a diverse and enduring local infrastructure.

Action 2: Identify and evaluate alternative organizational structures to achieve more stable local infrastructure.

Strategy 2: Evaluate and adjust watershed council support grant review and funding processes to build local capacity, provide base funding and promote strategic partnerships.

Where are we now?

The legislature currently provides councils and districts with a base level of funding of \$5 million each, every two years. During the 2007-2009 biennium, OWEB supplemented this base funding with an additional \$1 million each. Councils and districts work to supplement OWEB's funding by seeking other funding such as foundation grants, memberships, donations, business contributions, and, for some districts, local taxes. The level of support and resources varies based on the leadership, capacity and geographic location of these organizations. OWEB recognizes that more support needs to be provided to help build sustainable local organizations to carry on watershed restoration work.

This strategy only addresses the support grants for watershed councils. Soil and water conservation district support funding is provided by OWEB through the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which runs its own distribution and accountability processes.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Develop funding policy guidelines for achieving sustainable council support.

Action 2: Develop policy guidance for the Board on council requests for solo funding ("splitting" from umbrella councils) for the 2011-2013 council support grant awards.

Action 3: Work with applicants, reviewers and others to explore options regarding how OWEB funds councils, including looking at new applicant funding, base funding, partnership incentives, outcomes from OWEB funding, and other issues.

Strategy 3: Provide technical assistance to build capacity, secure additional funding and increase local organizational resilience.

Where are we now?

OWEB has provided funding to support capacity building for watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts through the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (Network) and Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD). OWEB's funding also supports coordination and cooperation between OACD and the Network to the benefit of councils, districts, and OWEB. The work of these organizations directly complements the funding for

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councils and districts and helps their respective groups perform at a high level and communicate their successes.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Require specific capacity building products and expectations as deliverables for the funding provided to the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils and Association of Oregon Conservation Districts.

Action 2: Reserve noncapital funds to contract with one or more organizations to deliver additional capacity building services in 2009-2011.

Action 3: Continue working with partners and exploring possibilities to develop tools and strategies for ecosystem service market participation that may diversify revenue streams for local infrastructure and leverage and diversify project and maintenance/monitoring funding.

Public Support

Goal 3: Provide information to help Oregonians understand the need for and engage in activities that support healthy watersheds.

All Oregonians appreciate and recognize the value of clean, abundant water. Fewer Oregonians recognize that clean, abundant water depends on functioning watersheds. Still fewer Oregonians identify the critical link between investments in watershed restoration and protection and clean, abundant water. It is important to expand the awareness that land and water management actions can improve and/or protect water quality. Healthy watersheds require an informed public that supports fish and wildlife habitat protection, well managed river corridors, agricultural and forest land stewardship and urban land and water management.

Strategy 1: Engage Oregonians on a broad level, reminding them of the importance of healthy watersheds and informing them, in broad strokes, of what has been accomplished on their behalf through the work of OWEB and others.

Where are we now?

OWEB was created in 1999 and now has over a decade of projects and programs that illustrate the linkages between ecosystem health and community and economic sustainability. Every two years, OWEB develops a biennial report on the progress of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds that highlights implemented projects, local community efforts, and agency program accomplishments.

After 10 years it is important to compile a history of investments and ecological outcomes to help the public understand the value received. The more people know about the public investments in watershed health and the benefits of those investments, the more they will value them and support continued funding of these efforts.

Where are we going?

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Action 1: Develop and implement simple, effective and strategic awareness messages and messaging tools aligned with OWEB's strategic plan.

Action 2: Develop a range of tools for OWEB grant recipients to use to further the Strategy and implement Action 1.

Action 3: Coordinate and develop specific plans with other agencies and partners to deliver consistent messages.

Action 4: Compile a history of OWEB investments and ecological outcomes ("Decade of Investment") to describe how OWEB has invested on behalf of Oregonians to improve and protect watersheds and the ecosystems they support.

Action 5: Review and enhance the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watershed Biennial Report to further the goals of the Strategic Plan and Strategic Communications Plan.

Strategy 2: Encourage and facilitate greater exploration, knowledge and appreciation of OWEB's accomplishments for those Oregonians who seek greater involvement.

Where are we now?

OWEB administers a competitive grant program that invests approximately one million dollars a biennium in watershed education and outreach grants across Oregon. In 2005, OWEB developed an Education and Outreach Strategy to connect and support OWEB's education and outreach functions and investments. The strategy included three elements that build upon each other: enhance awareness, improve knowledge and develop skills.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Develop and implement simple, effective and strategic education and involvement messages and messaging tools aligned with OWEB's strategic plan.

Action 2: Use the Strategic Communication Plan to guide education and outreach grant offerings.

Action 3: Work with partners to develop and implement the Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan ("No Child Left Inside").

Partnership development

Goal 4: Build and maintain strong partnerships with local, state, tribal and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and private landowners for watershed health.

OWEB combines the regulatory and land management programs of state and federal agencies and local governments with voluntary watershed restoration by private landowners and others. Over the years, solutions to address water quality, watershed health, native salmon habitat, and wildlife conservation have been achieved by building partnerships between government agencies, tribes, watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, nonprofit organizations, landowners and citizens.

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OWEB is charged with being the central organization for managing Measure 66 funds for watershed enhancement. This is a grant based, non-regulatory program to improve watershed and ecosystem health that requires a high level of coordination and collaboration with local, state and federal agencies and organizations. OWEB dollars can be leveraged and partners can help inform the public about the successful watershed restoration work underway. There is clearly opportunity to expand the nature of current partnerships and create new partnerships.

Strategy 1: Identify new and expand existing strategic partnerships that leverage OWEB funds and knowledge to achieve healthy watershed and community outcomes.

Where are we now?

Partnerships are a required element for all OWEB investments. Partnerships range from the matching funds for individual grants to institutional arrangements to implement federally developed programs. OWEB maintains a portfolio of investments with different kinds of partners and at different levels of formal relationships. Criteria for evaluating formal partnerships has been developed and adopted by the Board.

OWEB has successful partnerships with local watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, state and federal agencies, tribes, local government, land trusts, private foundations, and other nongovernmental organizations.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Executive Director and partnership subcommittee will identify and prioritize partnership development on behalf of OWEB consistent with the vision and Board adopted partnership criteria.

Action 2: OWEB key messages will be developed and shared with partners. Specific plans will be developed for distribution of messages by partners.

Efficient and Accountable Administration

Goal 5: Ensure highly efficient and accountable administration of all investments.

OWEB's core function is the administration of a competitive grant program, which has experienced significant growth in the number of grants and funding award amounts over the past ten years. The timely, accurate and transparent administration of all aspects of the program is an everyday activity for all employees. This approach benefits the agency and its partners by providing streamlined processes and necessary resources to carry out watershed enhancement in an expeditious and responsible manner. OWEB will continue to focus on this important goal and continue to look for opportunities for advancement and improvement.

Strategy 1: Continue to evaluate, explore and implement grant administrative processes to maintain and enhance efficiencies at all levels.

Where are we now?

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OWEB is in constant communication with staff to determine the most efficient ways to carry out its business. A staff review is conducted following each grant cycle to develop recommended improvements. OWEB has a full time information technology person on staff who has begun to develop digital processes for the organization, including a grant administration system and online reporting. Staff members in other program areas are working with partners to improve agency processes in order to better facilitate on-the-ground actions.

In addition to internal processes, OWEB benefits from third party reviews of its work. OWEB's grant process, files and expenditures are audited every other year by the Secretary of State and OWEB has received a favorable audit each time. OWEB also conducts an annual customer service survey.

Where are we going?

Action 1: Conduct an independent review of OWEB's business processes to identify ways to improve communications and streamline and simplify the processes for staff, applicants and grantees, without compromising accountability and legal requirements.

Action 2: Prioritize and implement business process recommendations.

Action 3: Explore options and develop information technology tools to increase efficiencies and meet the needs of stakeholders and staff.