



December 21, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

FROM: Miriam Hulst, Oregon Plan Implementation Specialist
Ken Bierly, Deputy Director

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item N: Oregon Coast Coho Recovery Plan Implementation
January 16-17, 2008 OWEB Board Meeting**

I. Introduction

This report describes a strategy for intensive, community-based outreach and subsequent project development assistance intended to encourage landowner participation in Oregon Coast coho salmon habitat restoration in high-priority areas. Staff have begun working with the Upper Nehalem, Lower Nehalem, and Tillamook Bay watershed councils to implement the outreach strategy.

II. Background

The 2007-2009 Biennium Spending Plan, approved by the Board at the September Board meeting, allocated \$1.5 million for recovery planning. A portion of the funds was approved to implement the Oregon Coast Coho Conservation Plan. A key element of the implementation strategy is to provide an enhanced level of habitat restoration support to local conservation groups and private landowners. Coastal watershed councils have identified the need for aid in recruiting landowner involvement in habitat restoration in high-priority areas and developing projects of maximum value for coho.

III. Assistance Needed by Watershed Councils

Many coastal watershed councils lack the funds and staff needed to actively recruit landowners for Oregon Coast coho habitat restoration. Therefore, councils often operate opportunistically, working with landowners who initiate contact. Staffing constraints also sometimes prompt councils to treat with preference projects that do not require extensive design, permitting, or other planning activities. Although there is great value in opportunistic and expeditious projects, the emphasis on these projects has over time led to a perception by some in the restoration community that most of the simple projects are done, and that improved project locations and designs will more effectively address the habitat deficiencies that most severely limit coho production.

The Coastal Coho Assessment concluded that coho are limited primarily by insufficient stream complexity, especially with respect to winter habitat. Restoring stream complexity in lowlands, which constitute the majority of coho high intrinsic potential habitat, is a critically important part

of recovering Oregon Coast coho. Coastal lowland landowners are frequently adverse to restoration, citing concerns about channel movement, flooding, and concomitant economic losses. It takes significant time and effort to address diverse perceptions and values. Watershed councils need enhanced staffing to successfully recruit willing lowland landowners and develop projects of maximum value for coho.

IV. Strategy for Intensive Local Outreach

Staff chose to offer non-competitive coho outreach and project development funding to the Upper Nehalem, Lower Nehalem, and Tillamook Bay Watershed Councils. The councils are receiving special assistance because the Coastal Coho Assessment determined that the Nehalem and Tillamook coho populations are not currently viable. The lack of viability was attributed primarily to insufficient habitat complexity. The Nehalem and Tillamook effort is a pilot project. At a later date, staff will consider expanding the project to other coho populations for which production is limited as a result of deficient habitat complexity. The project could also be extended to salmon recovery domains in other parts of the state.

V. The Outreach Process

Staff are working with the Nehalem and Tillamook councils to develop and implement a two-part plan for intensive outreach:

A. Part 1: Data Synthesis

The Nehalem and Tillamook watershed councils are compiling and integrating a variety of datasets for their watersheds. Many biophysical data exist for the watersheds but have been gathered at different times using disparate techniques, spatial scales, and metrics.

Synthesizing the data will afford the councils a cohesive understanding of watershed conditions, from which informed outreach priorities can be developed. The data work will be conducted with the leadership of a local technical advisory committee and with public input, so as to develop outreach priorities that have broad-based stakeholder support.

B. Part 2: Intensive Outreach

The Nehalem and Tillamook councils will conduct intensive outreach in areas identified as priorities by the data synthesis process. The outreach is likely to be patterned after an approach developed and successfully implemented in Coos Bay watersheds by the Coos Watershed Association (CWA) and OSU Extension. The process consists of a series of three landowner gatherings in each priority area. The CWA refers to the landowner meetings as coffee klatches.

The first coffee klatch entails introducing the council, presenting synopsized data about watershed conditions, and surveying landowner values, concerns, and goals related to land management. One of the council's primary objectives is to gain an understanding of landowner attitudes about restoration so that the information can be used in developing feasible, large-scale restoration plans for the priority area. Importantly, the meeting is not a forum in which pre-determined restoration plans and projects are presented to landowners.

The CWA learned a number of lessons about conducting the first of the three coffee klatches. The insights will assist the Nehalem and Tillamook councils with planning their landowner meetings. Chief among the lessons learned in Coos Bay are that coffee klatches run more smoothly in private homes than in public meeting places, individual invitations are important,

klatch invitees should be limited to landowners in the area being targeted for restoration, the number of meeting leaders should be minimized, the watershed council's mission and community role should be clearly presented and thoroughly discussed, and emphasis should be placed on two-way communication intended to acquire landowner input regarding watershed issues and raise landowner awareness of watershed conditions.

The second coffee klatch consists of a landowner field trip to restoration project sites. The meeting is intended to increase landowner understanding of restoration actions, build confidence in restoration outcomes, and demonstrate restoration compatibility with active land use.

The third, and final, coffee klatch entails a landowner meeting at which the council verifies restoration priorities developed by combining weighted watershed data with input provided by landowners at the first coffee klatch.

VI. Project Development

Upon completion of the coffee klatches, the Nehalem and Tillamook councils will work with OWEB staff to assess funding needed for project development. Additional project development capacity will be necessary because each council's staff is limited to a coordinator, two of which are half-time. Without additional capacity, the councils will be unable to efficiently build landowner relationships initiated at the klatches, maintain landowner interest, develop potentially complex restoration projects, and prepare grant proposals for project funding.

VII. Support for the Councils

Assistance to the Nehalem and Tillamook councils will not be limited to funding for outreach and project development. Staff will ensure that the councils receive the training and technical assistance needed to compile and understand watershed data, successfully facilitate landowner meetings, identify rigorous restoration priorities, and develop sound projects. The CWA and OSU Extension have offered to provide training and guidance to the councils. Staff will help the councils receive additional sources of support as needed.

VIII. Recommendation

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