

March 9, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner and Representative Tawna Sanchez

Joint Chairs of Ways and Means

Oregon State Legislature

900 Court St. N.E.

Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Steiner and Chair Sanchez:

The Union/Wallowa Chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) would like to express our explicit support for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) 23-25 Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) bill (SB-5509). Statewide OHA represents 10,000 members with 200+/- members located in Union and Wallowa Counties. The GRB represents an increase of \$53.3 million from the 2021-2023 biennium. The increase reflects additions made by the legislator that are being recommended to be carried forward into the proposed 2023-2025 biennium.

Proposed in the 2023-2025 GRB is a Policy Option Package (POP 121) requesting Federal Limitation to pursue the purchase of Phase II of the Minam Wildlife Area. Phase II will add 10,964 acres to the existing Phase I 4,609 acres that was previously purchased November of 2022. The Union/Wallowa County Chapter of OHA contributed \$20,000 to Phase I and has an additional \$14,000 earmarked for Phase II. OHA has provided \$100,000 in aggregate to the Phase I acquisition.

A coalition of 50+ partners led by ODFW, Manulife, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation have agreed to support Phase I and II. Completion of Phase II will link public access to the Eagle Cap Wilderness along the six miles of the Minam Wild and Scenic River Corridor. The entire project will protect critical big game winter range and prevent the parcel from being broken up into several smaller ownerships. This property will remain a working landscape which is supported by both the Union and Wallowa County Commissioners.

The Union/Wallowa County Chapter of OHA strongly supports the adoption of GRB SB-5509 and POP 121. Your consideration in this matter is appreciated.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Morgan Olson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Morgan Olson

President – Union/Wallowa County Chapter OHA

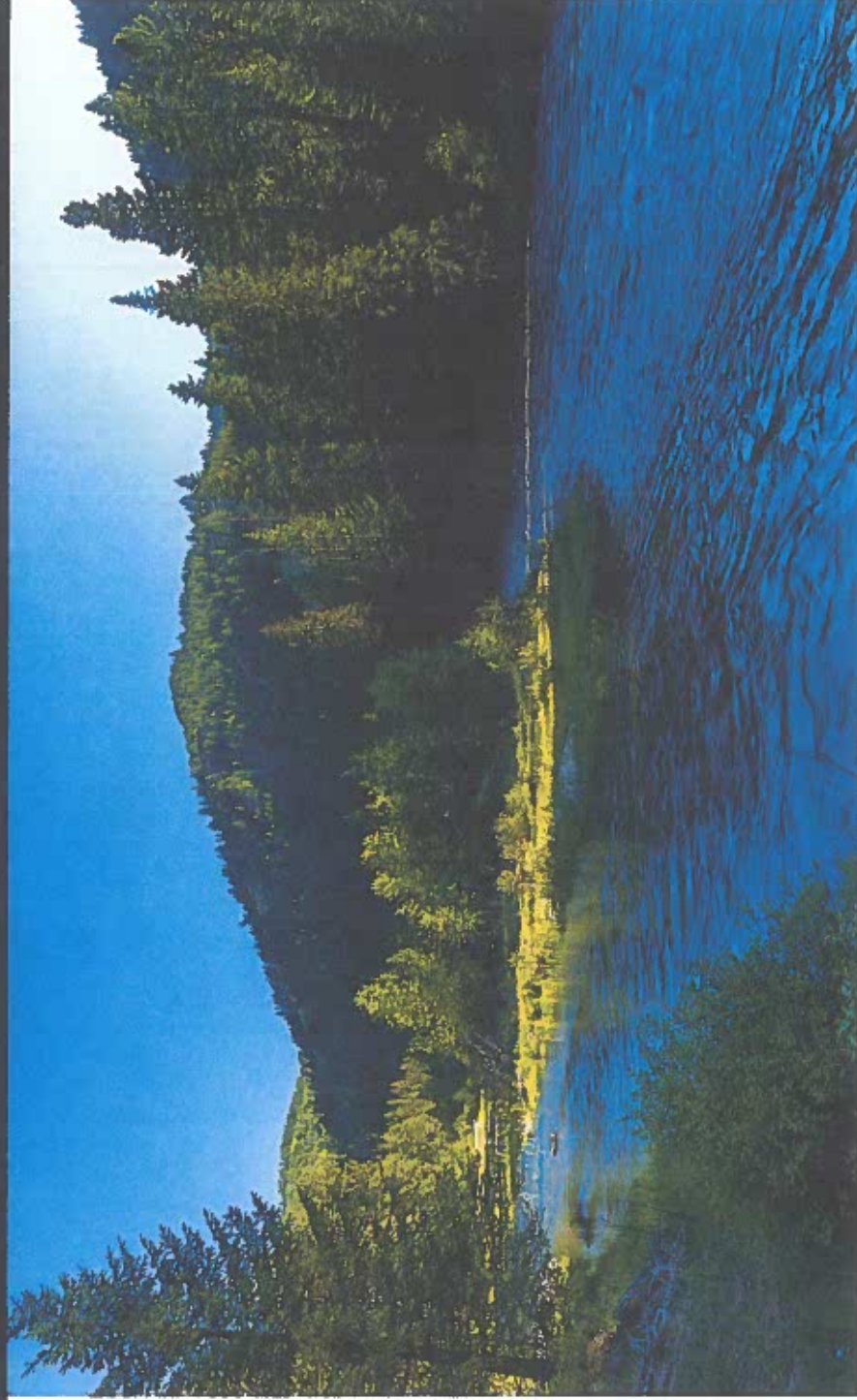
CC: Amy Patrick



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
ELK FOUNDATION

MINAM RIVER WILDLIFE AREA ACQUISITION

WALLOWA AND UNION COUNTIES, OREGON



PROJECT FACTS

PROJECT SIZE

- 15,573 +/- Acres
- Phase I: 4,609 Acres (closed Nov 2021)
- Phase II: 10,964 Acres (expect to close Dec 2023)

PURCHASE PRICE

(Subject to appraisal update for 2023)

- 2020 Appraised Value: \$18,700,000
- Phase I Value: \$5,508,354
- Phase II Value: \$13,191,646

FUNDING

- Phase I: Pittman-Robertson Funds, RMEF, and others
- Phase II: Forest Legacy Program, RMEF, and others (anticipated)

PARTNERS

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)
- Manulife Investment Management's timberland business (formerly Hancock Natural Resource Group)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

LOCATION

- Property is along the Minam River, primarily in Wallowa County with a small portion in Union County.
- Property is adjacent to the existing ODFW Minam River Wildlife Area, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) Minam State Recreation Area, USFS Eagle Cap Wilderness, and Bureau of Land Management lands.

LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

- Managed by ODFW as part of existing State Wildlife Area lands, in partnership with Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF).
- Continued management as a "working landscape," with active forest management and grazing used as a tool to improve and maintain wildlife habitat.

LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

The Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition will link wildlife habitat from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and the federally-designated Eagle Cap Wilderness Area to the Minam State Recreation Area at the confluence of the Minam and Wallowa Wild and Scenic Rivers. The property includes numerous Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats and species, federal and state listed species, and species of local economic and cultural importance. Active habitat management on the property will allow various wildlife species to move across elevation gradients, enhancing the resilience of existing populations in the face of climate variability.

CRUCIAL BIG GAME WINTER RANGE

Permanent protection of crucial winter, year-round, and transitional habitat along a migration corridor for elk, mule deer, and other wildlife.

ANADROMOUS FISH AND AQUATIC RESOURCES

Acquisition of the property will conserve approximately 114 miles of perennial and intermittent streams, including a significant stretch of the Minam River, providing spawning, rearing and migration habitat for Snake River spring/summer-run Chinook salmon (federal and state threatened) and Snake River Basin steelhead (federal threatened), Grande Ronde bull trout (federal threatened), and Pacific lamprey (state sensitive). As a result of cooperative reintroduction efforts, ODFW and tribal co-managers were excited to document coho salmon redds (nests) in the Minam River in 2021, after a 40-year absence.

The National Marine Fisheries Service's Snake River Recovery Plan calls for the conservation of pristine tributary habitat for Chinook salmon and steelhead and identifies the Minam River as one of the primary tributaries impacting the Grande Ronde population groups.

PUBLIC ACCESS FOR RECREATION

Acquisition will secure 15,573 acres of public recreational access, improve access to more than 6,000 acres of adjacent National Forest lands, and open new access to 40 acres of landlocked Bureau of Land Management lands.

Hunters, anglers, backpackers, horse packers, wildlife viewers and other recreationists will have access to a remote, rugged landscape. Outdoor enthusiasts will have improved access to the Eagle Cap Wilderness and the existing trail network on the National Forest lands, including the Minam River Trail which traverses the property.

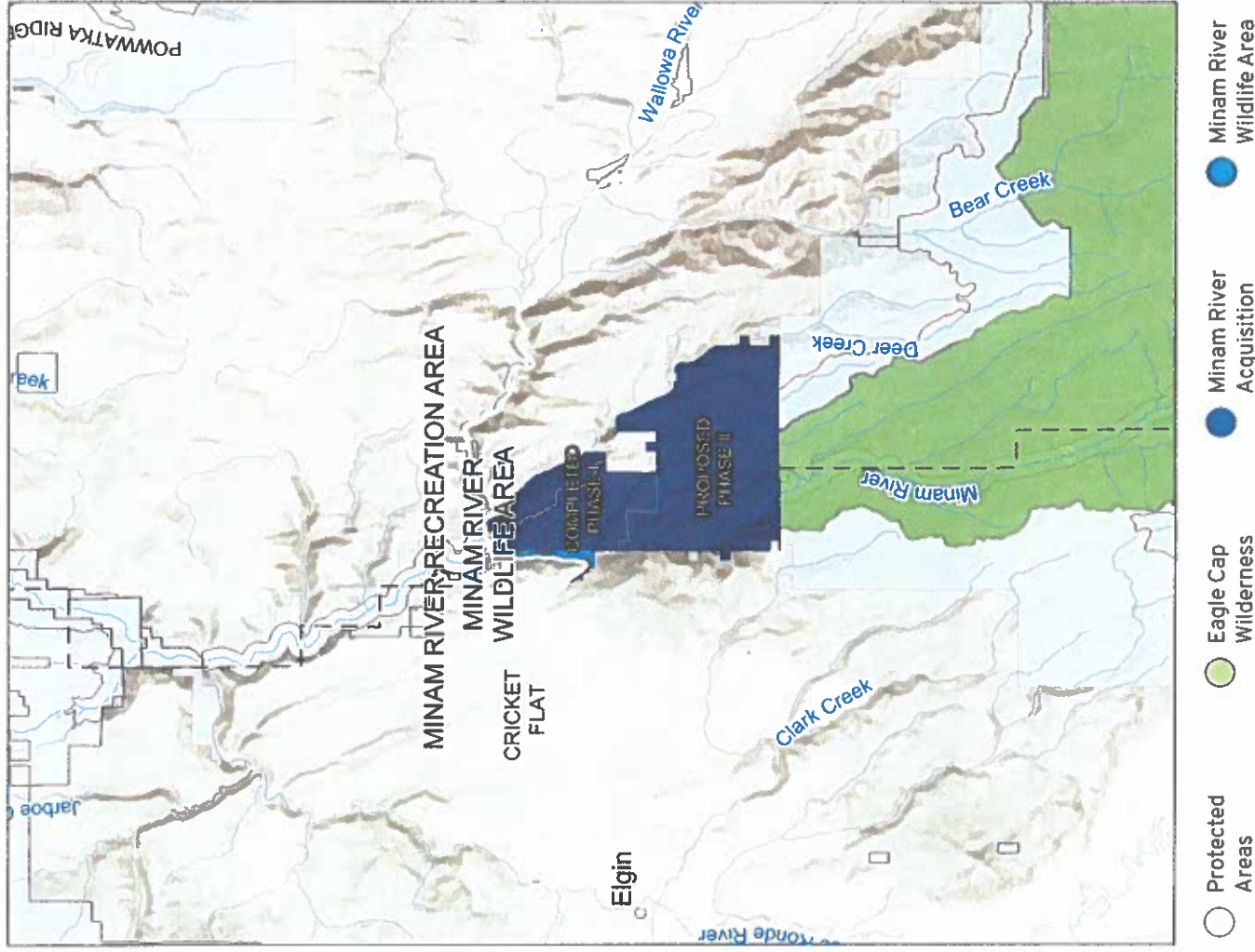
Recreational opportunities are easily accessible due to the property's location along the Highway 82 Hells Canyon Scenic Byway.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Formal outreach and information to local officials, the public and tribes generated widespread support for the project.
 - Over fifty entities and individuals expressed support for the Minam Acquisition's Forest Legacy proposal.
- Positive economic impact on rural economies due to outdoor recreation spending, as well as economic contributions from maintaining livestock grazing and forestry on the property.
- As with other state owned wildlife areas, ODFW will pay fees "in-lieu" of property taxes to maintain county tax revenues.

FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, CONTACT:

BILL RICHARDSON, RMEF SENIOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM MANAGER - WESTERN
(541) 760-5083 / BRICHARDSON@RMEF.ORG



THE MISSION OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION IS TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF ELK, OTHER WILDLIFE, THEIR HABITAT AND OUR HUNTING HERITAGE.