

ANALYSIS

Department of Agriculture Invasive Grass Management

Analyst: Wendy Gibson

Request: Approve, retroactively, the submission of a federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the amount of \$1,773,555 for the identification of invasive grass management projects for ecological resilience in rangelands.

Analysis: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Services operates programs focused on improving water quality, reducing soil erosion, increasing wildlife habitat, and reducing damage from natural disasters. The program is partnering with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to protect Oregon’s forest and rangelands from the effects of climate change.

As part of the cooperative agreement, ODA will receive \$1.8 million to conduct outreach efforts to identify and prioritize invasive grass management treatment areas and “high-value” partnerships in alignment with several state and federal efforts, including the USDA Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative, USDA Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Western Weed Action Plan, and Oregon SageCon Partnerships.

The USDA grant funding creates additional opportunities for ODA to coordinate with the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Landscape Resiliency Program (LRP), established through SB 762 (2021). During the 2021-23 biennium, LRP included four invasive grass treatment projects totaling 98,883 acres of rangeland. The treatments reduced the annual invasive grass to create a more fire resilient landscape, increase wildlife grazing, and restore historic ecosystems. According to ODA, the Department provided technical assistance to LRP on the invasive grass treatment projects and the agency will continue to coordinate with LRP on the new projects to enhance regional efforts, especially the efforts East of the Cascades.

This is a non-competitive grant with a 20% cash or in-kind match requirement, which ODA intends to meet through existing staff time. The grant application deadline was December 31, 2023. ODA provided a 10-day notification of the Department’s intent to apply for the grant on December 12, 2023. If awarded, ODA will return to the Legislature to seek additional Federal Funds expenditure limitation to expend the grant, which would become available in April 2024. The Department also identified the need for two limited duration positions to support the outreach efforts. The grant has a five-year period of performance.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Committee on Ways and Means approve the request.

Department of Agriculture Filimoehala

Request: Retroactive authorization to apply for a grant totaling \$1,773,555 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service for Invasive Grass Management.

Recommendation: Approve the request.

Discussion: The Department of Agriculture (ODA) is requesting retroactive authorization to apply for a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for projects to manage invasive grasses. NRCS identified the potential partnership with the ODA Noxious Weeds program to make this non-competitive funding opportunity available to alleviate a lack of invasive annual grass abatement programs in the region.

ODA provided a 10-day notice of application for the grant on December 12, 2023, and submitted the grant application on December 31, 2023. Since submitting the original 10-day notice the requested funding amount was increased from \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million to better align the request to actual costs of supporting the positions that will carry out the work.

ODA anticipates it will use grant funds to hire two Rangeland Management Specialist (Natural Resource Specialist 4 and Natural Resource Specialist 3) positions within the Noxious Weeds program to complete the work. The grant requires a 20 percent state match that will be met using in-kind staffing time. The grant will last for five years, with an anticipated operating period of April 2024 to April 2029.

If the grant application is successful, ODA will return to the legislature to request an increase in federal funds expenditure limitation and the establishment of two limited duration positions.



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January 9, 2024

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs:

Nature of the Request

The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) requests retroactive approval to apply for a funding opportunity with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). If funded, the effort will support coordination, collaboration, and outreach efforts to identify priority treatment areas and high value partnerships for invasive grass management and prioritize projects that align with the goals and objectives identified by the USDA Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative, USDA Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Western Weed Action Plan, Oregon SageCon Partnership, and others aimed at protecting rangeland and forests from numerous threats like invasive annual grasses, fire and climate change.

Agency Action

This funding opportunity is being offered directly to ODA as a non-competitive grant that would be delivered through a cooperative agreement. There is a 20% in-kind match requirement that will be met through ODA existing staff time. The source of the match is Lottery Funds. With ODA's intent to provide in-kind match with Lottery Funds that span into future biennium and as these future appropriations are unknown, the agreement will contain a mutual termination clause that can be executed by either party. The opportunity for the partnership was identified in Spring of 2023 and a viable funding opportunity was identified in Fall of 2023. The submission deadline of the completed application was December 31, 2023. When submitting the 10-day notification letter on 12/12/23 the anticipated amount of funding was \$1,224,862, but when submitting the application to USDA the funding was modified to \$1,773,554.73 (this includes \$1,533,553.59 in direct costs and \$240,001.14

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indirect costs). It is anticipated that funding would start in April 2024 with an anticipated end date of April 2029.

Funds for this cooperative agreement come through USDA-NRCS funds that are sourced from the Farm Bill, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other mechanisms. The agreement will support two full-time limited duration positions within the ODA Noxious Weeds Program, including a Rangeland Management Specialist (Natural Resource Specialist 4) and a Rangeland Management Specialist (Natural Resource Specialist 3). Positions would start in the Summer 2024 and continue up to five years.

There is broad support for this work from numerous federal agencies and state partners including USDA-NRCS, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon State Parks, the Oregon Invasive Species Council, and by existing partnerships like SageCon. SageCon is a large and diverse group of stakeholders, including numerous federal and state agencies (including ODA), that is dedicated to rangeland conservation through building ecological resilience by addressing threats to ecosystem health posed by fire, invasive species, woodland expansion, and other stressors. Rangeland Resilience work focused on invasive annual grasses is also identified as a high priority in HB3409 (2023). Working groups formed and aggregated as a result of this project will include partners from all levels of government, Oregon Tribes, academia, user group representatives and other stakeholders.

Action Requested

The ODA respectfully requests retroactive approval to apply for the NRCS funding opportunity to support rangeland resilience in Oregon.

Legislation Affected

If the application is successful, ODA will return to the Legislature for increased federal funds expenditure limitation and hiring authority for two limited duration positions.

Sincerely,



Lisa Charpilloz Hanson, Interim Director
Oregon Department of Agriculture

