

# HB 2829 Report: Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund



**BIENNIAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT December 15, 2024**

## Summary

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF), created in 2019 by House Bill 2829, helps fund projects that serve to protect, maintain, or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon and that support nature-based recreation consistent with the Oregon State Wildlife Action Plan, also known as the [Oregon Conservation Strategy](#). Throughout 2023-2024, the Fund invested in projects that:

- Connect youth, families, diverse and underserved communities to the outdoors
- Engage Oregonians in the science and research needed to improve our understanding of Oregon's diverse species
- Restore healthy ecosystems to benefit Oregon's fish and wildlife and improve the resiliency of our environment for future generations
- Address the impacts of drought on all Oregon communities – humans, plants, and animals.

The OCRF program consisted of three primary workflows in the 2023-2024 biennium that are each addressed in the following pages:

1. Making expenditures to implement the purpose of the fund and the intended use of the Drought Package Allocations from the State Legislature.
2. Building capacity within the Committee and the Department for implementing the Fund by developing a Strategic Plan for 2024 - 2028.
3. Continuing to diversify support for the missions of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund through the development of a Communications Plan.

## OCRF Expenditures and Conservation Investments

Since OCRF's establishment 4 years ago, the Advisory Committee has awarded \$7.6 million for 167 projects around the state, with an average of \$45,000 per project. Funds deposited into the OCRF have primarily been legislatively-appropriated General Funds, but have also included \$1 million Federal American Rescue Protection Act funds as well as corporate /private donations (> \$1.3 million). Donations to the Fund also come from hunters / anglers as they purchase licenses from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, they have the option to contribute to the OCRF (> \$580,000

donated). The Fund also receives public donations (> \$75,000 received) which are managed in partnership with the Oregon Wildlife Foundation at [OregonIsAlive.org](https://OregonIsAlive.org).

### **2022, 2023 Drought Package Investments**

Oregon is facing unprecedented drought conditions. Extreme drought conditions have already had significant economic impact on recreation and natural resource sectors, as well as on drinking water, fish and wildlife, aquatic habitats, and other natural resources. The OCRF received \$5 million from the Oregon Legislature as part of a drought resilience package (HB 5202, 2022). In 2023 the OCRF received an additional \$1 million for projects that increase drought resilience of natural systems (SB 5509, 2023). The OCRF recognized the urgency to address drought impacts and has awarded the majority (\$4.4 million) of these much-needed funds to conservation partners for projects throughout the state.

### **2024 Wildlife Passage Investment**

The importance of wildlife connectivity was recognized by the Oregon Legislature in 2024 with the dedication of \$5 million in proceeds from a Lottery Bond sale, to be deposited into the Fund. These funds will improve wildlife mobility and habitat connectivity projects in priority connectivity areas (HB 5030 § 2; SB 5506 § 184, 2024), and are scheduled to be released in Spring 2025.

### **Funded Projects**

Over the course of 2023 and 2024, the Committee offered three rounds of competitive funding opportunities and awarded 51 grants to organizations and agencies that can undertake projects that meet the intent of the Fund, some of which are highlighted below. More details on these projects and all 167 projects funded to date are described online: <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/OCRF/projects.html> .

The Committee's Spring 2024 Request for Proposals received a record-breaking 84 project proposals, and \$4.7 million in total requested funds. While the Committee was able to award \$1.2 million for twenty-four of those projects, this also demonstrates the demand for OCRF grants in conservation and recreation communities.

### **Outdoor Equity**

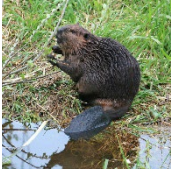
Embedded within the mandate for the OCRF is a commitment to reach out and engage underserved Oregonians and communities who have not participated in conservation or outdoor recreation in the past. The Committee dedicated a portion of Conservation and Recreation Fund revenue to projects and organizations that are explicitly seeking to close these gaps in outdoor equity.

Some great examples of OCRF-funded projects from around Oregon are provided below.



### **Wolverine Tracking Project**

Cascadia Wild runs the Wolverine Tracking Project, a community science project that conducts long-term monitoring of rare carnivores and connects Oregonians to wildlife and wild places. This project uses volunteers to collect data on Sierra Nevada red fox, wolves, wolverine, and fisher, in the Mt Hood National Forest.



### **Beaver Recovery Program for Upper Crooked River Watershed - Phase I**

The Upper Crooked River watershed is a place where beavers historically occupied in high numbers. This project seeks to build a foundation of beaver support from private landowners and expand beaver managed floodplains in the watershed. The project will pave the way for more beaver projects implemented on private lands in the target geography.



### **People of Color Outdoors Guardians**

People of Color Outdoors is a nature education program for children and families. The goal is to teach BIPOC children and families about native turtles, invasive species, climate change, and ways that individuals can help to support the environment. Each student will have field experiences available to study Smith & Bybee Wetlands and Whitaker Ponds.



### **Mapping Drought-Resilient Habitat for Fish and Wildlife**

Springs are drought-resilient aquatic habitat and often form the headwaters of Oregon's most ecologically-important streams. This project from The Nature Conservancy in Oregon seeks to survey 60 springs across Oregon that are important for Oregon Conservation Strategy Species and representative of ecoregions and geology types.



### **A Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) for Evaluating Change and Resilience in Nearshore Marine Communities**

The Oregon Dept of Fish & Wildlife Marine Program will purchase a new ROV to conduct video surveys of seafloor habitats, fish, and invertebrate communities to inform management and conservation.



### **Palensky-Hwy 30 Wildlife Underpass**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce and partners constructed an underpass to allow for amphibians and other wildlife to travel safely under Highway 30 to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

## **OCRf Advisory Committee Activity and Strategic Planning – Looking Forward**

The [Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee](#) is a nine-member, Governor-appointed committee that reviews ODFW policies regarding use of the OCRF funds and reviews and approves grants for the program. The Committee meets monthly and most meetings in 2023 and 2024 were virtual. The vacant Office of Outdoor Recreation (ex-officio) seat was filled by Jenna Marmon in September 2023, and the vacant Northern Basin and Range seat was filled by Jim Hammett in January 2024. All seats on the Committee are currently full.

During Fall 2023, the Committee revised the OCRF Oregon Administrative Rules for the Conservation and Recreation Fund, and the Commission adopted the [amended rules](#) in December 2023. The rules were revised to increase public transparency of OCRF process and to include an Urgent Grant option that developed a pathway outside of the normal grant solicitation window for time-sensitive, critical need projects. The Committee approved an urgent grant in April 2024, the ODFW Palensky-Hwy 30 Wildlife Underpass project for \$495,000. This project constructed Oregon's first amphibian crossing.

### **Diversifying Support for OCRF**

In 2023 the Committee dedicated a significant amount of time to developing a strategic plan for the OCRF. The Committee worked closely with a strategic planning consultant, Cheralynn Abbott, Pivotal Resources, to develop the top priorities and goals of the OCRF over the next two biennia. The [OCRF Strategic Plan](#) for 2024 – 2028 was adopted in May 2024. A high priority goal emerged from the strategic planning process and that is a focus on strategic communications and storytelling for the OCRF. As a result, the Committee is currently dedicated to developing a Communications Plan with the professional assistance of Quinn Thomas. The primary goals of this strategic communications plan will be to tell the story of OCRF's conservation accomplishments, broaden and diversify participation in the grant program, and sustain support for this important conservation program.

### **Looking Forward**

In the coming biennium, the OCRF will continue to play an important role in addressing Oregon's fish and wildlife conservation needs and increasing Oregonian's engagement in the outdoors. The OCRF is a program built on partnerships, and in service of all Oregonians as well as our fish and wildlife resources. ODFW and the Advisory Committee will be doubling down on OCRF's efforts to build stronger relationships with diverse applicants, conservation partners, and philanthropic foundations. In the 2025-27 biennium and beyond, OCRF will continue to be a leader in conservation and community-based recreation in Oregon. OCRF will continue its routine grant solicitation schedule and call for diverse and high priority projects. The priority focus for projects in the coming biennium will be ones that advance species resilience and habitat connectivity in a changing climate, prioritize drought resilience on natural and working lands, and promote inclusion and belonging in the outdoors.