



STAFF SUMMARY

Access and Habitat (A&H) – Project Funding Approval

Background

At the September 18 meeting, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will be asked to approve funding for three Access & Habitat (A&H) Board-recommended projects and additional funds to cover landowner costs associated with Department of Administrative Services (DAS) insurance requirements. The recommended projects continue the program's core mission of expanding public hunting access, reducing wildlife damage, and strengthening partnerships with private landowners.

The three A&H Board recommended projects (Lewis and Clark Timberlands NW Access Area, Calvin Farms Access Area, and Divide Ridge Access Area) all provide "Welcome to Hunt" access.

- The Lewis and Clark Access project will provide access across 153,220 acres in the Saddle Mountain, Wilson, and Trask WMUs for three-years. The Board adjusted the year-one payment rate to \$1.50 per acre in alignment with similar timberland projects, with an increase to \$1.75 per acre in years two and three contingent upon the A&H Program securing federal Voluntary Public Access grant funds.
- Calvin Farms Access Area provides access to 151 acres near Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, who will take over management of the project, for one year. The project is designed to reduce goose damage on ryegrass fields while maintaining public hunting access on a property that has historically received high hunter use.
- Divide Ridge Access Area renews a long-standing access project which delivers 1,440 acres in the Imnaha WMU for five-years. The property provides important forest and meadow habitats, serves as key big-game winter range, and expands the accessible landscape adjacent to USFS lands.

In addition to project approvals, the Commission will consider amendments to the A&H compensation structure to better support landowners facing rising costs for insurance requirements. The proposal increases the administrative insurance budget from \$3,000 to \$20,000 per year for three years, adds a tiered insurance-consultation payment (\$100 for working with an existing agent and \$500 when needing to secure a new agent), and raises the maximum annual landowner access payment from \$35,000 to \$50,000. These changes are driven by recent cases where landowners have been denied by their insurance company the required coverage or required to secure more expensive policies, particularly in eastern Oregon. The amendments respond to growing financial and administrative burdens and ensure the program can continue maintaining strong participation among cooperating landowners.

Public involvement

The Access & Habitat Program continues to provide structured and accessible opportunities for public involvement throughout its project review and approval process. Regional Council and A&H Board meetings are publicly noticed through Department news releases and posted on the ODFW website, where meeting materials are made available in advance for public review. Members of the public may submit written comments or attend meetings either in person or virtually to provide testimony on proposed projects, compensation adjustments, or broader program direction. The A&H Board most recently met in Salem on July 13, 2026, where the recommended projects and proposed insurance-related amendments were reviewed in a public setting.

Overview of proposed Commission action

The Commission will be asked to approve three Access & Habitat (A&H) Board-recommended projects that expand public hunting access, address wildlife damage, and strengthen long-standing partnerships with private landowners. These projects are the Lewis and Clark Timberlands NW Access Area, the Calvin Farms Access Area, and the Divide Ridge Access Area, each of which provides important public access opportunities in high-demand regions of the state.

The Commission will also consider an amendment to the A&H project compensation structure to better support landowners in meeting DAS-required insurance obligations. The amendment increases the administrative insurance budget, enhances available insurance-consultation payments, and raises the annual maximum landowner payment to maintain program attractiveness for cooperators experiencing rising costs. Collectively, these actions are intended to ensure continued landowner participation, address emerging insurance-related challenges, and maintain the consistency and reliability of public access opportunities delivered through the A&H Program.

By statute the Commission may approve or deny the funding of the A&H Board recommended projects and insurance payments. The department recommends the Commission approve the funding for the three access projects and insurance payment amendment.