



CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Competition Application:

Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon

Letters of Collaboration

- A.1: The Nature Conservancy
- A.2: Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development's Coastal Management Program
- A.3: Coquille Indian Tribe
- A.4: Coos Soil and Water Conservation District
- A.5: Coquille Watershed Association
- A.6: Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture
- A.7: Chione—Local Resident



The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
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December 27, 2023

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Coastal Zone Management - Habitat Protection and Restoration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
Competition: NOAA-NOS-OCM-2023-2008054

Re: Grant Application: "Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon"

Dear Selection Committee:

The Nature Conservancy's Oregon Chapter offers our strongest support for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's 2023 application titled "Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon" and is committed to contribute \$1.32M in leveraged funds towards the acquisition of the proposed property.

The Nature Conservancy has long supported the conservation of tidal wetlands in the Coquille and has invested significant resources over the last 15 years into the ecological recovery of this coastal area. In this time, TNC and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) have successfully completed over 700-acres of land acquisition and restoration projects within the Coquille basin. The acquisition proposed in this CZM grant application will add to the watershed's recovery by transitioning an additional 528-acres of tidally influenced freshwater emergent wetlands into a status of permanent conservation for fish and wildlife.

Investment in the Coquille River and Winter Lake provides a unique opportunity for recovery of the Coho population, supports Chinook salmon recovery, and offers a critical migratory link to high quality habitat. In addition, the Coquille River and this property are known for winter use by migratory waterfowl; approximately 50% of the Oregon Coast's wintering waterfowl overwinter in the Coquille.

Once under permanent protection, ODFW will add this property to its Coquille Valley Wildlife Area and operate it via the agency's approved management plan which focuses on protecting and restoring fish and wildlife habitats, recreational and education opportunities, and managing the habitats for the agency's mission and neighboring land uses. ODFW will ensure the conservation of the property in perpetuity, allow public access, and add public benefit utilizing the property as a platform for wildlife oriented recreational and educational opportunities.

The Conservancy is pleased to see the continued investment in restoration and land management in the area and the opportunities this project presents to achieve benefits for both nature and people.

Sincerely,

Jena Carter, Coast and Marine Director
The Nature Conservancy, Oregon



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Land Conservation and Development

Oregon Coastal Management Program

635 Capitol Street NE, Suite 150

Salem, Oregon 97301-2540

Phone: 503-373-0050

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www.oregon.gov/LCD

December 22, 2023

Attn: Sara Gregory, Umpqua Watershed District Manager (ODFW)



Re: BIL full proposal for the "Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River" project

Dear Ms. Gregory,

The Oregon Coastal Management Program (OCMP), located within the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) originally submitted a Letter of Intent (LOI) for the 'Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River' project to NOAA to consider for the CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration BIL funding. We were excited that this project was selected to move forward with full application for the 2023 funding cycle. The LOI included information that either DLCD or ODFW would be the main applicant and, after considering efficiencies between two state agencies, we collectively agreed that it would be best for ODFW to be the main applicant for the 'Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River' project. NOAA staff were notified that ODFW would be the main applicant.

OCMP is very supportive of the project goals of protecting this 528-acre addition to ODFW's Coquille Valley Wildlife Area, located within OCMP's coastal zone. This project will improve coastal climate resilience goals, will protect the most important waterfowl and shorebird area between San Francisco Bay and the Columbia River, protect overwintering habitat for ESA listed fish species, and provide public access opportunities within a rural community. Protecting tidally influenced, freshwater emergent wetlands and providing public access to coastal waters help achieve OCMP's conservation, resilience and public access goals and aligns with Oregon's Statewide Planning Goals to protect the state's natural resources, waters and habitats.

OCMP is dedicated to meaningful engagement with Coastal Tribal Nations and is very supportive of the Cooperative Management Agreement established between ODFW and the Coquille Indian Tribe for lands in this region. To have the addition of this 500+ acres under a Cooperative Management Agreement with the Coquille Indian Tribe will help bolster the future successes of restoration and land management outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

Lisa Phipps, Manager

Subject or Addressee

Date

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Oregon Coastal Management Program



COQUILLE INDIAN TRIBE

3050 Tremont Street North Bend, OR 97459
Phone: (541) 756-0904 Fax: (541) 756-0847
www.coquilletribe.org

National Ocean Services
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Department of Commerce

December 5, 2023

Re: Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon

Dear Selection Committee

On behalf of the Coquille Indian Tribe, I am submitting this letter of support for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) proposal to NOAA's CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Competition. ODFW's proposal to acquire over 500 acres of land in the Coquille River watershed to be incorporated in the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area (CVWA) supports the spirit of the Memorandum of Agreement our two organizations entered nearly a year ago. A foundation of this Agreement is the recognition of our shared goals of protecting, enhancing, and restoring fish and wildlife habitat in the Coquille River watershed. ODFW's proposal aligns perfectly with these shared goals.

The strategic acquisition of this land adjacent to the existing CVWA will support the protection and restoration of valuable tidally influenced wetlands in the Coquille River watershed, and the combination of past and future projects in the area will synergistically improve the fish and wildlife habitat value in a significant way. There is a history of robust stakeholder involvement and partnership surrounding this project area which makes the prospect of increasing the CVWA land base a promising step for even more future collaborative work. Additionally, the increased opportunities for education, outreach, and engagement will allow ODFW and the Tribe to share the importance of the ongoing fish, wildlife, and habitat work in the Coquille River watershed with the public.

The Tribe views ODFW's proposed CVWA project as an opportunity to build the momentum of ongoing projects in the Coquille River watershed and simultaneously expand on the promise of our historic Memorandum of Agreement. This project represents a significant opportunity to showcase Coquille River watershed stewardship that is unique to this area. As a co-manager with ODFW of fish, wildlife, and their habitats in Southwestern Oregon, the Coquille Indian Tribe enthusiastically supports this project proposal.

Sincerely,

John Ogan

John Ogan
Assistant Executive Director – Natural Resources
Coquille Indian Tribe

Appendix A.4

	<i>Coos Soil & Water Conservation District 379 North Adams Coquille, OR 97423 Phone/ 541-396-6879</i>
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Date: 12/27/2023

To: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Dear Grant Review Team,

The Coos Soil and Water Conservation District (Coos SWCD) has been invited to submit a letter of our support for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) efforts to expand the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area (CVWA) through acquisition of 528 acres. The lands under consideration, which are directly connected to the CVWA, are currently owned by the Bridges Foundation. *"The Bridges Foundation is a charitable trust located in Oregon, encourages scientific, technological and educational opportunities for youth; to improve the quality of life for those challenged with a disability; to protect unaltered ecosystems and mitigate environmental degradation when possible; and to value historical landmarks, cultural uniqueness, social interaction and economic opportunities"*. The Foundation acquired the lands from the previous interested seller ranch operations private landowner, for the purpose of securing it and eventually transferring it to a public entity who would enhance and protect the natural resources there. The Foundation has a history of working with "Working Lands" owners to provide a balanced approach to conservation. ODFW has been the target entity to transfer to because of the ability for the agency to continue balanced conservation, while providing agricultural resources as has been the track record on the CVWA to date.

Coos SWCD recognizes ODFW's intention with the acquisition of this property would be to conduct habitat improvements for native fish and wildlife including salmon and waterfowl. Coos SWCD recognizes the collaborative approach ODFW intends to implement continuing the practice of Working Landscapes/agricultural management where the property could contribute to the local economy through forage removal agreements with local farmers, as is currently being done under the existing ownership. Access for non-fee public use in Coos County has been noted as very limited by ODFW. The acquisitions will allow the lands to become open to more public uses (e.g. waterfowl hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking) and education in the future. Ownership of this property will also put ODFW in a position to better facilitate the replacement of the Coaledo tidegate located on Beaver Creek. This tidegate is pivotal to the Coaledo Drainage District's water management capability and fish passage to habitats upstream. Perhaps more importantly, the acquisition would put the agency in a position as a landowner to directly accommodate a large proportion of the Winter Lake Phase III "Working Lands" restoration project. The Coos SWCD & ODFW project technical team are leading

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development of Phase III of the Winter Lake Project (also referred to as the Coquille Working Landscapes Project). The project area is a vast ~1,800+ acre tidal floodplain which consists of multiple parcels of varying private and public ownership delineated into three separate management units under the Beaver Slough Drainage District (BSDD). Several of the parcels that ODFW proposes to acquire from the Bridges Foundation are included within the scope of Winter Lake Phase III project actions, which include habitat enhancement and water quality improvements such as channel creation and grading, culvert and bridge replacements, riparian planting, fencing, and off-channel watering for livestock. The Phase III project directly aligns with the SWCD mission of improving water quality and assisting with habitat conservation.

Winter Lake represents one of the largest contiguous land areas in the lower Coquille Basin with high potential for Oregon Coast (OC) coho overwinter habitat as well as high-quality pasture-raised beef production. The multi-phase, multi-agency Winter Lake project has been under development since 2009, and prior phases of the project (Phases I and II) which were implemented in 2017 and 2018 respectively, have already worked to restore over 400 acres of tidal wetlands on Units 1 & 2, rebuilding a failing tide gate infrastructure and improving drainage to help manage water levels for surrounding landowners.

The Phase III project overall is exemplary of the NOAA Coastal Resiliency Program Priorities and Objectives; specifically, sustaining productive fisheries and strengthening ecosystem resilience; fostering regionally important habitat restoration; enhancing community resilience to climate hazards and providing other co-benefits; as well as providing benefit to underserved communities. The Phase III Winter Lake project proposes to continue to augment strong efforts to restore fish access through infrastructure and tidal channel reconstruction, while maintaining traditional agricultural grazing use in summer months.

Coos SWCD has given the land acquisition proposal comprehensive consideration and with this letter acknowledges that the acquisition and proposed management strategy aligns with the Coos SWCD goals and mission for water quality and conservation in the Coquille Basin¹. Accordingly, the Coos SWCD is in favor of ODFW acquiring this land and managing it as described above. Your consideration of the land acquisition related long term benefits to the Coquille Estuary water quality and ecology is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Caley Sowers, District Manager

1. Coos SWCD is neutral concerning private and public land ownerships with support of mission statement goals unilaterally.



*Promoting Natural Resource Conservation and
Economic Stability in the Coquille Watershed*

National Ocean Service (NOS)
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Department of Commerce
Funding Opportunity: CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration
Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Competition
NOAA-NOS-OCM-2023-2008054

November 22, 2023

Re: Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon

Dear Selection Committee:

The Coquille Watershed Association (CoqWA) is pleased to support the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's 2024 application "Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River, Oregon" for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration BIL Competition. The acquisition will permanently protect 528 acres of critical freshwater tidal wetland habitat in the Coquille River. Lack of slow-water refugia and off-channel habitat is a critical limiting factor affecting Oregon Coast coho populations with the access and restoration of tidal wetlands being a top priority action for recovery. The property is notable for its size, its location within an existing network of conserved lands, and its restoration potential. With this acquisition, CoqWA will work with land managers to place a robust riparian buffer, providing a cold-water corridor from the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area to the Coquille River. This will provide critical habitat for salmonids and improve water quality for the mainstem Coquille.

Since 2008, organizations like mine have worked with other private, state, federal and tribal partners to protect and restore functionality of tidal wetlands along the Coquille River. Protecting and restoring land, coupled with working agricultural landscapes, provides a meaningful opportunity for recovery of the coho population, further support Chinook salmon recovery, and leverage the building blocks of existing habitat to maximize benefits to the fish and local communities. In addition to the fish benefits, the Coquille River and this property are known for its winter use by migratory waterfowl; approximately 50% of the Oregon Coast's wintering waterfowl overwinter in the Coquille River valley. Winter Lake is home to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Coquille Valley Wildlife Management Area, the largest public recreation site in the lower Coquille. This acquisition will increase access to the plentiful fish and wildlife opportunities the Lower Coquille River offers.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions about the Coquille Watershed Association's support of the Coquille Valley acquisition project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Julie Huff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Huff
Monitoring Program Coordinator

Coquille Watershed Association
390 N. Central Blvd., Coquille, OR 97423
coquillewatershed.org



PACIFIC BIRDS

HABITAT JOINT VENTURE

Creating the Ideal Environment for Bird Habitat Conservation

December 22, 2023

Re: Support for Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River acquisition project

Dear Review Committee,

Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture (Pacific Birds) offers strong support for the Conserving Tidal Wetlands in the Coquille River acquisition project submitted by Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development/ Oregon Coastal Management Program.

Migratory Bird Joint Ventures are tasked with conserving habitat for migratory birds across North America. Pacific Birds' mission is to create the ideal environment for bird habitat conservation. Coastal habitats are a focal conservation priority for Pacific Birds, due to the historical loss of coastal habitats, their importance on the landscape, their role in supporting the Pacific Flyway, and the urgent need for protection and restoration.

The Coquille Valley is one of the most important waterfowl and shorebird areas between San Francisco Bay and the Columbia River. The acquisition project proposes to protect 528 acres and will increase the protected tidal wetland in Coquille Bay by 3%. The restoration and conservation efforts outlined in the project proposal are aimed at enhancing habitat complexity, improving water quality, and fostering biodiversity, which are well-aligned with the goals and priorities of Pacific Birds.

The aim to incorporate acquired land into the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Coquille Valley Wildlife Area and the commitment to public access for recreational and educational opportunities, and Tribal access to traditional foods and resources, are highly valued by Pacific Birds for fostering inclusivity of use in coastal habitats. Additionally, the vital ecosystem benefits of carbon sequestration, mitigation of flood waters, and wildfire refugia will increase after restoration.

Projects of this size are complex, requiring an alignment of timing, collaboration, and significant funds to accomplish. Over \$1.3 million from a private donor will support this project and over \$3M has already been raised to support restoration actions. Pacific Birds strongly supports additional investments needed to conserve tidal wetlands in the Coquille Valley. This project represents an opportunity to restore vital ecosystems, enrich communities through enhanced access to nature, and increase resilience in coastal systems for wildlife and people.

Thank you for your consideration of this important restoration opportunity.

Sincerely,

Monica Iglecia
U.S. Coordinator
Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture
monica_iglecia@pacificbirds.org

Dear ODFW Staff and Commission Members,

I am an avid sportsman who lives in Coos Bay and works in Coquille. I would like to express my wholehearted support for ODFW expanding the Coquille Wildlife Area by acquiring the land currently owned by the Bridges Foundation.

I grew up in a low-income, non-landowning household and have never had access to private land for fishing and hunting. Therefore, I have always relied heavily on public land for fishing, hunting, and recreational opportunities. I strongly believe in the American model of wildlife management and the opportunities provided by public land, especially on our ODFW wildlife areas.

The Coquille Basin has an abundance of wetlands and waterfowl, but very little public land compared to other coastal river basins. Because of this, the Coquille Wildlife Area is incredibly important for the vast majority of waterfowl hunters in the area who do not own land or have the means to afford expensive hunting leases on private lands. However, waterfowl hunting often becomes crowded at the wildlife area due to its importance and popularity. Expanding the wildlife area by acquiring the adjacent parcels of land from the Bridges Foundation would increase the area available to local hunters and support more waterfowl production.

In addition to hunting, the Coquille Wildlife Area is popular for wildlife viewing, fishing, hiking, and kayaking. The wildlife area is also incredibly important for fish and wildlife conservation. The winter lake tidal restoration project on the wildlife area has benefitted production of coho salmon, an important sport fishery in the Coquille Basin. Acquiring the land from the Bridges foundation would facilitate a tidegate replacement and restoration project in the Beaver Creek drainage. This would further boost coho salmon production.

In the past few years, there has been a local movement to increase access to public land. The City of Coquille has expanded their riverwalk along the Coquille River and constructed hiking and biking trails on the city-owned "Hundred Acre Wood". Increasing the size of the Coquille Wildlife Area will complement this initiative that is strongly supported by local citizens.

In conclusion, I strongly encourage ODFW to expand the Coquille Wildlife Area to benefit local hunters, anglers, and recreationists. This will benefit me in addition to hundreds of community members who use the wildlife area every year.

Sincerely,

Andrew Chione

12/29/2023