



June 5, 2020

Dear Members of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Thank you for the opportunity to share an update with you from the Oregon Conservation Partnership. During the last three months of the pandemic we have had to learn how to do business remotely, in a new way, while still building our programs and providing our 145 member entities the support they need to continue moving forward under current difficulties and change that has become a moving target.

We have worked together to maintain communication with our members through the use of virtual meeting programs, expanded social media, and increased check-in calls through the public health crisis and economic downturn. Our monthly webinars have concentrated on managing diminishing finances during the pandemic, helping our members access programs under the CARES Act and other emerging programs, and bringing members together to share stories and for how they are coping and building resilience. As we approach reopening strategies, we have scheduled a webinar later this month on guidelines for preparing to reopen and we have provided a detailed template to our members on reopening procedures.

Despite the difficult conditions of the pandemic, our members continue to pursue their work with social distancing and other safety protections to carry out conservation programs, providing a safe working environment for both employees and our constituents. Landowners and customers can make appointments for individual necessary consultations that cannot be handled remotely, and field work can continue when the employee can meet the customer with social distancing. Field staff continue to monitor conservation properties and organizations are finding creative ways to convene their supporters remotely with on-line galas, nature trivia nights and webinars. We have not stopped working; we are just working in a different way.

Now, more than ever, the four executive directors of our associations are hands on with our membership, working daily to serve Oregon's conservation needs. As a team working together, we share ideas and tools and research the needs of our members to keep the workflow moving while providing professional and emotional support to the staff and leadership of watershed councils, land trusts and districts. We know we have several months ahead of us to continue in this environment.

We recently conducted a survey to gauge the many ways in which the pandemic restrictions have affected our organizations. The survey data from 70 responses clearly shows that councils, land trusts and conservation districts have been negatively impacted by the challenges of social distancing requirements, reduced access to field work sites and outreach events, slowdowns in permitting and other processes. Accordingly, our work in conservation often takes longer,

with increased costs exceeding original plans and estimates. OWEB has received the survey results and we will provide an executive summary analysis of the data in the near future.

We empathize with your need to make some exceedingly difficult funding decisions. We as the partnership are identifying areas where we can make some cuts for the remainder of this year and some cuts in the coming calendar year as well. We appreciate your working with us to keep our organizations strong by providing enough base funding to allow us to continue supporting our members' needs to maintain and deliver Oregon's conservation programs. We support OWEB staff's recommendation of Option C as presented to the Board.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

Sincerely,

Jan Lee, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts



Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trust



Jeremy Baker, President, Oregon Conservation Education & Assistance Network



Vanessa Green, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils

