

Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources,

Funding is needed for the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Native Plant Conservation Program (NPCP). Since its inception, the NPCP has never received adequate funding from the State of Oregon to operate and fulfill its legislatively-mandated duties. And at this time, there is still no State funding for the NPCP in the current Governor's Recommended Budget (SB 5502).

Without State funding for the Native Plant Conservation Program:

1. The NPCP loses out on the opportunity for requesting matching Federal funds for species and projects affecting Federally-listed plant species that are also State-listed. While Federal funds received can only be used on Federally-listed plant species and projects associated with those species, they are a boon to the program in terms of helping it fulfill its duties. Furthermore, without some level of State funding, those plant species and projects that involve State-listed only species are not receiving the attention that is needed by the NPCP.

2. At least one example of a project that NPSO was directly involved in getting State funding for specifically during a past budget cycle (July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2019) was for updating the State-listing status of plant species that are considered threatened or endangered species. At this time, all that is left is for the rulemaking process to be completed. The NPCP made their recommendations for updating the State list in 2018 and received (and closed) public comments in January 2019. If you don't know, this critical component of plant conservation has not been updated since its original iteration was completed in 1988 even though, by law (ORS 496.176(8)), it is to be periodically reviewed every 5-years. Without State funding, this cannot be completed. Additionally, since this work was not completed under the last budget cycle (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021), that leaves the existing work that was completed in 2018 as stale and already in need of updating.

3. Another, equally critical role of the NPCP is to provide consultation and scientific take and recovery permits for projects involving State-listed threatened and endangered plants. Projects requiring said permits include various development, mitigation, research, and recovery projects, all of which get reviewed by NPCP staff and thus require a considerable level of time for review and consultation of permit applications. At this time, these projects (and permit applications) are not being reviewed thus putting both projects and species recovery efforts in serious jeopardy. Without these permits, many projects and their associated recovery efforts simply cannot move forward.

4. Yet another critical role of the NPCP is to provide comments on behalf of the citizens of Oregon on projects proposed on public lands and how they may impact native plant conservation and State-listed species. Examples of such projects include, but are not necessarily limited to, transmission lines, natural gas lines, transportation projects (road, rail, airline), wind and/or solar farms, port improvement projects, etc., along with the infrastructure associated with these projects. At this time, no comments are being provided on what can only be assumed is due to a lack of funding. At least one recent example sent by an NPSO member in early August 2019 requested that NPCP provide comments on the proposed B2H mega-transmission line. No response was ever sent to this person and no comments were made on the project.

5. Lastly, NPCP assists State and local government agencies with the management of State-protected plant populations found on their land and conducts research to enhance protected plant species recovery efforts. Without funding, this critical work does not happen.

Please restore State funds to NPCP to the greatest extent possible.

Sincerely,

Jason Clinch
R&E Committee Chair, Native Plant Society of Oregon