

**Oregon Water Conservation & Stream
Restoration Program HB3142/3003**

Central Oregon Cities Organization
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Purpose: Studies in the past several years have identified proven, scientifically backed tools that will make a difference for ecological flows in critical tributaries, stabilization of groundwater levels and improved riparian area health in Central, Southern and Eastern Oregon. Solutions will address the critical and growing problem of overpopulation of Juniper trees and their voracious consumption of water.

Background: Dozens of studies over the past forty years have indicated the negative impact that fast-growing invasive Junipers have had on watersheds, stream flows, sage grouse habit, etc. Juniper concentrations have grown by 1000% in the region in the past 60 years. As few as 9-17 Juniper trees per-acre can consume 100% of the annual precipitation in a given year, eliminating any water for other species, natural habitat, groundwater accumulation, or stream/spring flow.

For instance, in 1986 researcher Breanna Sabin wrote that: “A *tenfold expansion of western juniper (Juniperus occidentalis spp. occidentalis) into the sagebrush steppe has led to the degradation of the economic and ecological potential of these landscapes.*” -- Breanna Sabin, June 6 2008. *The Relationship Between Allometric Variables and Biomass in Western Juniper (Juniperus occidentalis)*

Numerous scientific studies demonstrate that restoration to historical levels of Juniper in critical portions of the basins would have a positive impact on water levels, ecological health, and stream flows.

In 2020, OSU reported: “*Analysis indicated that juniper reduction significantly increased late season spring flow by 225 percent.*”

Proposal: Expand current Juniper treatment efforts to **add a specific focus on reducing unnatural and excessive water consumption by invasive Junipers.** Target specific riparian areas, critical streams and tributaries, and areas of particular groundwater concern or areas where agricultural or other efforts are being restricted. Connect with biomass energy production and the state tax credit to produce a sustainable program and contribute to wildfire threat reduction. The program would be a direct funding allocation to the local entities, with funds distributed by the state to these entities within 60 days of passage of the legislation.

- 1) Help conserve water / restore streams and groundwater resources/counter drought impacts,
- 2) Improve habitat for endangered sage grouse and other species,
- 3) Provide a local source of renewable energy, utilizing Oregon’s current renewable energy standards, and

- 4) Create jobs and economic benefits (to the Juniper treatment teams as well as for farmers, agricultural interests, etc.).

Water Conservation & Stream Restoration Act of 2023

Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Wheeler County may work in coordination with local city/county organizations and irrigation districts, Oregon State University, etc. to identify area where Juniper thinning could make the most impact on riparian areas, water flows/levels in threatened tributaries/streams, rivers, groundwater areas, etc.

Receiving organization contracts with:

- 1) Regional contractors engage in thinning projects in targeted areas
- 2) Local organization to track and measure progress and outcomes (increased flows/water levels)

Receiving organization may retain up to 8% to cover administrative costs for the project. Monitoring contract costs come from total allocation (not the administrative holdback).

Extend existing state biomass tax credit for utilities which purchase biomass power produced in the region by the woody biomass that comes from the target areas.

Local organizations shall work with their Local Workforce Board, BOLI, HECC and other state organizations to develop a workforce development and apprenticeship program and shall apply for funding under the Future Ready Oregon program. Receiving organization works with a tracking/monitoring organization to develop quarterly and annual reports to outline progress made, data collected, jobs created, economic impact, etc. and shall report this information to the WRD, OWEB and the appropriate legislative committees.

2 Year "Quick Start" Allocation:

- \$1,750,000 for providing a grant to a soil and water conservation district located in Crook County.
- \$1,250,000 for providing a grant to a soil and water conservation district located in Jefferson County.
- \$1,000,000 for providing a grant to a soil and water conservation district located in Klamath County.
- \$500,000 for providing a grant to a soil and water conservation district located in Deschutes County.
- \$2,500,000 for providing a grant to soil and water conservation district located in Harney County.
- \$1,000,000 for providing a grant to a soil and water conservation district located in Lake County.
- \$1,000,000 for providing a grant to Wheeler County.

\$800,000 for OSU for tracking/reporting/monitoring support

Allocated by DAS within 60 days (Project Turnkey or Future Ready (SB1545, Section 3) model) to: SWCDs and Wheeler County.

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