



## Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council

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Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are writing as a grantee of one of the 2021 Post-Fire Landscape Recovery Grants provided by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). The Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council (LCUWC) has been the beneficiary of multiple OWEB grants for many years. We appreciate the amazing opportunities to utilize this funding to assist the private landowners with improving and recovering the natural resources in Lake County at a meaningful scale.

### **Background**

The 2022 Oregon Legislative Session appropriated OWEB funding to provide financial assistance to support natural resource restoration and recovery in areas impacted during the 2021 fire season. The first grant cycle opened September 1, 2022 and closed 5pm October 20, 2022. Award decisions were announced on December 27, 2022. Initially OWEB awarded the LCUWC \$2.5 million with a deadline of June 2025 to complete all objectives. This initial timeline allowed for thorough analysis and validation of the most effective and efficient use of the appropriated funds to assist in the recovery of the landscapes impacted during the 2021 fire season.

On February 3, 2023 OWEB staff (as the fiscal proxy to these legislatively appropriated recovery funds) contacted LCUWC to relay information about the Governor's budget and the update about the carry forward for the 2021 Post-Fire recovery grants into the next fiscal biennium. LCUWC was updated on an adjusted timeline such that objectives of the awarded funding must be completed by June 30, 2023. This funding timeline update removed 24 of the initial 30 months allocated towards accomplishing this critical wildfire recovery work; during the first month following award announcement (Jan. 2023), and prior to the initial funding timeline update (Feb. 3, 2023), the LCUWC had worked diligently to begin the process of this critical wildfire recovery work. On March 3, 2023 an additional timeline update was provided that a 'carry-over' or extension into the 2023-2025 biennium had "high assurance."

Aside from severe logistic inadequacies given the implementation timeline, the biggest concern we as the LCUWC must contend with, are the negative impacts to our valued relationships with private landowners and contractors. It has taken the LCUWC decades to build trust and confidence in these relationships. Currently, due to the back-and-forth changes of the implementation timeline associated with the legislative decisions on the finances of this recovery grant, we are unable to commit to many of the goals for post-fire recovery, nor commit to contracts with our vendors based on our initially approved and funded grant proposal. We are running out of time to secure the workforce needed to meet these objectives without a static decision on funding carry-over or extension into the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium by the Oregon Legislature.

The Cougar Peak and Patton Meadow Wildfires occurred in the late-summer/early-fall of 2021; we are nearly two and a half years post-incident(s), with minimal recovery addressed on the private lands. The emergency response grants addressed only 2.2% of the private land impacted by these wildfires and this Post-Fire Landscape Recovery grant cannot be implemented effectively or efficiently with 3 months' time, which is further compounded by the 2022-2023 winter snowpack. The 2022-2023 winter snowpack will significantly hamper the implementation window over the forecasted remaining 3 months of funding availability.

Implementation constraints associated with limited access, and the above average snowpack will cause further degradation to these landscapes during the 2023 (and future) runoff period(s). The erosion and soil loss associated with the 2023 winter runoff period, will only add to the needed recovery actions within these landscapes, which will be in-addition-to the original scope of work associated with the initial grant proposal. Post-Fire Landscape Recovery will take many years to accomplish and decision makers in our Oregon Legislature are not allowing for realistic timelines or budgets to address this catastrophic natural resource issue.

Concerns (cause)	Implications (effect)
Landowner and contractor outreach conducted between Dec. 27, 2022 and Feb. 3, 2023	Relationship for current and future work due to moving target of work deadline
Funding timeline uncertainty – changes to timeline as of Feb. 3, 2023	Continued and further ecological degradation
OWEB advised to attempt completion of original scope of work with new funding deadline (Jun. 30, 2023)	Lessened efficiency and effectiveness of treatment; contractor relationship negatively impacted with workload forecasting; further negative impacts to landowner relationships through inefficient use of tax dollars
Adjusting scope of work for new timeline of Jun. 30, 2023	May require an additional technical review for associated adjustment; further delay recovery actions; consume additional personnel capacity and time; impact landowner and contractor relationships as activities and scale of work has changed
March 3, 2023 deadline extension update (extension to original deadline of June 2025)	Required LCUWC to contact once again the landowners and contractors on work changes, and timelines; continued ecological degradation via inaction towards fire recovery
As of April 11, 2023 no confirmation of funding deadline (with or without funding extension) has been given	LCUWC, landowners, and 2021 wildfire footprints have missed original treatment actions (identified for Feb-March 2023) given timeline of funding uncertainty (and corresponding changes to the original scope of work)
Fiscal impacts to the original work, given shortened implementation window	May require an additional technical review for changes to the original scope of work given timeline changes impacting action costs
Non-carry over, or lack of funding extension may necessitate scope of work amendments requiring an additional technical review	Current and future relationships with landowners and contractors impacted (LCUWC inability to follow through with initial an ensuing project updates); significantly impedes the ability carry out recovery actions; ecological impacts are compounded given snowpack and associated runoff and erosion; implementation window is non-feasible given snowpack from 2023-2023 winter

Please allow for the reallocation of funds in OWEB’s 2023-2025 budget for ongoing wildfire restoration work and please support OWEB’s agency capacity to oversee the completion of these critical landscape level projects.

Respectfully,



Tom O’Leary: Chairman of the Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council Board of Directors