

Salmon River Estuary Restoration Briefing Paper

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Meeting

Siuslaw National Forest

January 28, 2015

The Siuslaw National Forest would like to acknowledge the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) for supporting the restoration efforts in the Salmon River estuary. The Salmon River estuary experienced a series of land acquisition and intertidal marsh restoration projects from 1978 to 1996. Land acquisition continued under the Cascade Head Scenic Research Area Act until 2001, but restoration efforts stalled in 1996, both funding and the necessary support to proceed with restoration in this area had diminished. In 2006 the Siuslaw National Forest pursued a local, community based and student led effort, known as a planning charrette, to reignite restoration efforts in the Salmon River estuary. Once the 6 week student charrette process was complete, OWEB stepped in, applying for USFWS National Coastal Wetland Grant funding on our behalf. OWEB provided the essential state funding as match, building partnership with the Oregon Department of State Lands and as a result secured 1.3 million dollars to continue with the more complex restoration elements that remained in the Salmon River estuary. Each restoration area identified through the student charrette effort, with support of the local constituents, was specified for funding in the National Coastal Wetland Grant. This placed the Siuslaw National Forest in a position to implement all of the remaining restoration elements, with full community support and the financial means to do so.

Another key factor in the success of the restoration efforts from 2007 to present was the financial flexibility integrated into the granting process between OWEB, the Salmon Drift Creek Watershed Council and the National Wetland Conservation Grant program. The National Coastal Wetland Grant program has significant additional flexibility in the length of the granting cycle (i.e., 5 years with a 2-year grant extension, as opposed to 1 year) and year-to-year flexibility in the funded projects within the identified area. Year-to-year flexibility provided an opportunity to move funds between projects, if for instance in one project area we were over budget, because we encountered something that could not have been predicted, and under budget in another area. The restoration projects from 1978-1996 consisted of dike and tidegate removal, all easily completed within a single summer 6-week work interval. The restoration projects from 2007-2014 were more involved and complex, including dismantling a housing development and an amusement park built directly on tidal marsh. Such projects required maximum flexibility in the grant allocation process and year-to-year planning, and implementation was often broken into phases due to the magnitude of the work required (i.e., moving 27,000 cubic yards in a 6-week summer work window during 3 summer periods).

Looking forward, there may not be another place quite like the Salmon River estuary, but it is our belief that there is still a great deal to learn from this area, knowledge that will inform the next 40 years of restoration work like this.