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## **Oregon legislature approves new \$5 million fund to protect community drinking water**

Conservation groups are celebrating a big win in the Oregon legislature – a new \$5 million fund that will help communities protect their source drinking water.

Communities on the Oregon Coast are particularly interested in acquiring the forested lands that supply their drinking water. Protecting the streams, creeks and rivers that supply a community's drinking water is an incredibly effective way to ensure high quality and reliable quantities of clean drinking water to communities and water suppliers. The new fund will be administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and will allow Oregon to access hundreds of millions in federal matching funds.

"This program is well poised to allow communities to decide how the forests providing their drinking water are managed and cared for," said Daniel Wear, forest program manager for Sustainable Northwest's private forests initiative. "Land ownership is an effective way to connect communities to the water they rely on for daily life."

"This new fund opens up hundreds of millions in federal matching funds for Oregon communities to protect watersheds and secure safe and clean drinking water," said Kelley Beamer, executive director of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts. "Thank you to our legislative champions, Reps. Helm and Owens, for prioritizing this new grant program and working to expand access to clean, reliable, and affordable drinking water across the state."

This funding will provide \$4 million for communities to acquire land or purchase conservation easements on properties, while also establishing a \$1 million fund for projects to apply for loan repayment on projects that would have previously qualified for this funding.

The following communities and water districts are just a few of the many poised to benefit from the new fund:

- **Lincoln City Water District** received a Drinking Water Source Protection grant from the Oregon Department of Health (OHA) and plans to move forward with identification of strategic land acquisition opportunities in the near future.
- **Neahkahnie Water District** will be buying property containing multiple wells providing the community's drinking water supply. This community would benefit from loan reimbursement from this acquisition project.
- **Neskowin Water District** will be making several acquisitions to secure full ownership of their watershed through agreements with willing landowners in the coming years.
- **Newport** intends to own the entire watershed to provide community benefits in the future. The city has previously inquired about acquiring land from willing landowners within the watershed; however, the prices were too high to secure agreements.
- **Port Orford** is finalizing a Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan from Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and working to identify opportunities for further conservation of watershed lands. Funding would allow them to purchase strategic properties from willing landowners within their Drinking Water Source Area without taking on further debt.
- **Reedsport** owns a majority of the property surrounding Clear Lake, their Source Drinking Water Area. They intend to acquire a remaining 330-acre parcel from a willing landowner to continue to provide clean drinking water to residents.
- **Rhododendron Water Association** holds a \$175,000 loan (a \$75,000 bridge loan and \$100,000 DWSP loan from OHA) to protect water quality through a Riparian Protection Agreement with a private landowner. Funding will allow the association to pay off this loan and invest in other priority infrastructure needs.

### **About the Coalition for Oregon Land Trusts**

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) serves and strengthens the land trust community in Oregon. At COLT, we build connections and advance policies that help protect our natural world—our water, wildlife and open space—for all people, forever. This work helps our coalition members—30 conservation organizations around the state—do what they do best: protect wildlife and wild places, defend working farms and forests, provide recreation and parks, drive climate solutions and science, champion clean water for all and engage communities to protect our natural world.

### **About Sustainable Northwest**

At Sustainable Northwest, we believe healthy, working lands are good for nature, people and local economies. We partner with rural communities and Tribal nations to solve natural resource challenges and build economic opportunities. Founded in 1994, our work focuses on working lands -- forests, farms, and ranches. We promote healthy working lands, clean energy, smart water use, and markets for sustainable wood products throughout the greater Northwest. Through this broad spectrum of work, we help to ensure both rural communities and urban centers have healthy landscapes, resilient economies, and engaged communities. We work on the ground in communities, collaborating to create long-term benefits.