Pacific Northwest Oak Alliance

PACIFIC BIRDS HABITAT JOINT VENTURE

Prairie, Oaks, and People: A Resource Brief for Policy Makers and Legislators

Oak and prairie ecosystems are among the Pacific Northwest's most ecologically and culturally significant landscapes. They provide key ecosystem services and resources to landowners and local communities and are drought-tolerant and fire-adapted.

The Prairie, Oaks, and People Investment Strategy offers a ready-to-implement five-year strategy, with $310.9 million of shovel-ready projects identified by robust regional partnerships. This effort brings together Tribes, conservation groups, private landowners, and public agencies in a nonpartisan commitment to conserving these landscapes. Policymakers have an opportunity to support this collaborative approach and deliver tangible benefits across the region.

Why Act Now?

1. **Immediate Impact:** These investments will streamline and catalyze the implementation of ready-to-implement projects that are identified as priorities by local communities.
2. **Nonpartisan Appeal:** This plan addresses shared priorities by combining conservation with infrastructure protection, disaster risk reduction, economic development, and benefits for rural landowners, Indigenous and local communities, and urban stakeholders alike.
3. **Wildfire Risk Reduction:** Restoring fire-adapted oak and prairie ecosystems reduces wildfire risks, supports water retention, and enhances carbon sequestration—key natural disaster risk reduction goals**.**
4. **Landowner Benefits:** Landowners gain direct economic advantages through financial incentives for restoration activities and conservation easements, land-based benefits such as decreased likelihood of disaster through reduced wildfire risk, improved soil and water quality, and improved grazing and sustainable timber harvest opportunities.
5. **Cultural and Economic Value:** Oak and prairie habitats hold deep cultural significance for Indigenous communities and they offer opportunities for recreation, subsistence, and compatible working lands.
6. **Cost-Effectiveness:** Proactive investment in ecosystem conservation and restoration is far less expensive than addressing crises caused by extreme wildfires, rapid expansion of invasive species, and endangered species litigation.

A Call for Visionary Leadership

Policymakers have a unique opportunity to champion the Prairie, Oaks, and People Investment Strategy by supporting funding, enacting legislation, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. This Strategy is ready for implementation, with projects and partnerships prepared to put $310.9 million into action. By prioritizing oak and prairie ecosystems, you can help secure a future where biodiversity, more durable infrastructure, wildfire risk reduction, and community well-being coexist.

Policy Priorities and Impact Opportunities

1. Ecosystem Restoration and Wildfire Risk Reduction
Investment Need: $182.4 million
Goal: Restore 60,000 acres through activities like fuels reduction, prescribed fire, and weed control.
Policy Actions:

- Increase funding for state and federal programs supporting active restoration.
- Establish funding sideboards to ensure wildfire preparedness and fuels reduction programs are aligned with restoration goals.
- Support and fund efforts that reduce barriers to prescribed fire activities.
- Ensure state forest practice rules allow and encourage landowners to replant oak seedlings after commercial conifer harvest where oak historically occurred.

2. Land Protection Through Easements and Acquisitions
Investment Need: $102.1 million
Goal: Protect 10,200 acres through fee-title acquisitions and conservation easements.
Policy Actions:

- Expand state funding for land conservation and tax incentives and easement programs that reward landowners for conservation efforts.
- Remove policy barriers to successful implementation of existing land protection funding programs in Oregon.

3. Community and Capacity Building
Investment Need: $17.2 million
Goal: Strengthen public engagement, foster local leadership, build capacity, and grow partnerships.
Policy Actions:

- Invest in education and outreach to inform landowners and communities about the benefits of conservation and opportunities to engage.
- Invest in workforce training programs that prepare local communities for sustainable employment in restoration projects.
- Create programs that foster collaboration between Tribes, non-profits, and local agencies to maximize impact.

4. Stabilize At-Risk Species Populations
Investment Need: $9.2 million
Goal: Support species-specific research, including monitoring for at-risk and keystone species.
Policy Actions:

- Allocate resources for monitoring and recovery of at-risk species.
- Promote cross-jurisdictional collaboration for species conservation efforts.
- Ensure policies uphold environmental regulations.

For more information, visit oakalliance.org/investment-strategy.