



Staff Report

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Date: 4/22/2024
Item #:

TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Keith Stahley, City Manager
FROM: Brian D. Martin, PE, Public Works Director

SUBJECT:

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Restoration Grant Application for continuing restoration work in Minto Island Conservation Area.

Ward(s): All Wards
Councilor(s): All Councilors
Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods
Result Area(s): Natural Environment Stewardship

SUMMARY:

2024 is the fifth and final year of grant funding received under the Willamette Mainstem Anchor Habitat Investments Program for implementation of the Minto Island Conservation Area (MICA) Phase 3 restoration project. Despite nearly five years of repeated treatment of invasive plants and installation of over 75,000 native plants in this 48-acre area, it has become clear that the work to restore native floodplain forest and shrub habitat is far from over. Aggressive invasive plants continue to threaten successful establishment of native vegetation and floodplain functions. An Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Open Solicitation Restoration grant is being sought to address this issue. If awarded, the funds will allow the City to continue restoration work for an additional five years, slightly expand the treatment area, and adapt additional methods to better address site conditions.

ISSUE:

Shall City Council authorize the City Manager to apply for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Restoration Grant and, if successful, enter into an agreement with OWEB to accept the grant funds?"

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the City Manager to apply for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)

Restoration Grant and, if successful, enter into an agreement with OWEB to accept the grant funds.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

- OWEB's Open Solicitation grant program provides financial support to assist in safeguarding and restoring healthy watersheds and native habitats through a range of grant types, including: Restoration, Technical Assistance, Land and Water Acquisition, Monitoring, Stakeholder Engagement, and Small Grants.
- The OWEB Open Solicitation Restoration program provides grants for watershed projects that protect or restore watershed functions. Minto Island Conservation Area is an eligible location for this grant source.
- For OWEB's current spring Open Solicitation (Attachment 1), staff are preparing two grant applications seeking funding for different purposes: (1) a Restoration Grant for ongoing restoration work in MICA; and (2) a Technical Assistance Grant for a fish passage study. These grants operate from separate funding pools and are assessed based on different criteria; thus, the two grant applications will not be in competition for funding. This report focuses on the OWEB Restoration Grant application for continued restoration of the MICA Phase 3 (West Forest) Restoration Area (Attachment 2). A second report will be provided to Council for the fish passage study grant.
- The MICA Phase 3 (West Forest) Restoration Area continues to be challenged by aggressive non-native invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry and reed canary grass that can quickly out-compete newly installed native plants. Additional work is needed at this site to control these invasive plants and increase native plant abundance.
- If funding is awarded, the City will work with a qualified restoration contractor who has previously conducted this type of work on other public lands in the Willamette Valley.
- The estimated project cost is \$687,500 over five years, of which \$550,000 will be requested from OWEB. The grant application requires a minimum match of 25%, which can be provided as any combination of cash or in-kind contribution. The City's match of \$137,500 will be provided by the City in the form of in-kind contribution of staff time and resources, including project management, grant administration, restoration planning and technical guidance, agency coordination, environmental compliance and monitoring, site access and logistics, and public outreach.
- Grant applications are due to OWEB on April 29, 2024, and the funding decision is expect to be made by Fall 2024.

BACKGROUND:

The 307-acre Minto Island Conservation Area was acquired by the City in 2013 with Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program funds. A *Minto Island Conservation Area Management and Conservation Plan* was developed and adopted by the City 2015. This plan provides a blueprint for managing and restoring the conservation area's natural resources and describes desired future conditions. Phase 1 restoration was implemented between 2016 to 2020 and focused on the east side forested floodplain between the paved trail and Willamette Slough. Phase 2 restoration was implemented between 2020

to 2023 and focused on controlling the aquatic invasive plant *Ludwigia* in Willamette Slough. Phase 3 began in 2019 and is the subject of the current funding request. This area includes approximately 48 -acres along the western and southern sides of MICA.

The Phase 3 restoration project focuses on enhancing, restoring, and expanding the riparian floodplain forest and seasonally inundated wetland habitats on the west side of the conservation area adjacent to the Willamette River. The successful project will ensure that the project site is a dependable source of large woody debris for the Willamette River into the future while continuing to provide high flow refugia to native fish. The first five years of this project were funded by grants from Bonneville Power Administration and Meyer Memorial Trust and focused on gaining control of the vast monocultures of invasive blackberry and reed canary grass within approximately 27.5 acres of the site.

Over 75,000 native plants have been installed in the Phase 3 area between 2020 to 2024; however, survival rates of these plants have been low due to challenging site conditions and continued pressure from invasive plants. With the 2019 grant funding ending, additional funding is needed to continue to open up space for native plants to establish and grow. The successful restoration of this area requires additional weed control and planting of native vegetation to improve habitat conditions and riparian functioning as well as allow for access to future restoration work areas.

Robert D. Chandler, PhD, PE
Assistant Public Works Director

Attachments:

1. OWEB Notice of Funding Opportunity
2. MICA Restoration Phases Map