

OCEAN and Partners

Executive Summary - Riparian Practitioner Session Held April 16, 2018

Based on a full report prepared by Consultants Amy Stork and Allison Handler

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Overview

On Monday, April 16, 2018, the Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network (OCEAN), in partnership with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), hosted a day-long session for riparian restoration practitioners from throughout Oregon. The objectives for the day included:

- Increase participants' connection to each other and the work.
- Explore key programmatic, organizational, and sector-wide issues and opportunities for riparian restoration and protection in Oregon.

Approximately 85 participants attended the session, held at the Seaside Convention Center. The event was held the day before the annual CONNECT conference. The session was facilitated by consultants Amy Stork and Allison Handler of Solid Ground Consulting.

This executive summary provides an overview of the day. The full report, which summarizes the components of the day and participant responses, is available from the event organizers.

Discussion topics

- **Landowner outreach.** After introductions, the day launched with a presentation by Dr. Jon Souder, Assistant Professor at Oregon State University, Forest Watershed Extension Specialist and Watersheds Research Cooperative (WRC) Director. The presentation focused on understanding landowner motivations, social networks in communities, and effective engagement techniques. Following the presentation, participants were divided into groups, and rotated between stations where they discussed topics and questions related to the presentation.



- **Technical issues and adaptations in riparian restoration.** Participants had the opportunity to choose three out of eight discussion topics: Plant sources, plant density, planting crews, herbicides, effectiveness monitoring, positioning landowners for post-project success, supporting landowner “do it yourself” projects, and leveraging project-specific partnerships.
- **Organizational capacity.** Participants divided up according to the size/type/geography of their organizations: SWCDs with more than 10 staff with a tax base; SWCDs with fewer than 10 staff with a tax base; SWCDs with no tax base; Watershed Councils (East side); Watershed Councils (West side); and agency staff. The discussion included: How can we build institutional knowledge? How can we attract and retain the right staff? How can our board evolve? How else can we best serve our community?
- **Big picture ideas for evolution of the sector.** Participants were asked to respond to several questions about the evolution of the sector: What can funders, agencies, and partners do to support success and innovation? What programmatic and policy improvements would increase impact and efficiency? How can we balance reactive / opportunistic projects with the need to be proactive / strategic? What would be needed to support riparian protection efforts, rather than only do riparian restoration?

Key themes

Woven throughout all the topics covered, several themes stand out:

- **Desire to connect with peers.** Evaluations indicate that the day was successful, and participants are eager to continue to gather for shared learning experiences.
- **Desire to share ideas and innovations.** Practitioners have many ideas for how to improve programs and projects, from outreach to monitoring. The opportunity to share is very valuable.
- **Potential for greater collaboration.** Whether it’s practitioner to practitioner, organization to organization, or with funders and agencies, participants in this session see the potential for collaboration to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the sector.
- **Desire to focus more on landowner relationships.** Trust and relationships are critical to success in engaging landowners and getting their long-term buy-in. Practitioners strongly desire funders to enable program success by funding activities directed at building relationships with landowners.
- **Need for monitoring.** In every topic area, practitioners emphasized the need to be able to better plan for and collect data.
- **Project time scales.** Practitioners emphasize the discrepancies between funding timescales and true project time scales.
- **Sector-wide capacity needs.** Research leading into the session and feedback at the session highlight the strengths, challenges, and gaps in the voluntary conservation sector. This document closes with a discussion of the potential for a more comprehensive sector-wide capacity-building approach.



Facilitator comments and recommendations

The strong energy and passion in the riparian practitioner group is evidenced by participation from throughout the state and by positive participant evaluations. We believe that programming that is responsive to the needs of the group will continue to be well-received. Below we offer ideas for both near-term and more comprehensive approaches to building capacity for these practitioners specifically, and more generally for all organizations working on voluntary conservation on private lands.

Immediate follow up from April 2018 event

- Send this executive summary and the full report to the participant group, including those who registered, but were unable to attend.
- Consider sending a “funder/agency response” that acknowledges the value of the input, and indicates how funders and agencies will process the ideas that were presented.
- Consider selecting a few ideas generated at the session (such as a follow-up training that was suggested or changes to how small grants can be used) and implementing rapidly.

Future trainings

Based on our experience and feedback from participants, the following ideas may be worth consideration.

- **Narrower focus.** More narrowly define the desired outcomes for the training in order to effectively select topics and structure the exercises.
- **Responsive topic selection.** Seek feedback on which technical topics would warrant more in-depth discussion. We observed particular interest in: planting strategies, herbicides, monitoring, and landowner “do-it-yourself”.
- **Inclusion of experts.** Recruit experts or experienced practitioners to present on key topics, then host discussions of those topics, similar to the format of the morning presentation and related discussion.
- **Small-group discussions.** Prepare small-group facilitators with advance training and discussion questions.
- **Refined networking opportunities.** While many found the networking at this event valuable, it could have been shorter and more targeted to connect people who would learn most from each other.
- **Regional events.** Evaluations indicate that participants valued interaction with folks in their regions to build connection. Some technical topics may be best suited for regional gatherings.
- **Management training track.** Managers may find capacity-building, fundraising, and big-picture conversations helpful, while field practitioners need more hands-on information.
- **Shorter training day.** With travel time and the intensity of the content and interpersonal contact, many found the day to be slightly too long. A six-hour session may be more appropriate.



- **Event fee.** A nominal charge that covers participant food costs will help encourage participant commitment.
- **Removing barriers.** Holding these trainings adjacent to a longer conference may facilitate attendance for some organizations traveling a long distance; however the additional lodging and food costs may deter others. Consider offering a scholarship to defray costs for those without resources to attend otherwise.

Sector-wide capacity-building ideas

The organizers of the Riparian Practitioner Session may also wish to consider developing a comprehensive approach to building the capacity of the sector working on voluntary conservation on private lands. Such an approach could consist of several distinct steps:

- **Understand the desired outcomes.** Organizing entities will need to discuss shared goals for building the capacity of this sector, and develop a set of strategic priorities to guide the work.
- **Conduct a needs analysis.** A needs analysis would begin with a review of existing data sets that document the capacity needs of the sector, such as the survey conducted for this project, Dr. Jon Souder’s research, and previous surveys. Should this review reveal specific areas where more information is needed, additional surveys and interviews can inform a more detailed analysis.
- **Develop a capacity-building program.** Based on the needs analysis, a program could be designed to enhance organizational and individual capacity for impact, through a combination of trainings, targeted assistance, or other methods. Examples of potential capacity-building investments include:
 - ◆ One-day trainings similar to the recent session.
 - ◆ In-depth trainings in topics such as leadership, management, fundraising, communications, marketing, advocacy, or identified technical topics. Trainings often combine skill-building with the development of formal or informal peer networks. Training formats could be in-person or online, and they could range in length from one hour to a full day or more.
 - ◆ Intensive in-person trainings may be followed by a series of cohort-based phone conferences to deepen the learning and solidify peer relationships.
 - ◆ Formation and facilitation of collaboration cohorts by geography, organization type/size, programmatic concerns, etc., possibly leading to formal or informal collaboration agreements.
 - ◆ Development of an online resource library.
 - ◆ Targeted assistance to individual organizations for organizational assessment, strategic planning, business planning (e.g. regarding fee-for-service offerings), or other capacity-building projects.

Such a program could include a small-scale pilot to test preliminary ideas with a small number of organizations, before launching a more comprehensive program sector-wide.

- **Evaluate.** Using the strategic priorities as a baseline, evaluate the effectiveness of the work and plan for any next steps.

