

## House Capital Budget Committee Leaders

Representative Steve Tharinger, Chair

Representative Lisa Callan, Vice Chair

Representative David Hackney, Vice Chair

Representative Mike Steele, Ranking Member

Representative Peter Abbarno, Assistant Ranking Member

Representative Bryan Sandlin, Assistant Ranking Member

February X, 2023

Dear House Capital Budget Committee Leaders,

We write to thank you for your previous support, and to ask for your continued support for the Washington Coast Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WCRRI), one of our state's best combined economic and environmental capital programs. Administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), WCRRI has supported rural economies by restoring some of Washington's most irreplaceable landscapes, coastlines, and communities since 2015. We respectfully request that you include **\$17.6 million in your 2023-25 Capital Budget** to continue WCRRI's critical work for coastal habitats and the people that depend on them.

## Ecosystem Restoration is Economic Resilience

Coastal restoration not only restores habitat, but also improves infrastructure, increases climate resiliency, and provides critical employment opportunities in historically underfunded communities. Communities that have all been identified as disadvantaged by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool and have a 'moderate to high' or 'high' level of vulnerability according to the CDC Social Vulnerability Index.

WCRRI builds local restoration job capacity that offers economic resilience (diverse income sources) throughout our rural coastal communities. As one of our previous WCRRI sponsors told us, "In Seattle, dozens of jobs might look small. But out here, in terms of employment, these numbers are huge." A study of the restoration economy identified that the majority of jobs created by restoration activities are filled by people living within the watershed where the project occurs. Since 2015, WCRRI projects have supported more than 467 family-wage jobs. With practitioners removing 33 fish passage barriers, opening up 83 miles of stream, and restoring more than 10,000 acres of upland and riparian habitat. **With a \$17.6 million capital investment for the 2023-25 biennium, WCRRI will support an additional 103 jobs.**

## Results for People and Nature

Healthy forests, rivers, tidelands and beaches on our Pacific Coast are essential to the well-being of our communities, ecosystems and economies. Coastal communities have worked for decades to steward and improve our lands and waters, but long lacked consistent funding to address diverse, ongoing restoration needs.

Since WCRI's development, projects from Neah Bay to the Elochman River have removed invasive species, mitigating their disruption to natural ecosystem function, and restored habitat for rare and endangered native species of fish and other wildlife.

This region of the state is realizing direct impacts from climate change to communities and ecosystems at an accelerated pace. Now, more than ever, is the time to invest in the natural infrastructure of coastal Washington to increase the resiliency of the coastal ecosystems, to reduce flood risk, and to meet the many other challenges of a changing climate.

The program continues to grow as a trusted and effective way to foster healthier, more vibrant and resilient Washington coastal communities, with the need for funding consistently outstripping supply. With a proactive focus on supporting locally driven projects that prioritize urgent ecological restoration needs, WCRI has so far leveraged \$10.6 million from additional funding sources and complements related community-development and environmental restoration efforts. Projects are sponsored by Tribes, conservation districts, nonprofit organizations, and other local jurisdictions.

Included among the 2023 WCRI projects are plans to reconnect floodplains to reduce flood risk, recover rare and endangered plant species, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and address invasive plants. These projects have broad and diverse support from local governments, the conservation community, the fishing industry, Tribes, watershed groups, salmon recovery advocates and state and federal agencies.

### **Time to Invest**

We ask for your support for \$17.6 million in capital funding for RCO to continue providing WCRI opportunities to the Washington Coast, to improve lives and living standards in our communities, restore ecosystems, provide family-wage jobs, and reconnect communities to the ecosystems that they depend upon.

Respectfully,

Cc:

Sen. Kevin Van De Wege; Sen. Jeff Wilson; Rep. Mike Chapman; Rep. Steve Tharinger; Rep. Jim Walsh; Rep. Joel McEntire