



Oregon Central Coast

Estuary Collaborative

Restoring Resilience to Two Estuaries



Engineering site visit to Drift Bend in the Alsea Estuary (credit: Cheryl Horton, MCWC)

COASTAL ESTUARIES

The Oregon Central Coast Estuary Collaborative's

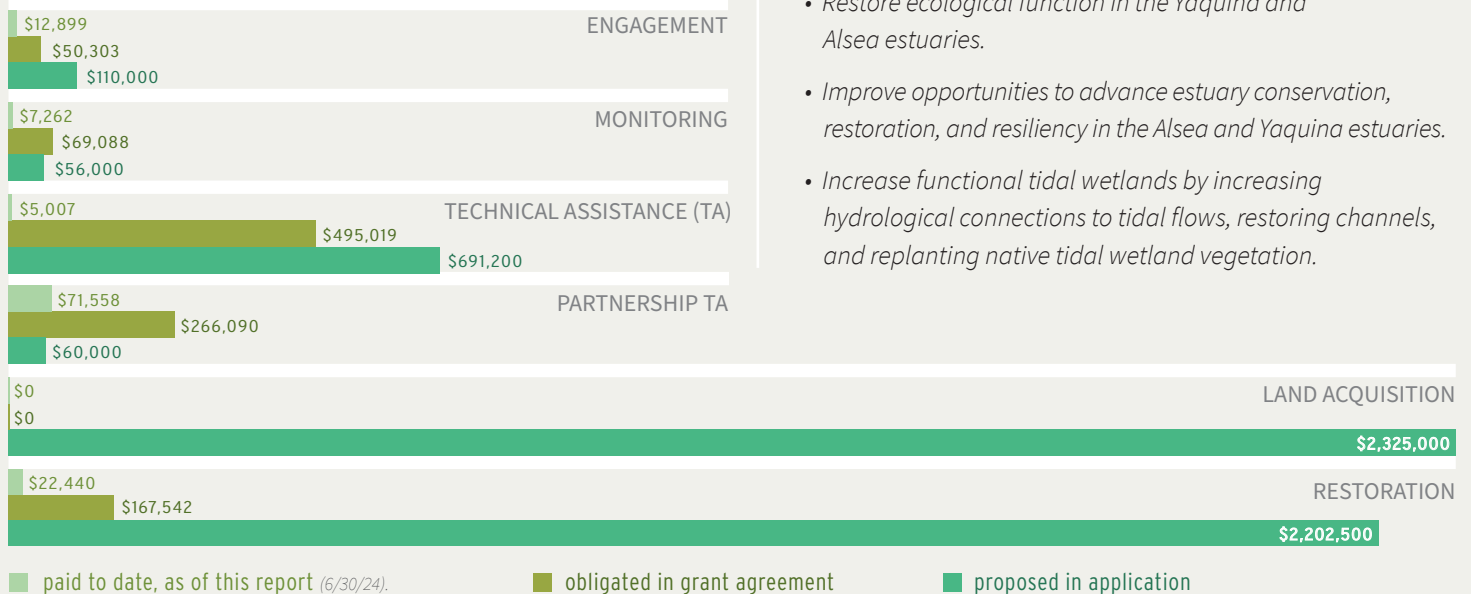
FIP is dedicated to habitat restoration in the Yaquina and Alsea estuaries. These areas have lost more than 90% of their tidal swamps, prompting the initiative to restore and safeguard important wetland ecosystems across over 900 acres.



Estuaries are essential for coastal resilience, helping to manage water flow, nutrient cycles, and sediment movement, all of which are important for adapting to sea level rise.

Funding

OWEB awarded \$5,444,700 in funding for the first two of an anticipated 3 biennia. At the time of application, the FIP anticipated leveraging an additional \$4,970,000 throughout the life of the initiative.



Benefits

- Restore ecological function in the Yaquina and Alsea estuaries.
- Improve opportunities to advance estuary conservation, restoration, and resiliency in the Alsea and Yaquina estuaries.
- Increase functional tidal wetlands by increasing hydrological connections to tidal flows, restoring channels, and replanting native tidal wetland vegetation.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant program supports high-performing partnerships to implement strategic restoration actions and measure ecological outcomes through coordinated monitoring. In January 2022, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) awarded a FIP grant to the Oregon Central Coast Estuary Collaborative. This report documents cumulative progress since the FIP was initiated in 2022. Work completed under the FIP grant program is part of a much larger on-going collaborative effort of federal, state and local agencies, tribes, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations in the central Oregon coast region. Accomplishments included in the report only reflect actions completed with OWEB FIP funding.

PARTNERS

MidCoast Watersheds Council (FIP administrator) • Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians • Ducks Unlimited Inc. • Lincoln Soil & Water Conservation District • McKenzie River Trust • The Nature Conservancy • The Wetlands Conservancy

GOAL

Restore functional tidal wetlands including marsh, scrub/shrub, and spruce swamp habitats, conserve landward migration zones for sea-level rise resilience, and protect the lands and waters of the Yaquina and Alsea estuaries.



STRATEGIES

- Collaborative outreach to key landowners about estuary conservation and restoration, as well as sea level rise considerations.
- Collaborative restoration project funding and implementation.

- Incorporate ecological function and climate change considerations that benefit estuary health.
- Reduce impacts from transportation infrastructure and other landscape alteration on estuary connectivity.



IMPLEMENTATION

22

LANDOWNERS
ENGAGED IN
CONSERVATION
AND RESTORATION
DISCUSSIONS

1

PROJECT
MANAGEMENT
FRAMEWORK
DOCUMENT

2

COMPREHENSIVE
MONITORING
PLANS

2

AGREEMENTS
SIGNED WITH
LANDOWNERS FOR
TIDAL WETLANDS
RESTORATION



OUTCOMES

Near Term 0-5 YEARS

- Protect priority tidal wetland habitats.
- Engage with key landowners in priority areas.
- Increase carbon storage.

Improve:

- Sediment regime.
- Tidal and floodplain connectivity and hydrology.
- Natural species composition.
- Water quality.

Mid-Term 5-10 YEARS

- Priority barriers removed or replaced.
- Enhance and replant tidal wetland vegetation.

Long Term 10+ YEARS

- Increased tidal exchange and floodplain connection as a result of restoration.
- Planted scrub/shrub and spruce swamp habitats are established and show signs of long-term persistence.

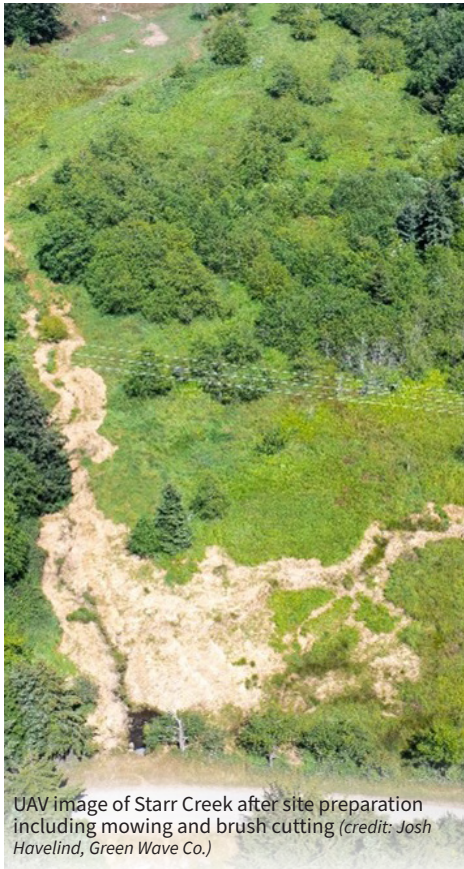


Accounting for root wads and root wad logs at MCWC's log storage site, in preparation for large woody debris placement at Starr Creek in the Alsea Estuary (credit: Cheryl Horton, MCWC)

FIP Initiative Progress, Biennia 1-2

Progress on outputs shown below represents actions completed through OWEB grants.

OUTPUTS	PROGRESS	OBJECTIVE TARGET
Increase tidal connectivity, place large woody debris, replace invasive plants with native plants.	0 acres	900 acres
Protect priority tidal wetland habitats by: conservation ownership, life estate, or easement.	0 acres	400 acres
Protect remaining tidal swamp habitats and priority Landward Migration Zone areas by conservation ownership, life estate, or easement.	0 acres	100 acres
Outreach with key landowners in priority areas.	0 signed landowner agreements	5 agreements



UAV image of Starr Creek after site preparation including mowing and brush cutting (credit: Josh Havelind, Green Wave Co.)

Monitoring Approach

The OCCEC Estuary FIP employs a three-tiered monitoring approach for restoration projects in the Yaquina and Alsea estuaries, scaling from low-cost, basic assessments (Tier 1) to more intensive monitoring requiring greater resources (Tiers 2 and 3). Monitoring teams, established early in project planning, are responsible for sampling design, data management, and analysis to assess project effectiveness and advance estuary restoration knowledge. A monitoring advisory team, including ecologists and partners, is recommended for larger projects.

The Project Effectiveness Monitoring Plan is being developed not only to inform the effectiveness of the restoration projects implemented through this FIP, but also to advance the knowledge base for estuary restoration in general throughout the OCCEC working area.



King Slough on the Yaquina Estuary (credit Cheryl Horton, MCWC)

Adaptive Management

Restoration

CHALLENGES

Obtaining individual permits for restoration projects on private lands that do not have a federal nexus, and therefore do not qualify for permitting through a programmatic can be time-consuming, challenging, and were new to our partnership working in estuary systems.

County Floodplain Development Permits vary in complexity and can be challenging to obtain for projects in estuary systems.

LESSONS LEARNED

We relied on the expertise of a permitting specialist at FIP Core Partner organization Ducks Unlimited to lead us through the individual permitting process.

We scheduled a pre-application meeting with Lincoln County to discuss the FIP's first restoration project and gain clarity on the process. We started early and worked with Lincoln County Planning Department as a partner throughout the process.

ADAPTATIONS

We will continue to include time in FIP Partnership TA and/or restoration grants for a permitting specialist to lead the process, when working on private land without a federal nexus.

The FIP partnership is aware of the challenges to obtaining FDP's and the additional changes coming in 2024-2025. We will continue to start the permit process early, schedule pre-application meetings, and stay in touch with Lincoln County Planning Department about upcoming restoration projects.

Monitoring

CHALLENGES

Creating the required FIP specific monitoring documents ("Progress Monitoring Framework" and "Progress Effectiveness Monitoring Plan") took different skillsets as well as leadership, expertise, collaboration, and time.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is worthwhile to rely on experts within the partnership or to hire external experts. Additionally, it is worth taking extra time to incorporate feedback from relevant partners and external experts. In the future, when documents need to be created from scratch and undergo multiple review processes, we will build in more time to complete and disseminate products.

ADAPTATIONS

We gave ourselves more time beyond what was listed in the FIP Monitoring Plan Development grant timeline. With everyone's busy schedules it was important to step back, figure out what was possible, and adjust to ensure quality products. With some help from staff at BEF to finalize the OCCEC Estuary FIP's Progress Monitoring Framework, we gained clarity and an improved product. In fact, the PMF is being used as an example for other partnerships. The Progress Effectiveness Monitoring Plan has set us up for success with different tiers of monitoring for projects, while also being applicable to a wider network of estuary restoration practitioners.

Adaptive Management

Engagement

CHALLENGES

Keeping track of restoration and conservation opportunities in the Yaquina and Alsea estuaries, given private landowner changes, staff turnover at partner organizations, and several partners conducting outreach proved to be challenging.



LESSONS LEARNED

Creating a shared drive with documents that can be edited and updated by the group, as well as hosting regular meetings with key partners helped keep the FIP engagement tasks on track.



ADAPTATIONS

Creating a shared tracking spreadsheet (deliverable in our first FIP Engagement grant) and creating the “Central Coast Conservation Opportunity Team” which met monthly in 2023-2024, were two ways we addressed these challenges. CCCOT allows partners to share knowledge, resources, new opportunities, and track progress over time. We allot half of meetings to FIP projects and the other half to projects within the wider central coast working area to maximize efficiency and respect partners’ time, while keeping everyone informed.

Partnership Capacity

CHALLENGES

The FIP was awarded in July 2022, halfway through the first biennium, and for the first several months, MidCoast Watersheds Council’s Executive Director led the FIP initiative in addition to his existing workload. Though workable, this was not sustainable in the long run.



LESSONS LEARNED

The partnership recognized the need for a dedicated staff person to manage the FIP and hiring a coordinator was one of the first tasks undertaken through the FIP Partnership Technical Assistance Grant. Hiring took eight months and required a lot of work from partners to accomplish.



ADAPTATIONS

Within the first two months of the FIP Coordinator’s hiring, monthly FIP Core Team meetings were scheduled and facilitated, a governance document was created and approved, two TA grants, one Engagement grant, and one Monitoring grant were submitted under the FIP, and reporting was completed. This positive trajectory has continued, demonstrating the value of a dedicated staff person in this role.