

## MEDIA ADVISORY

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### Wildlife Conservation Society Awards Funding for Climate Adaptation Project at the Table Rocks

(Medford, Oregon) - The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) recently awarded Lomakatsi Restoration Project a grant of \$218,347 to implement oak habitat restoration at the Table Rocks. The grant was provided by the WCS Climate Adaptation Fund, a program made possible through the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The grant leverages an existing partnership effort to restore declining oak ecosystems in the Rogue Basin and increase their potential to withstand the effects of climate change.

Kerry Metlen, Forest Ecologist with The Nature Conservancy, explained how the project is important from a regional perspective and connects with long-term monitoring and stewardship: "Uncharacteristically severe wildfire threatens large old oaks and oak woodland habitat, a threat that is likely to increase with climate change. The Table Rocks are one of the best places to conserve oak savanna and woodland under future climate scenarios so this is one of the places we are investing in thinning, reintroduction of beneficial fire, and long-term monitoring."

The project builds upon an established collaborative partnership between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Lomakatsi Restoration Project, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO). Project partners are working with Native American Tribes that have ancestral ties to the Table Rocks, including the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, to inform project design and treatment implementation.

Partners have identified approximately 5,000 acres of critical oak habitat in need of restoration and climate adaptation work in and around the Table Rocks. In addition to the \$218,347 of funding provided by WCS, \$850,000 is being provided by agencies and conservation partners for the project. Over the next five years, the initial phase of the project will integrate climate adaptation management strategies on approximately 400 acres of federal BLM lands, as well as 800 acres of adjacent private lands.

"Oak habitats are biologically highly valuable natural areas in the region supporting more than 300 wildlife species," stated Marko Bey, Executive Director of Lomakatsi.

Many oak woodlands and savannas are suffering from the establishment of dense trees and shrubs resulting from decades of fire suppression. "Oak ecosystems are endangered due to encroaching vegetation that competes for water, light and nutrients, and increases the likelihood of uncharacteristic high-intensity wildfire," said Bey.

In an effort to address threats to oak habitats, restoration treatments will include selective tree and shrub thinning to reduce fire hazards, preserve old oak trees, remove invasive species, introduce controlled burning, and seed native plants. Lomakatsi crews will begin activities on February 9<sup>th</sup> and conclude in early April. Work will commence again in the fall of 2015 and operate seasonally until 2019.

"After two years of planning, we are excited to launch this landscape level project with our partners and begin implementing mitigation and restoration practices on approximately 1,200 acres of oak habitat," said Bey.

"Oak ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest exist in only a small percentage of their historic distribution, putting the plant and animal species associated with this habitat at risk," stated CalLee Davenport, Biologist with the USFWS. "Protecting existing oak woodlands and restoring threatened areas is critical to reversing the decline of those species."

The project area supports a diversity of birds, and is near the northernmost range extent for several species, including the Oak Titmouse and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. "Many oak associated birds are already in decline due to existing threats, and will likely face additional challenges as vegetation shifts in response to a changing climate" stated Jaime Stephens, Science Director of Klamath Bird Observatory. "Because this area is projected to favor oak habitats under potential climate change scenarios, it could play an important role in the adaptation of bird species," said Stephens.

During project planning, oak restoration management recommendations were based on innovative climate science provided by The Nature Conservancy in their 2013 report *Rogue Basin Oak Mapping and Climate Resilience*. Approaches to mitigate climate change impacts were integrated into the project from *The Rogue Basin Action Plan for Resilient Watersheds and Forests in a Changing Climate* developed by the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative.

The Table Rocks is a high use outdoor recreation destination hosting over 40,000 visitors annually. "This project provides a great educational opportunity to inform the public about climate adaptation work for wildlife habitat," said Terry Fairbanks, Forester for the BLM. "This effort involves multiple partners to address resource concerns across various ownerships and is a model for collaborative ecosystem management," she concluded.

In October 2014 The Wildlife Conservation Society announced 13 new grants totaling \$2.49 million awarded as part of its Climate Adaptation Fund. WCS's Climate Adaptation Fund provides support for on-the-ground efforts to help species and the ecosystems on which they depend adapt to changing climatic conditions across the United States.

"The Wildlife Conservation Society is proud to support these types of groundbreaking projects, which serve as models of best practice for future-smart and sustainable investments in restoring our natural ecosystems," said Darren Long, Director of the Climate Adaptation Fund. "Projects like the one led by Lomakatsi provide other conservation practitioners with important and tangible examples of how to help species and ecosystems adapt to a changing climate."

For more information about Lomakatsi's Oak Habitat Restoration Program, visit

[www.lomakatsi.org/oak-habitat-restoration/](http://www.lomakatsi.org/oak-habitat-restoration/)

For more information on the Table Rocks, visit [www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/tablerock/index.php](http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/tablerock/index.php)

For more information about the WCS's Climate Adaptation Fund, visit <http://programs.wcs.org/northamerica/ClimateAdaptationFund.aspx>

