

News Release

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Rogue Bear All-Lands Restoration Project Awarded \$21.25 Million from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ashland, Oregon – Lomakatsi Restoration Project, a nonprofit forest restoration organization based in Ashland, Oregon, will receive approximately \$21,250,000 in funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for the Rogue Bear All-Lands Restoration Project.

Supported by a strong partnership of local agencies and nonprofits, the project will strategically reduce hazardous fuels through ecological thinning and prescribed burning on 8,500 to 10,000 acres of private land within a greater 83,000-acre project area spanning the wildland urban interface and adjacent woodlands west of Medford and north of Jacksonville, within and around the communities of Gold Hill, Rogue River, and Jacksonville. Through the process, Lomakatsi expects to work with approximately 240 different landowners, and will collaborate with partners to raise additional funding with the goal of ultimately accomplishing ecologically based fuels reduction on 40% of the larger project area.

The Rogue Bear Project is one of 92 projects across the nation—and one of five in Oregon—that was selected through a highly competitive national RCPP application process. Funding originates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act, which is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America Agenda and the largest investment in climate action and conservation in world history, enabling the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to boost funding for RCPP. The funding is meant to complement past and ongoing investments in conservation and mitigating the impacts of climate change with a partnership-centric approach focused on private lands.

"This award is the culmination of nearly two decades of collaboration between federal, state, municipal, and community partners to address the growing impacts of wildfire to the forests and cities of the Rogue Valley," said Marko Bey, Lomakatsi Founder & Executive Director. "We're experiencing year after year of uncharacteristically severe wildfire, with an unprecedented nearly two million acres burned in Oregon during the 2024 fire season alone. Lomakatsi is excited to continue scaling our organization to meet the tremendous need for forest restoration and fuels reduction that makes communities and the ecosystem more resilient, enhances wildlife habitat, and supports jobs, boosting the local economy."

The Rogue Bear Project is located west of the confluence of the Rogue River and Bear Creek, expanding upon and creating a contiguous footprint with the 52,000-acre Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project and the 27,000-acre West Bear All-Lands Restoration Project to the southeast, which share

similar goals. These Rogue Valley projects are collectively situated within or adjacent to seven of the 30 cities at highest risk of wildfire in the entire state.

“We’re very fortunate to have some great, high performing, long-standing partnerships here in the Rogue Basin and that’s a big part of why this proposal was successful,” said Peter Winnick, NRCS District Conservationist for Jackson County. “We’re excited to bring this substantial investment to help private forest landowners make their properties healthier with more resilient habitat, while reducing the overall risk of wildfire to adjacent communities. Lomakatsi has lots of experience leading landscape-scale initiatives, including through past RCPP awards. We look forward to working together to make this project successful.”

The Rogue Bear Project takes further steps to help realize the vision set forth in the Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy, developed in 2017 by Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative (SOFRC) and partners to help prioritize conservation and resilience investments across the 4.6 million-acre Rogue Basin. Research shows that treating around 25-40% of a given project area can substantially reduce wildfire risk across that landscape.

“This RCPP award is a monumental investment that will allow us to continue to increase the pace and scale of urgently needed forest and woodland restoration treatments,” said Terry Fairbanks, SOFRC Executive Director and coordinator of Rogue Forest Partners, a group of four nonprofits and six public agencies working together on multiple forest health and resilience projects around the Rogue Basin. “Rogue Forest Partners are excited to support and collaborate on this effort that expands our collective work into a key area identified in the Rogue Basin Strategy.”

Lomakatsi has a long history of partnering with tribes to support ongoing stewardship of ancestral lands, and will utilize their Inter-Tribal Indian Youth Service Corps Program—which employs tribal and multicultural young adults ages 18-30 and up to age 35 for veterans—to bring added capacity to the project over the next several years. The Rogue Bear Project has received the endorsement of several Tribal Nations with ancestral ties to the project area, including the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

“We are proud to support the Rogue Bear All-Lands Restoration Project and the collaboration that drafted the proposal, which will allow for enhancement and resilience of our forests and communities,” said Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians Chairwomen Delores Pigsley. “The effects of wildfires have dramatically intensified within our forests and it’s long overdue that we collectively address this growing threat to our communities and natural resources.”

Ecological thinning and prescribed fire treatments will emphasize removing younger, smaller diameter trees around homes, roadways, and strategic ridgelines to improve wildland fire response and evacuation options. The treatments retain large, old, more fire-resistant trees and hardwoods such as oaks to reduce the risk of severe wildfire to forests and woodlands and the essential ecosystem services they provide. In some treated areas, partners plan to utilize native seed to help re-establish a healthy understory that supports habitat for the Monarch butterfly and other pollinators.

“We look forward to continuing our work with Lomakatsi, the NRCS, and other partners to protect wildlife habitat and create fire-adapted communities in the Rogue Valley, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the state,” said U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Partners Program Oregon State Coordinator CalLee Davenport. “The USFWS has invested heavily in this high-priority landscape over the years, and we are excited to collaborate on this expansion that both reduces wildfire risk and improves ecological health.”

Work is slated to begin in 2025 with preliminary environmental assessments in partnership with NRCS and USFWS, followed by targeted outreach to landowners whose properties have been identified as the

highest priority for treatment. Lomakatsi will lead the planning and implementation process, working closely with the NRCS, USFWS, other members of Rogue Forest Partners, and others.

“We have a robust team of 94 staff members, including ecologists, foresters, fire management professionals, and cultural resource specialists, and an in-house restoration workforce, as well as many local forestry services providers we can rely on for added capacity, so we are well equipped to make this project successful,” said Lomakatsi Program Director Shane Jimerfield. “Thanks to our long-standing partnerships, all the work will be grounded in the latest science, and supported by our comprehensive monitoring protocols that helps us track and adapt our treatments over time to maximize outcomes on the ground.”

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