

Current Events within the Oregon Flora Project
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Beginning July 1, 2008, the Oregon Flora Project will have a break in its activities due to a lack of funding. Our program budget is very small—\$105,300 in FY 2007-2008—and with 96% of the funds allocated for salaries (four part-time workers), there are no options but to terminate staff and suspend work. Work will resume when we obtain adequate funding; hopefully by this autumn.

This time of change presents an opportunity to evaluate the direction of the OFP, and to reassert the transparency of OFP operations to interested parties.

With fourteen years of rigorous scholarly research and data development, the Oregon Flora Project has earned its reputation as a botanical resource of the highest quality. Adding to the value of OFP information is its accessibility and utility to the general public as well as to professionals. The loss of OFP activities would negatively impact a very broad constituency whose needs for plant biodiversity information are not readily met by other resources.

The Oregon Flora Project began as the personal initiative of Dr. Scott Sundberg to write a new *Flora of Oregon*. His death in 2004 was a setback to the OFP, yet the continued progress of the Project attests to its relevance. The significance of the work of the OFP—both in what it has accomplished and what it is prepared to complete—calls for moving beyond the ‘labor of love’ attribute the Project has acquired. Indeed, the fierce dedication of our staff, volunteers, and individual donors is a hallmark of the OFP; yet reliance upon passionate volunteerism and a mean donation amount of \$125 is too tenuous a foundation for an endeavor this important.

The mission of the OFP clearly supports the strategic initiatives of Oregon State University as a land grant institution. The work of the Oregon Flora Project crosses department and college lines; it provides tools for research and teaching, and has served over 100 undergraduate and graduate students through employment and research opportunities. The OFP’s extensive work engaging citizens in science education creates a visible and effective transfer of University-affiliated research to the public.

Given the myriad of mutual benefits shared between OSU and the OFP, it is logical to propose that the University contribute to the support of the OFP. The OFP has not received funds for salaries or operating expenses from OSU during the 14 years of the Project’s existence.

Institutional partnership with other natural resources-based agencies in Oregon is another alternative to investigate, as is the restructuring of the OFP as an independent non-profit agency. The creation of an advisory board to assist in these decisions and in securing financial sustainability for the project is an important step to accomplish during this time of transition.

Sustainability for the Oregon Flora Project entails the engagement of scientists and data managers who will 1) research and assess the biological, ecological and taxonomic status of all 4,500+ plants of the state; 2) express these data to a diverse audience in effective and creative

ways; and 3) respond to the dynamic nature of both botanical research and the plant populations themselves.

The OFP has five major elements; four of these—the Atlas, Checklist, Photo Gallery, and the Rare Plant Guide—are either available for use on the website or are within months of release. All contribute to the development of the Flora. A thriving OFP, with a proposed staff comprised of a taxonomic director, program coordinator, artist, several database managers and IT support, would maintain and enrich the existing features, and prepare a new Flora within four to six years.

Insuring sustainability for the Atlas alone, on an annual basis, will require \$41,300, based on the expenses of a half-time research assistant position (~\$36,000/yr with benefits), computer server hosting, and project management.

The high quality of OFP material is the consequence of a coherent research program that underlies its visible products. Acknowledging that this infrastructure requires stable financial support is an essential step toward insuring that the Oregon Flora Project can continue to provide the public with comprehensive information about the plants of Oregon.