

Grant helping Tribe assess herbicide policies

By Nicole Montesano
Smoke Signals staff writer

A grant from the Environmental Protection Agency is helping the Tribe to plan an updated policy on use of herbicides on Tribally owned lands. It will provide \$1.9 million over five years, from 2024 through 2028.

A work session will be scheduled with Tribal Council in late January to discuss the priorities for the program.

Some Tribal members have raised objections to using herbicides to control weeds around Tribal housing and on the campus. The policy followed by the Facilities Department, which maintains the grounds, states that “Herbicides are often used as a last resort, when other attempts have failed and action is imperative.”

General Manager Angie Blackwell said in a council meeting this fall that the Tribe lacks enough employees to rely on hand-weeding alone, and therefore relies on spraying for weed control. Tribal Housing residents who don’t want herbicides used around their homes can request to opt out, provided they keep weeds under control themselves.

This year, however, the Tribe secured a grant to help it review the existing policies and consider changes.

For the past several months, a team led by the Natural Resources Department, which manages the Tribe’s conservation lands, has been conducting an inventory of current practices and has been putting out surveys to assess member preferences.

Restoration Ecologist/FW Policy Analyst Lindsay McClary, who oversees Natural Resources’ work on conservation lands, said that so far very few people have filled it out. The deadline was Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024.

The Tribe’s Planning and Grants departments worked together to secure the funding from the Environmental Protection Agency through the Clean Water Act.

“EPA offered a competitive grant opportunity for Tribes to reduce water toxins in the Columbia River Basin ... Everything we do drains into the Columbia,” McClary said.

The effort is being driven by a technical team comprising McClary, Fish & Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen, Grants Assistant Dana Morfin and consultant Mary Lou Soscia, who worked to build the grant program before she retired from the EPA.

Assistant General Manager Bryan Langley, who oversees both Facilities and Natural Resources, has also been involved in discussions.

By the end of February, McClary said, the team hopes to finish an assessment of the Tribe’s current practices. It plans to have a report ready for the Tribal Council by Friday, Feb. 28.

McClary noted that the Facilities and Natural Resources departments manage very different areas with different needs. Natural Resources uses an integrated pest management plan that guides its herbicide usage, McClary said.

“None of us here want to be in charge of another department or overseeing what they are doing,” she said. “I don’t think NRD is or wants to be in a position of being regulatory...We anticipate conversations around having an organizational wide policy.”

There is some awkwardness in that situation, she added.

However, there could be an opportunity for discussions of how the Tribal campus should look, such as incorporating “more of a native landscape and less manicured,” she said.

Priorities that have been identified so far include holding events on the Tribal campus to collect toxic and hazardous items and creating an overarching Tribal-wide policy for use of herbicides, pesticides and insecticides, McClary said.

A Toxics Take Back Event has been scheduled for Friday, April 11.

Once a plan has been created, the Tribe anticipates putting it into

place by September 2026.

The Facilities Department policy on herbicides authorizes uses of specific products, but states that housing tenants who want to opt out of having their yards sprayed may do so if they agree to the required conditions. Those include submitting a formal written request to the Grand Ronde Housing Department and keeping the area weeded within the bounds of signs that will be placed by the Housing Department.

Tribal member Amber Case said she has collected 128 signatures in opposition to the use of glyphosate around Tribal Housing through Change.org.

Case has spoken out at several Tribal Council and General Council meetings about her objections to pesticide spraying.

“For years Elders and community members have been trying to get a cease spraying of Gly-star glyphosate in our community,” Case said in an email. “We don’t want it; no one is calling the General Manager to say, ‘Don’t stop spraying.’ They are saying ‘Please stop spraying, for

the good of the people and the land.’ With all the knowledge to stop and peer-reviewed scientific reports, it makes (sense) to stop spraying and find an alternative.”

Springer and Sons Pest Services is the Tribal contractor for commercial spraying.

Questions were raised by some in the community regarding whether the business had an active license. A check of the Oregon Department of Agriculture website as well as the Secretary of State’s office showed an active license as of Wednesday, Dec. 18.

Tenants in Tribal Housing who opt out of spraying will have periodic inspections conducted, and once the no-spray signs have been placed, they are not allowed to be moved and must be kept clean and clear.

For more information or to request a copy of the policy or the request form, contact the Facilities Department through the switchboard at 503-879-5211, or Facilities Administrative Assistant Daphney Colton at daphney.colton@grandronde.org. ■

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