

Oregon All Counties Steering Committee Governance Document

I. BACKGROUND

In March 2010, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that greater sage-grouse (hereafter, sage-grouse) warranted listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but were precluded from listing at that time due to other higher priority species. As a result of this decision, sage-grouse were designated candidate status under the ESA.

In 2011, a grass-roots group of private landowners, conservation groups, and local, state, and federal agencies formed the Harney County Sage-Grouse CCAA Steering Committee to develop a programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for private rangelands in Harney County, Oregon. A CCAA is an agreement between the USFWS and non-federal landowners, in which the landowner agrees to reduce or eliminate threats to a candidate species on lands they manage in exchange for assurances from USFWS that they will face no further regulatory requirements should the species become listed in the future.

The Harney County CCAA was signed by USFWS and the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) on May 21, 2014. Under the agreement, USFWS issued an Enhancement of Survival incidental take permit to the Harney SWCD. The Harney SWCD then worked with interested private landowners to develop site specific plans to address threats to sage-grouse on private rangelands, and issued certificates of inclusion to include those landowners under the SWCD's incidental take permit.

In March 2014, representatives from the other counties within the range of sage-grouse in Oregon met to pursue development of CCAAs using the Harney County CCAA as a template. This group eventually collaborated with USFWS to form the Oregon All Counties Steering Committee (OACSC). The OACSC worked together to develop programmatic CCAAs for Baker, Union, Malheur, Grant, Lake, Crook, and Deschutes counties. The signing of the CCAAs was the cornerstone event that brought seven counties and USFWS together to successfully cover 3.5 million acres of privately owned sage-grouse habitat in Oregon.

This plan is intended to be a "living document" to allow prioritized actions to be adapted with the emergence of new information, shifts in ecological condition, and funding opportunities. The OACSC recognizes that funding opportunities are uncertain and that future efforts identified in this plan are contingent on federal and state budget allocations. However, the plan serves to prioritize work in terms of scope and geography so that emerging funding opportunities can be utilized expeditiously, efficiently, and in a manner that will likely have the best outcome for sage-grouse populations in Lake, Malheur, Grant, Harney, Crook, Deschutes and Baker/Union Counties.

The OACSC has identified priority areas for conservation based on assessment of threats, past conservation actions, necessary future actions, and potential for landowner cooperation.

II. PARTNERS AND PARTNER ROLES

The OACSC consists of three partner tiers:

Tier 1: Core Partners

The Core Partners are the agencies responsible for administering Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and developing, implementing and monitoring Site Specific Plans in order to maintain Enhancement of Survival Permits pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act. The Core Partners are:

- Lakeview SWCD

- Harney SWCD
- Malheur County SWCD
- Crook County SWCD
- Powder Basin Watershed Council
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Roles and Responsibilities of Core Partners

The success of the OACSC depends on the ability of the core partners to work in a coordinated and collaborative manner to accomplish common sage-grouse habitat conservation and enhancement goals. All Core partners are expected to:

- **Act as Voting Members of the Partnership**
The Core Partners are the only voting members of the partnership. Each entity has 1 vote in official OACSC decisions. As voting members, they are expected to solicit feedback from Tier 2 and 3 partners and consider their input.
- **Act as Primary Project Proponents**
The Core Partners are expected to be the primary project proponents designing and implementing projects. Project proponents are expected to work with private landowners to develop project proposals on private lands.
- **Commit to a shared vision.** The goal of the OACSC is to work in a collaborative spirit to engage landowners and managers to enhance sage-grouse habitat within the Baker/Union, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Malheur, and Lake Counties with the aim to reverse local sage-grouse population declines. The OACSC will accomplish this by identifying local threats in a spatially-explicit manner and by applying conservation measures with a high degree of coordination.
- **Support the partnership Lead Partner to coordinate the OACSC.** Core Partners are expected to assist the lead partner in order to ensure the timely completion of tasks and the relatively equitable division of work. Core Partners will participate fully during OACSC meetings and provide requested information on a timely basis.
- **Collect and maintain project implementation and monitoring data.** Documentation of project implementation and results is essential to: 1) record conservation actions and apply future actions that may capitalize on previous efforts; 2) document success and lessons learned; 3) inform the potential need for adaptive management; 4) demonstrate responsible stewardship of funds; 5) represent project implementation geospatially; and 5) convey incremental progress towards the overall goal of improving sage-grouse habitat. All partners are expected to make this data available (pending private landowner permission when required) to the Lead Partner to assess progress toward the goals and objectives of the OACSC.
- **Use best-practices to enhance sage-grouse habitat.** The sagebrush steppe is a challenging ecosystem to restore once habitat loss or degradation occurs. The need to balance agricultural production, real estate value, big game habitat, and sage-grouse habitat restoration goals can sometimes add complexity to conservation decision-making. All partners are expected to seek this balance in project design and implementation and to use best-available science to guide conservation efforts.
- **Lead Partner: Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District (Subject to change)**
As the local coordination entity, Crook County SWCD (CCSWCD) will be responsible for facilitating meetings and correspondence of the OACSC, as well as tracking progress in the SAP. This will include arranging OACSC meetings and ensuring facilitation is meeting the needs of the partnership. This will also include providing

needed administration for funding sources applied for and received by the partnership. The lead partner will coordinate partners to achieve conservation outcomes identified in the SAP and will schedule project site visits with the OACSC and compile written technical feedback, ranking decisions, and funding recommendations consistent with the OACSC joint funding decision making framework outlined below.

The lead partner will maintain OACSC's SAP and track projects to ensure implementation is occurring on schedule. The lead partner will also maintain tabular and geospatial data to report progress towards achieving the conservation outcomes identified in the OACSC's SAP, including: dates of treatment implementation/completion, project specifications (acres, methods, etc.), funds expended, and monitoring results. The lead partner will summarize this information in a prepared report and work with partners to update work plans on an annual basis. The lead partner will provide all reporting required to OWEB and/or other funders or stakeholders.

The lead partner is expected to reach out to Core Partners for input and may call on the other Core Partners to assist in these duties.

Tier 2: CCAA Partners

The CCAA Partners along with the Core Partners, are responsible for all administration, development, implementation, monitoring, and reporting on Site Specific Plans and CCAAs.

- Private Landowners

All CCAA Partners are expected to:

- Act as Non-Voting Members of the Partnership
Non-voting members are encouraged to participate in discussions about development, implementation, monitoring, and reporting. They are also expected provide input as to projects' technical merit or priority.
- Commit to a shared vision. The goal of the OACSC is to work in a collaborative spirit to engage landowners and managers to enhance sage-grouse habitat within the Baker/Union, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Malheur, and Lake Counties with the aim to reverse local sage-grouse population declines. The OACSC will accomplish this by identifying local threats in a spatially-explicit manner and by applying conservation measures with a high degree of coordination.

Tier 3: Technical Partners

The Technical Partners are agencies, organizations, and/or private individuals with technical expertise critical to the success of the OACSC.

- NRCS
- OACD
- BLM
- CWMAs
- ODFW
- County governments
- USDA-ARS
- OSU Extension Service
- SageCon Partnership
- The Nature Conservancy
- OWEB

- Local Implementation Teams

All Technical Partners are expected to:

- Act as Non-Voting Members of the Partnership

Non-voting members are encouraged to participate in discussions about development, implementation, monitoring, and reporting. They are also expected provide input as to projects' technical merit or priority.

- Commit to a shared vision. The goal of the OACSC is to work in a collaborative spirit to engage landowners and managers to enhance sage-grouse habitat within the Grant, Harney, Malheur, Lake, Deschutes and Crook Counties with the aim to reverse local sage-grouse population declines. The OACSC will accomplish this by identifying local threats in a spatially-explicit manner and by applying conservation measures with a high degree of coordination

III. MEETINGS

The following meetings are anticipated for the OACSC

- Semi-annual or quarterly coordination meetings
- Special Issue OACSC Meetings
- At the Lead Partner's discretion, additional meetings may be scheduled to address emerging issues. Partners are encouraged to be flexible in allowing for virtual meetings.

IV. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Decisions will be made based on the “consensus of the majority”.

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- The designated representatives of the member SWCDs, PBWC and USFWS are the voting members of the committee. Each SWCD, PBWC, and USFWS receives one vote.
- When one or more SWCD, PBWC, USFWS are not represented at a meeting, and a vote is called for, and there is not a clear consensus of the majority; no decision will be made until the absent representatives have had an opportunity to vote on the issue.

All other participants in the partnership (e.g., technical partners and landowners) are non-voting, advisory members.