

Oregon All Counties  
Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances  
Steering Committee



Strategic Action Plan

Updated January 2022

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## Table of Acronyms

ALE	All Lands Easements
ARS	Agriculture Research Station
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CCA	Candidate Conservation Agreement
CCAA	Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances
CM	Conservation Measures
COT	Conservation Objectives Team
CSP	Conservation Stewardship Program (NRCS)
CTA	Conservation Technical Assistance program
CWMA	Cooperative Weed Management Areas
EQUIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS)
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FIP	Focused Investment Partnership (Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board)
GRSG	Greater sage-grouse
LIT	Local Implementation Team
MDI	Mule Deer Initiative
MLRA	Major Land Resource Areas
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
OACD	Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
ODFW	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
OWEB	Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
PAC	Priority Areas for Conservation
PBWC	Powder Basin Watershed Council
PPH	Preliminary Priority Habitat
RCP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program (NRCS)
ACEP-ALE	Agriculture Conservation Easement Program, Agriculture Land Easement Component
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SGI	Sage-grouse Initiative (NRCS)
SSP	Site Specific Plans
SWCD	Soil and Water Conservation District

USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
USFWS United States Fish and Wildlife Service

## 1. Introduction

The Oregon All Counties CCAA [Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances] Steering Committee (OACSC) is a collaboration of local and federal partners including Crook, Harney, Lake, and Malheur Soil and Water Conservations Districts (SWCDs), along with Powder Basin Watershed Council (PBWC; covering Baker and Union counties), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The OACSC is committed to working with private landowners to reduce or eliminate threats to greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), hereafter sage-grouse, a species of conservation concern inhabiting eight eastern Oregon counties. The OACSC conducts its work through the framework of six Programmatic CCAAs which are formal agreements between the USFWS and permit holders (the SWCDs and PBWC). Under the Programmatic CCAAs, permit holders engage private landowners in voluntary conservation actions in exchange for certain assurances should sage-grouse be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Sage-grouse habitat across Oregon is threatened by historic and ongoing changes to native plant communities and the impact of catastrophic wildfires. Native shrubs and grasses have largely been replaced by invasive annual grasses and historical fire suppression encouraged expansion of juniper. Invasive grasses provide inadequate cover for sage-grouse nesting, and are highly flammable, promoting more frequent and more severe wildfire. Both the abundance of invasive grasses and the increased frequency and severity of wildfire prevents the re-establishment and persistence of native plant species. These impacts along with other historical land practices have altered sage-grouse habitat and therefore, sage-grouse populations. The primary focus of this document is to strategically plan conservation measures that will improve critical sage-steppe ecosystems, and ultimately increase and/or sustain sage-grouse populations.

To address sage-steppe habitat issues, the OACSC developed a strategic plan based on Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) comprehensive statewide assessments, which indicate that habitat loss is the primary threat to sage-grouse in the state. We specifically focus on habitat loss resulting from the ecological processes of juniper encroachment, spread of invasive annual grasses, and increasing frequency, intensity, and extent of wildfire. Threats that may be important, though localized, include habitat loss, fragmentation, or a reduction in quality due to: 1) multiple types of development (urban and ex-urban development, renewable energy, electrical and natural gas transmission lines, mining, roads, communication towers, and other infrastructure); 2) sagebrush elimination and agricultural conversion; 3) improper grazing management (including both legacy effects of past management and current grazing regimes); 4) recreational uses (off-highway vehicles); 5) fences; 6) isolated or small populations sizes; and 7) free roaming equids (Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership 2015). In addition, extreme weather conditions, drought, west Nile virus, excessive flooding, predation, hunting, insecticides, sagebrush defoliation moth, and other noxious weeds contribute to a decline in habitat quality or sage-grouse mortality.

### Completed Conservation Actions as of 2021:

- 53 landowners enrolled covering over 575,000 acres
- 23,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat treated to address exotic annual grasses
- 25,698 acres of juniper removed from sage-grouse habitat
- Grazing management strategies improved on 225,943 acres of sage-grouse habitat
- 33 miles of fencing marked in high risk collision areas
- 113 wildlife escape ramps installed in water troughs
- The above actions result in 225,989 acres treated to reduce the threat of wildfire

In 2011, ODFW established Sage-grouse Local Implementation Teams (LITs) throughout eastern Oregon. Efforts by local teams helped identify threats to sage-grouse within each county in a spatially explicit manner with the goal of applying conservation measures with a high degree of coordination. By 2015, the Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan called for further invigoration of these teams, which led to local strategic work plans and coordinated conservation efforts (Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership 2015). At the same time, the OACSC formally came together to develop a strategic action plan for CCAA implementation for the 30-year duration of the agreements (2015-2045).

The OACSC's Strategic Action Plan (SAP) is the partnership's roadmap for implementing CCAAs on privately owned sage-grouse habitat in Oregon over the course of three decades. It also serves as a guide for recruiting landowner participation, developing Site Specific Plans (SSPs) for those interested, and implementing identified conservation actions designed to achieve the intended benefits for sage-grouse and rangeland health. This SAP establishes both the administrative and conservation strategies that the OACSC will pursue over the next 30 years. The plan provides the background regarding species and habitat decline and how the issue came to a head years ago. It identifies and defines the roles of the OACSC, and shares target goals, objectives, and future planned outcomes. The SAP is a "living document" and as such has been updated periodically. This SAP represents the third update and incorporates new goals and objectives reflective of the OACSC's continued progress.

## 2. Background

### Development and Implementation of Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances for Greater Sage-grouse in Oregon

In March 2010, USFWS determined that sage-grouse warranted listing under the Endangered Species Act, but were precluded from listing at that time due to other higher priority species. As a result of this decision, sage-grouse were a candidate species under the ESA.

In 2011, a grassroots 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 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 SWCD on May 21, 2014. Under the agreement, USFWS issued an Enhancement of Survival incidental take permit to the Harney SWCD. This permit extends authorization to enrolled landowners for inadvertent "take" of sage-grouse resulting from activities covered by the CCAA. The Harney SWCD then worked with interested private landowners to develop SSPs 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. USFWS and the SWCDs worked together to develop programmatic CCAAs for Baker/Union, Malheur, Grant, Lake, and Crook/Deschutes counties. Crook and Deschutes counties are jointly covered under one CCAA, with Crook County SWCD serving as the permit holder. In Baker and Union counties, the Baker SWCD initiated CCAA implementation under a single permit, but this permit has since been reassigned to the Powder Basin

Watershed Council. The signing of the CCAAs was the cornerstone event that brought eight counties together to successfully cover 3.5 million acres of privately owned sage-grouse habitat in Oregon.

### 3. Vision

Oregon's private rangelands provide habitat for sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate wildlife species. Threats of wildfire, invasive annual grasses, conifer encroachment, injurious grazing practices, and open space fragmentation have been reduced as a result of this partnership. Threats to sage-grouse will continue to be addressed and conservation efforts will be maintained in a manner considerate of local economic and social needs. This focused vision advances a broader goal of the CCAA partnership to create a replicable grassroots conservation model for Oregon that is ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable. Figure 1 provides exemplifies the collaborative efforts that are typical of the OACSC that works together to meet statewide goals and objectives.



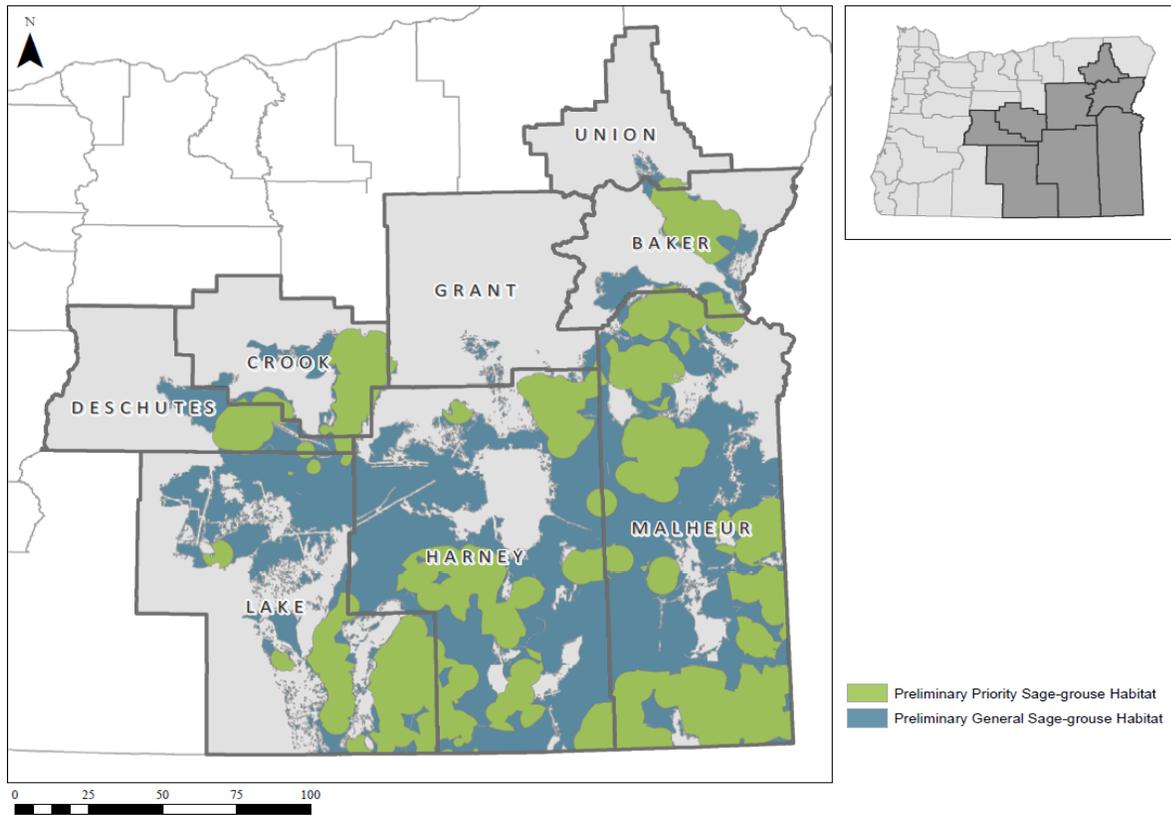
**Figure 1. Collaboration among many partners is essential to accomplishing the vision of the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee.**

## 4. Scope and Guiding Principles

### Geographic Scope

The scope of the project area is all occupied sage-grouse habitat in Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, and Union Counties (Figure 2). There are nearly 18 million acres of sage-grouse habitat in the CCAA geography; approximately 69% is BLM-owned, 24% is privately-owned, and the remaining 7% is split among lands managed by the State of Oregon, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, USFWS, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The primary focus of the OACSC is the development and implementation of CCAAs on the nearly 3.5 million acres of privately-owned sage-grouse habitat in the CCAA geography. However, the majority of livestock operations in eastern Oregon rely on grazing permits or leases on public lands in addition to their private holdings. Therefore, coordination with the appropriate management agencies (BLM, USFS, and Oregon Department of State Lands [DSL]) is necessary to ensure that CCAA SSPs for private lands are developed in a manner that accounts for management considerations and restrictions on associated public lands, such that the final SSPs are workable and compatible with the livestock operations as a whole.



**Figure 2. Geography of the OACSC.**

In addition, the OACSC will continue to look for opportunities for enrolled landowners to implement conservation measures in their SSPs in a coordinated and collaborative manner to achieve landscape scale conservation with greater efficiency. For example, where partners such as BLM, Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs), or others are planning restoration projects, the SWCDs and PBWC will

facilitate participation of enrolled landowners in the project vicinity - providing coordination, and technical and financial assistance – resulting in larger scale restoration projects that are more economically efficient.

### **Guiding Principles**

The guiding principles that create the balanced foundation and vision for this action plan are as follows:

#### **Tiered Approach**

- Several interdisciplinary sage-grouse conservation plans (described in [Section 9](#)) provide guidance for the OACSC. The plans are tiered in their approach to sage-grouse conservation and offer guidance from a regional perspective down to the local level.
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service, Conservation Objectives Team Report (COT Report)
  - Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon: A Plan to Maintain and Enhance Populations and Habitat (ODFW Conservation Strategy)
  - Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan (State Action Plan)
  - SageCon Annual Rangeland Conditions Reports
  - SageCon Invasive Geographic Strategy
  - Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAAs)
  - Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee Strategic Action Plan (this SAP)

Each conservation plan focuses on sage-grouse habitat restoration and addresses the dominant limiting factors to sage-grouse and the sage-steppe ecosystem at various geographic scales. The plans are intended to guide the decision-making process for future sage-steppe and sage-grouse habitat efforts within the western United States and the state of Oregon, as well as at the county and local community level.

#### **Respect**

- People
  - Ensure that interested parties within and outside the group are treated with fairness and equality.
- Ideas
  - Ideas from interested parties and stakeholders will be considered and addressed in a professional and unbiased manner.

#### **Commitment**

- To Resources
  - Ensure that natural resource health and sustainability benefits from decisions generated by the group. The sagebrush steppe ecosystem is challenging to restore once habitat loss or degradation occurs. Therefore, it is essential that all conservation decisions consider the complexity associated with balancing the goals for both sage-grouse habitat restoration along with agricultural and economic goals for each county. All partners are expected to seek this balance in project design and implementation and to use best-available science to guide conservation efforts.

- To Landowners
  - Proactively outline and discuss the terms/conditions of the agreement with landowners to establish clarity about agreement expectations and objectives.
  - Facilitate resolution to maintain the balance between agricultural/economic goals with sage-grouse goals.
  - Consider landowners' concerns and suggestions when making landscape-scale decisions.
  - Maintain landowner privacy and respect private property rights.
- To Ourselves
  - Uphold the standard of maintaining a highly functional, efficient, and evolving group that progresses in a positive direction.
- To Education and Outreach
  - Stay up-to-date on current science that will help the group make educated decisions.
  - Provide educational and outreach opportunities to interested parties outside the group (general public, other professionals, students, etc.).

### Stewardship Conservation

- Use an integrated approach
  - The intent of the plan is to develop an integrated approach to improve sage-grouse habitat in the Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, and Union counties high priority areas by addressing threats identified as likely, or definitively, impacting sage-grouse populations that are within the immediate control of stakeholders, and for which strategic actions are likely to have a positive impact.
  - Make informed decisions to promote sustainability of natural resources (animal and plant) while maintaining the agricultural focus of the communities and land within.
  - Conservation strategies will integrate local, regional, and national needs.
- 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; and 4) demonstrate responsible stewardship of funds; 5) represent project implementation geospatially.
- Prioritize actions
  - To guide future work, the plan prioritizes actions that:
    1. Implement conservation measures identified in a Site-Specific Plan;
    2. Address previously treated sites that require retreatment or follow-up treatment to promote success;
    3. Expand contiguous treatment areas and ultimately areas of suitable habitat for sage-grouse by siting proposed conservation activities adjacent to an existing treatment area; and/or
    4. Are located where there is the greatest likelihood of sage-grouse utilization.

## 5. Conservation History

Within the CCAA geography there are over 20 years of history implementing conservation actions to improve limiting factors associated with sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat. Targeted restoration began with the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI), which was formed in 2010 as a partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, and nonprofit groups working together with a shared vision of achieving wildlife conservation

through sustainable ranching. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), along with ODFW, USFWS, and the SWCDs in each county worked together to utilize funding opportunities through the Farm Bill to implement conservation projects on private land that would benefit sage-grouse and enhance habitat conditions. These Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI) projects, which focused on removing juniper and treating invasive annual grasses, led to thousands of acres being treated to improve the sage-grouse dilemma.

### **Partnership Conservation 2011 – 2015**

By 2011, the movement to improve sage-grouse conditions increased and became more focused. ODFW established Local Implementation Teams (LITs) throughout the state to further identify local threats in a spatially explicit manner. The goal was to apply conservation measures with a high degree of coordination on a landscape level. This effort increased coordination and focus on key areas in need of treatment, especially treatment of non-native annual grasses. In addition, USFWS spearheaded the development of CCAAs. Successful pilot projects led to multiple county wide sage-grouse CCAAs, which were signed in 2015. This initiative brought private landowners, USFWS, and the SWCDs from each county together to further address the plight of sage-grouse.

By August 2015, 638,423 acres of privately owned PPH sage-grouse habitat were covered by a signed letter of intent to enroll in a CCAA. Shortly thereafter, USFWS announced that sage-grouse no longer warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act. The decision was based, in part, on the extensive conservation efforts that had taken place across the range of sage-grouse since 2010. More importantly, the decision was based on the many conservation plans that were developed to guide sage-grouse conservation efforts into the future.

### **Partnership Conservation 2015-2021**

In 2015, as the sage-grouse conservation efforts continued, more partners began collaborating and working across jurisdictional boundaries to address larger, landscape scale projects to benefit sage-grouse and rangeland health. The NRCS scaled-up their efforts by introducing and implementing the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which advanced conservation efforts with private landowners enrolled in the CCAAs. Local agencies like BLM, ODFW, watershed councils, Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) and others began amplifying their efforts and working with the OACSC to leverage resources and build contiguous projects across ownership boundaries.

With private landowners on board and momentum of the OACSC on the rise, the partnership found that they were ready to increase the pace and scale of their restoration actions. Capacity and financing were the only thing standing in their way. The OACSC applied for their first Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) in 2015. By 2016, they had a grant agreement established so that they could strategically take the OACSC to the next level of conservation, in focused areas in Lake, Harney, and Malheur counties (**Figure 3**). This 6-year opportunity (2016-2021), along with other leveraged dollars allowed conservation to be achieved wherever it was most needed across the landscape, regardless of the land ownership. The ability to utilize the funds where they are needed enabled projects to merge and achieve landscape-scale conservation, which is imperative for a landscape-scale species, such as sage-grouse. Increased capacity of the OACSC provided a means for the Partnership to ensure that ecological outcomes were achieved in an efficient manner. They were now able to provide a critical resource for successful conservation and collaboration.

The initial FIP geography area selected by the OACSC was within Harney, Lake, and Malheur counties and totaled 745,401 acres (**Figure 3**). The area encompassed six Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs; synonymous with ODFW Core Areas and Preliminary Priority Habitat [PPH]): Bully Creek, Burns, Cow Valley,

Drewsey, and Warners. Besides the focal area being tied directly to priority habitat, the area also complimented past, current, and future conservation efforts on private and public lands. For these reasons, conservation efforts were more likely to succeed in the identified focus area.

The OACSC completed its final year of OWEB FIP Phase 1 implementation in 2021. They have been extremely successful in completing conservation actions outlined for improving sage-steppe habitat, even exceeding projected outcomes. Project partners have been able to strategically meet their goals and while doing so, learned a great deal about their potential, their capacity, and the conservation treatments that will ultimately help them meet their desired outcomes. FIP funding along with other leveraged grant dollars, empowered the OACSC to increase capacity and the pace and scale of actual restoration treatments leading to improved sage-steppe rangeland on over 255,943 acres of priority habitat in these three counties. Although Crook/Deschutes, Baker/Union, and Grant counties were not a part of this initial effort, they continued to pursue other funding sources to address sage-grouse habitat issues in each of their respective counties.

### **Partnership Conservation 2021 - 2045:**

As of March 2021, Powder Basin Watershed Council was incorporated into the OACSC partnership to represent Baker and Union counties, having had the CCAA permit and associated responsibilities transferred to them from the Baker SWCD. They are active contributors to the OACSC and provide direction for Baker and Union counties sage-grouse activities. With an established CCAA Coordinator in place, the Powder Basin Watershed Council will focus on outreach activities to inform interested landowners of the CCAA opportunity, with the aim to renew interest in the program, as well as needed conservation work. Focused Investment Partnership funding secured by the Baker LIT in 2019 provides funds for CCAA capacity planning, implementation and monitoring activities. With Baker and Union counties participation, the OACSC will cohesively move forward to reach short and long-term goals established by the OACSC. Each is in a different place regarding management objectives, however, together they will adaptively manage their efforts towards conservation goals outlined through 2045.

Concurrently, a database called the Oregon Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Tracker was developed for the OACSC to collectively report their conservation projects and monitoring results. This database will ultimately track ecological successes and be used in the future to make management decisions regarding sage-grouse populations and sage-steppe habitat.

Currently, each county and USFWS is planning and implementing outlined targets annually. Monitoring activities are following conservation actions to determine whether ecological progress is being made across Oregon in priority sage-steppe habitat. With increased capacity, improved knowledge for best conservation practices, and collaborative partnership efforts occurring across the landscape the OACSC will undoubtedly reach statewide goals to ultimately restore sage-grouse habitat for nesting and food supply. In time, the landscape will change so that fewer woodland type plant communities will decrease, perennial bunch grasses and forbs will increase, and post fire plant communities will return with desired plant species rather than invasive annual grasses.

In the interim, the OACSC will continue to seek project funding to successfully implement each Programmatic CCAA. To fulfill their scope of work and funding needs, the OACSC is planning to seek another Focused Investment Partnership grant in 2022 for efforts within a subset of the overall OACSC geography in Crook, Lake, Harney, and Malheur counties (**Figure 3**). They will also pursue other grant funding to ultimately complete conservation treatments across the landscape as outlined in their plan of action.

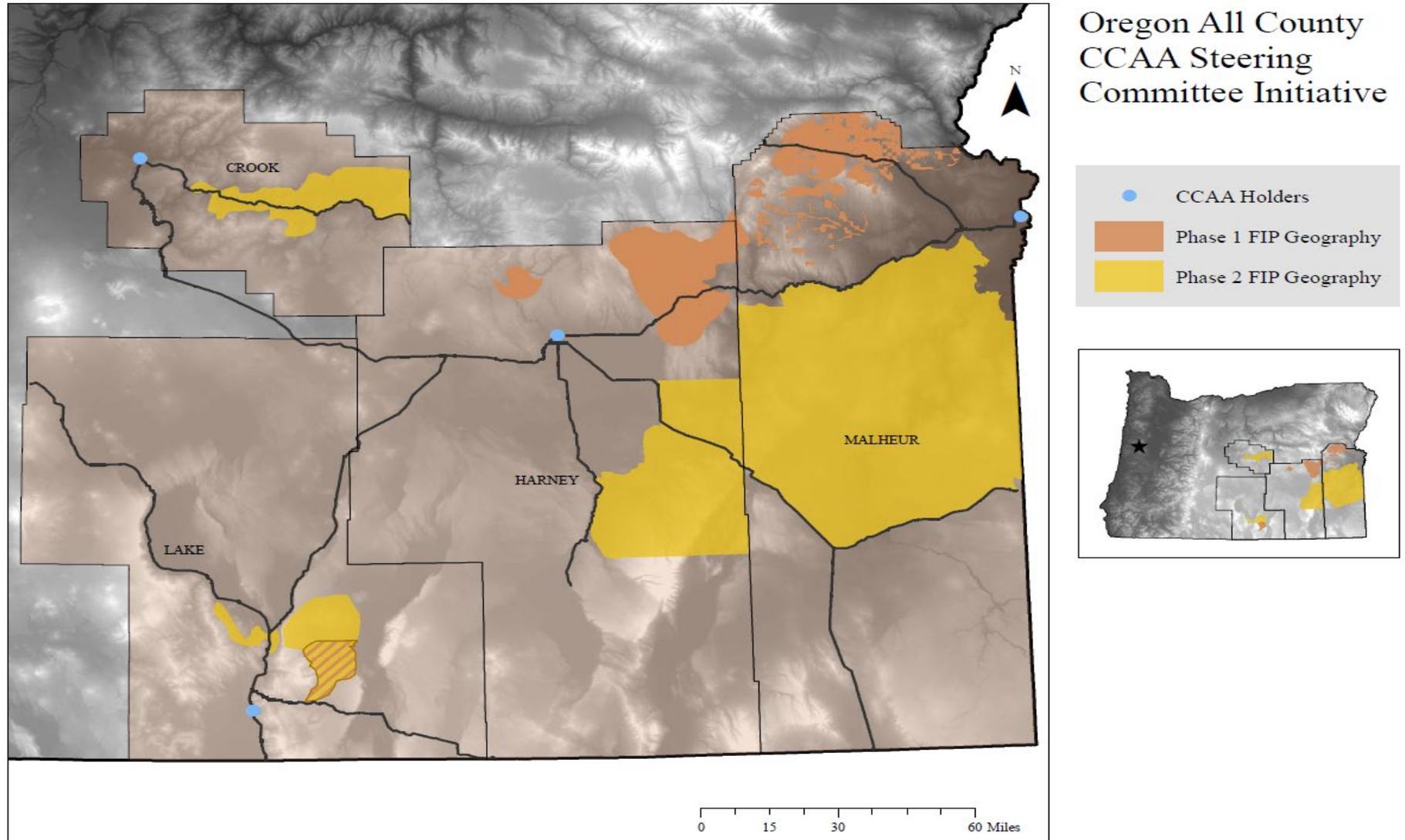


Figure 3. OWEB FIP Phase I focal area, 2016-2021 (yellow) and Proposed OWEB Phase II FIP focal area, 2022-2028 – (orange).

## 6. Partnership Roles

The following section provides a summary of the core implementation partners comprising the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee (SWCDs, PBWC, USFWS). The OACSC expects that while over time individual representatives may pursue other career opportunities, each participating organization will continue to engage in the partnership and other highly qualified individuals will successfully assume the responsibilities necessary for the continued success of the OACSC. Partners are split into three groups according to their level of involvement (Table 1).

**Table 1. Experience and anticipated contributions of core and external partners.**

Partner	Experience	Contribution
<b>Tier I: Core Partners (Parties to the Programmatic CCAAs)</b>		
Lakeview SWCD (LSWCD)	SWCDs were established in Oregon in 1939 with the goal to direct programs to protect local renewable resources. SWCDs provide technical assistance, education, and funding to local landowners to accomplish natural resources and sustainable agriculture goals. The four SWCDs that are core partners have been implementing the Sage-grouse Programmatic CCAAs since their inception in 2015 and employ staff with wildlife biology, rangeland and water resource management expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SWCDs and PBWC are responsible for providing skilled technical staff to secure funding for and develop, implement, and monitor Site Specific Plans for 30 years.</li> <li>• These entities also manage all program data and complete all required reporting to USFWS and others.</li> <li>• Additionally, as Core Partners, SWCDs and PBWC are responsible for the administration and governance of the Oregon All Counties Steering Committee.</li> </ul>
Malheur County SWCD (MSWCD)		
Crook County SWCD (CSWCD)		
Harney County SWCD (HSWCD)		
Powder Basin Watershed Council (PBWC)	PBWC was formed in 1991 and is a locally organized, voluntary, non-regulatory group established to maintain and improve the conditions of the Powder Basin watershed. PBWC works closely with a variety of stakeholders to lead activities that enhance natural resources. PBWC assumed the Baker/Union Programmatic CCAA in 2021 and employs staff with wildlife biology, rangeland and water resource management expertise.	
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	The mission of the USFWS is to work collaboratively to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. One tool for accomplishing this mission are CCAAs and agency-wide, USFWS has been involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of CCAAs since these types of agreements began in 1999. In Oregon, USFWS has been actively engaged in the development and completion of all six Programmatic CCAA's for greater sage-grouse, as well as a CCAA for Oregon State Lands, and similar agreements for federally-managed lands (CCAs). The USFWS employs biologists with expertise in fish, wildlife, and their habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USFWS supports the CCAA program by assisting with administrative and capacity functions and through funding as resources allow.</li> <li>• USFWS provides training and ongoing program-wide updates.</li> <li>• The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides funding for on-the-ground conservation.</li> <li>• USFWS staff review SSPs to ensure compliance with the CCAA standard and provide a Letter of Concurrence within 60 days if all issuance criteria are met, thereby allowing permit holders to administer Certificates of Inclusion to enrolled landowners.</li> </ul>

Tier 2: CCAA Partners		
<b>Private Landowners</b>	Private landowners provide the knowledge and connection to the land that can only be gained by living within the systems that we are seeking to protect. Their knowledge of natural and agricultural processes is essential to the successful implementation of the CCAAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist in the development and review of Site Specific Plans</li> <li>• Participate in annual reporting and implementation of conservation measures identified in their SSP</li> <li>• Provide in-kind match for restoration projects</li> </ul>
Tier 3: Technical Partners		
<b>Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since 1935, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (originally called the Soil Conservation Service) has provided leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources.</li> <li>• NRCS has decades of experience administering Farm Bill programs (e.g., EQIP, SGI, CSP, ALE) within the Oregon's rangelands, including its Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program which provides voluntary conservation technical assistance to land-users, communities, units of state and local government, and other federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRCS works with SWCDs, PBWC, and CCAA enrollees to provide technical assistance based on sound science and suited to a customer's specific needs.</li> <li>• NRCS provides financial assistance for many conservation activities on CCAA-enrolled lands.</li> <li>• NRCS provided funding for CCAA implementation through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program.</li> </ul>
<b>Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OACD has worked for 66 years to advance the interest of SWCDs for the conservation, wise use, and enhancement of Oregon's natural resources by providing leadership, information, and representation.</li> <li>• OACD promotes a strong network of self-reliant districts that comprise the primary delivery system for programs that implement healthy, economically viable natural resource management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist with coordination and administrative services for the variety of investments (secured and pending).</li> </ul>
<b>Bureau of Land Management (BLM)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. As a "multiple-use" agency, the BLM has a long history of balancing uses like energy development, livestock grazing, recreation, timber harvest, with conservation of natural, cultural and historic resources.</li> <li>• The BLM has a workforce with diverse expertise, including rangeland and aquatic, management, fish and wildlife, and restoration practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide fiscal management of matching funds for project implementation and monitoring on federal land Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs).</li> <li>• Provide funds and project management for conservation efforts on federal lands to address threats to greater sage-grouse.</li> <li>• Coordinate with Core Partners to implement projects adjacent to conservation work occurring on CCAA-enrolled lands.</li> </ul>
<b>Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative Weed Management Areas were established in the mid 1990's.</li> <li>• CWMA staff have expertise in planning and conducting weed surveillance and eradication activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public education</li> <li>• Monitoring and mapping</li> <li>• Weed prevention</li> <li>• Cost share funding for weed control</li> <li>• Weed control and restoration</li> </ul>
<b>Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ODFW has been monitoring sage-grouse populations and their habitats in Oregon since the 1940s.</li> <li>• The Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan (SageCon 2015) and Oregon Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy (ODFW 2011) quantify threats to sage-grouse and provides state-wide strategies to address them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical review of documents, plans, and projects related to sage-grouse and other wildlife species using sage-steppe habitats</li> <li>• Sage-grouse population monitoring.</li> <li>• Implementation funding through the Access and Habitat Program and Mule Deer Initiative.</li> </ul>

<b>SageCon Partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SageCon Partnership was established in 2012 to provide a network for facilitation and coordination among statewide partners invested in preserving the sagebrush ecosystem, sage-grouse, and ranching communities in eastern Oregon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SageCon has and continues to produce valuable resources to plan and implement conservation actions undertaken by the OACSC, including but not limited to, range-wide habitat and ecological condition maps, the Invasive Geographic Strategy, and annual reports documenting shifts in habitat quality and quantity and conservation efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>County Governments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County governments have been involved in CCAA development and funding since the beginning of the process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide funding to help cover administrative costs of districts and build capacity to implement sage-grouse plans.</li> </ul>
<b>USDA – Agricultural Research Service (ARS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ARS has conducted extensive research exploring the complex interactions in sage-steppe ecosystems.</li> <li>ARS helped to design the monitoring protocol used in the CCAA program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information and research relevant to planning and implementing changes in natural and agricultural systems intended to improve sage-grouse habitat.</li> </ul>
<b>Oregon State University Extension Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oregon State University Extension has been committed to helping promote resilient and healthy natural ecosystems and sustainable agriculture for over 100 years.</li> <li>OSU Extension faculty were instrumental in the design of the monitoring protocol used in the CCAA program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide technical assistance to landowners and practitioners.</li> <li>Provide educational opportunities for a variety of stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>The Nature Conservancy (TNC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Nature Conservancy was established in 1951 and has been advancing conservation in Oregon’s sagebrush ecosystem for decades through scientific research, policy development, advocacy, and other forms of technical support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide scientific support in the design and implementation of conservation projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established in 1987, OWEB began implementing its mission to help protect and restore healthy watershed and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies.</li> <li>In 2015, OWEB committed \$10 to support sage-grouse habitat investments and identified sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat as an ecological priority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OWEB staff provide expertise and convene subject matter experts to review and enhance proposed restoration projects.</li> <li>Provide funding for CCAA effort through Focused Investment Partnership and Open Solicitation grants.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Implementation Team (LITs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LITs were established by ODFW in 2011 with the goal to identify threats to sage-grouse in a spatially explicit manner at the local level and to coordinate local partners to maximize conservation outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate conservation efforts and funding proposals among local partners.</li> <li>Organize continuing education opportunities and field visits.</li> </ul>

## 7. Governance Documents

A brief overview of our meetings and decision-making process is discussed below. See [Appendix A: Governance Document](#) for additional details.

### Meetings:

The following meetings are anticipated for the OACSC:

- Semi-annual or quarterly coordination meetings
- Special Issue SWCDs, PBWC, USFWS 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.

#### **Decision Making Process:**

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

- 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 voting member is 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.

## **8. Ecological Priorities and Goals**

**The overarching ecological outcome of the Partnership is to strategically plan and implement conservation treatments on a landscape scale to increase the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately increase sage-grouse populations statewide.** This Strategic Action Plan has evolved since 2015 and the 2022 update includes new and/or revised strategies, goals, and objectives that reflect the OACSC’s progress, accomplishments, and lessons learned. In this third iteration of the SAP, some former goals and objectives have been restructured or removed to more clearly articulate and measure progress towards the overall aim of the OACSC.

The 2022 Strategic Action Plan establishes OACSC’s plan of work for a thirty-year period and is organized according to four goals with corresponding sub-categories. An overview of the 2022 SAP is provided in **Table 2** and a comprehensive version of the SAP is included in **Appendix B: Detailed Work Plan**. This work plan documents actions, anticipated outputs, metrics, and baseline and effectiveness monitoring for documenting the OACSC’s progress. Additionally, Appendix B conveys the how each objective operates within our [Theory of Change](#) (**Figure 7**) to ultimately accomplish our overarching ecological outcome.



**Figure 4. Removing encroaching junipers increases the amount of quality sagebrush habitat available. Private landowners, NRCS, BLM, SWCDs, USFWS and other partners have cooperated to treat hundreds of thousands of acres of sagebrush habitat since 2010.**

**Table 2. Summary of 2022 Strategic Action Plan goals, strategies, and sub-categories of objectives. See [Appendix B](#) for additional detail.**

<b>GOAL 1: Ensure the administrative framework and capacity exists for Programmatic CCAA throughout the life of the CCAA.</b>			
Strategy 1	<p><b>Administrative framework and capacity:</b> This strategy focuses on ensuring the administrative framework and capacity to enroll private lands in the Greater Sage-grouse Programmatic CCAAs and execute site specific plans. Aspects of this strategy include ensuring adequate staffing within each county, providing All County CCAA Coordination, maintaining the CCAA database, and communication/coordination with state-wide external partners to relay CCAA progress and accomplishments to remain engaged with state-level partners and funders.</p>	Sub-categories	Administrative capacity
			Administrative framework
			Statewide communication and outreach
<b>GOAL 2: By 2045, a minimum of 40% of eligible acres will be enrolled with a signed SSP, USFWS letter of concurrence, and issuance of a certificate of inclusion</b>			
Strategy 2	<p><b>Landowner Outreach and enrollment and local partner communication:</b> This strategy focuses on communication to landowners and local partners. The goal of local outreach is to communicate enrollment opportunities and benefits to private landowners and local agencies with the purpose to enroll eligible lands according to the prioritization guidance in the programmatic CCAAs.</p>	Sub-categories	Landowner outreach and local partner communication
			Landowner enrollment.
<b>GOAL 3: By 2045, implement 90% of the conservation measures that are prescribed in signed SSPs to guide conservation measures to address threats to sage-grouse on enrolled lands.</b>			
Strategy 3	<p><b>Reduce threats to sage-grouse and maintain or improve the ecological condition of sage-grouse habitat:</b> This strategy focuses on management actions to reduce threats to sage-grouse on privately owned rangelands with the goal of maintaining or achieving high quality habitat conditions necessary to promote sage-grouse populations. This may include assisting landowners to apply for funding to implement conservation measures.</p>	Sub-categories	Overarching
			Wildfire threat
			Invasive vegetation threat
			Juniper threat
			Grazing threat
			Increased habitat
<b>GOAL 4: Monitor 100% of SSPs for the life of the CCAA and complete required reporting to assess effectiveness.</b>			
Strategy 4	<p><b>Monitor, maintain, and report on plans for the lifetime of the CCAA:</b> This strategy focuses on the work that is required for ongoing monitoring of enrolled properties, not only a requirement per the terms of the Programmatic CCAAs, but also to document progress towards the goals stated above and to guide adaptive management of conservation measures.</p>	Sub-categories	Monitor
			Report
			Changed circumstances

## 9. Profile of the CCCAA Geography

The OACSC's area of work includes all private lands that support sage-grouse habitat in eastern Oregon (see **Figure 2**). Because this sage-steppe region is so vast, we incrementally partitioned our efforts to work in selected portions of our overall geography. During 2016-2021, the Harney, Lake, and Malheur SWCDs focused work in their OWEB Focused Investment Partnership focal area (FIP Phase 1 Focal Area, **Figure 3**), while the Crook SWCD and Baker SWCD/PBWC continued the CCAA effort throughout Crook/Deschutes and Baker/Union counties, respectively. With significant accomplishments in the FIP Phase 1 geography and ongoing demand for CCAA enrollment in additional areas, the OACSC prioritized a new sub-portion of the overall focus area for work during 2022-2029 (FIP Phase 2 Focal Area, **Figure 3**). Work will continue in Baker and Union counties with OWEB funding through 2024 provided to the PBWC through the Baker Sage-grouse Focused Investment Partnership. The profile included below describes the overall OACSC area of work.

### Physical Geography

The geography aligns very closely with three Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs); MLRA 10 – Central Rock and Blue Mountain Foothill, MLRA 23 – Malheur High Plateau, and MLRA 25 – Owyhee High Plateau. MLRA 10 covers the northern geography, including portion of the Deschutes, Crook, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Baker and Union Counties. This MLRA is typified by gently rolling to steep hills, plateaus, and low mountains. MLRA 23 covers the majority of the southern portion, including parts of Deschutes, Crook, Lake, Harney, and Malheur Counties. MLRA 23 consist primarily of nearly level to moderately steep plateaus, basins, and valleys bordered by long, gently sloping alluvial fans. MLRA 25 covers the southeastern portion of the geography in Malheur County. This MLRA is characterized by uplifted fault-block mountain ranges separated by narrow desert plains and deep narrow canyons draining into the Snake River.

### Water Resources

There are portions of nine river basins in the CCAA geography, including the Grande Ronde, Powder, John Day, Malheur, Middle Snake/Boise Basin, Black Rock, Owyhee, and Deschutes Basins, and the Oregon Closed Basin. The major rivers in the project area include the Powder River, Grande Ronde River, John Day River, Crooked River, Donner und Blitzen River, Silvies River, Owyhee River, and Malheur River. Nearly all of these river basins are dominated by sagebrush habitat uplands, with higher elevations and headwaters containing forested landscapes and steeper slopes. Most of the precipitation falls during the winter as snow, and all of these basins are fed by snowmelt. Snowpack-fed stream flows are an important source of water for irrigation, fish, wildlife, livestock, domestic water supply and other uses (Oregon Department of Agriculture 2011).

### Wetlands

According to the ODFW's Conservation Strategy, wetlands provide important habitat for migrating and breeding waterfowl, shorebirds, water-birds, songbirds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2016). Wetlands have direct value for people because they improve water quality by trapping sediments and toxins, recharging aquifers, storing water, and reducing the severity of floods. Water is extremely limited in much of the Blue Mountains, East Cascades, and Northern Basin and Range ecoregions. As a result, there is competition for water resources, particularly in late summer. Lowered water tables affect wetland habitats. Competition for water harms both ecological and economic goals. Water diversions for other uses change the seasonality of flooding, slow habitat recovery, and increase invasion of non-native grasses. Drought years intensify water shortages. Restoration and careful management of wet meadow systems and other wetlands can increase sustainable production of forage for livestock and increase late-season stream flows (ODFW 2016).

Wetlands are particularly important to sage-grouse during late brood-rearing. According to research conducted by Intermountain West Joint Venture, 80% of the existing brood-rearing wetland habitat is located on private land. These areas are of particular importance during late brood rearing when water is limited in sagebrush habitats. This study also analyzed the density of leks in relationship to wetland habitats and found that the highest density leks were situated closer to potential brood rearing habitats (Donnelly et al. 2016).

### Fish, Wildlife, and Plants

**Greater sage-grouse:** Information in this section is primarily based on the State Action Plan (2015) and the annual sage-grouse population reports from ODFW.

Sage-grouse have an extensive history of occupying eastern Oregon's landscapes for their abundant sagebrush habitats and grassland systems, which, provide rich ecological value to their life cycle. Much of this land is large, contiguous acres that span private and public ownership, reaching over 18 million acres of sagebrush habitat in Oregon alone. Historically, sage-grouse were commonly found on these landscapes, however, in the early 1900's their numbers were reduced dramatically in comparison to historic levels.

In particular, ODFW noted that sage-grouse populations fluctuated dramatically from the 1950s to early 1970s. Though sage-grouse populations are cyclical, undergoing periods of increase and decline, there has been an overall decline in population estimates since 1980-2021 (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2021). To maintain and increase sage-grouse populations throughout Oregon, ODFW, USFWS, and other natural resource agencies adopted a statewide strategy in 2011 to address the peril of the sage-grouse. The primary goals are as follows: 1) Population goal: Maintain or enhance sage-grouse abundance and distribution at the 2003 spring breeding population level, approximately 30,000 birds, over the next 50 years; 2) Habitat goal: Maintain or enhance the distribution of sagebrush habitats in Oregon with the objective to retain greater than 70% of sage-grouse range as sagebrush habitat in advanced structural stages and to manage the remaining 30% (areas of juniper encroachment, non-sagebrush shrubland, and grassland) to increase available habitat within the range of the sage-grouse (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2011).

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the primary causes for long term changes in population abundance and distribution. Other factors include drought, wildfire, juniper encroachment, invasive annual grasses, West Nile virus, agricultural conversion, recreation and predators. Conservation of sagebrush habitat and grasslands is essential, and sage-grouse are a wide-ranging, sagebrush obligate species, that use habitat according to their seasonal needs. Specifically, sage-grouse habitat includes the following: a) nesting habitat in the late spring, b) early brood-rearing habitat from June to mid-July, c) late brood-rearing habitat from mid-July to September, and d) winter habitat. Over the last five years, ODFW, USFWS, the OACSC and other conservation organizations have actively addressed these issues in order to improve habitat conditions in the CCAA geography. Conservation measures are annually applied to priority areas on private and public land to improve overall conditions and to meet ODFW's statewide goals. ODFW monitors sage-grouse habitat and populations in the state and reports population metrics annually. ODFW's 2021 report estimates 15,927 birds in the state and shows that Oregon's sage-grouse population may currently in an upward oscillation, having peaked in 2016. However, the 2021 estimate is still the third lowest estimated sage-grouse population in Oregon during the analysis period and is well below ODFW's target of approximately 30,000 birds (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2021).

**Other Wildlife:** Although the focus of the Programmatic CCAAs is sage-grouse, numerous other wildlife species also inhabit sagebrush ecosystems in Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Lake, and Malheur counties, these other species are discussed in this section. The mix of shrubs and herbaceous plants found in sagebrush and associated communities provides habitat for a large number of other vertebrates. Table 3 lists the vertebrate species associated with sagebrush ecosystems and their status in Oregon.

**Table 3. Terrestrial vertebrate species associated with sagebrush ecosystems and status<sup>1</sup> in Oregon.**

	Common Name	Scientific Name	ODFW Status
Birds	Ferruginous hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	SC
	Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	SV
	Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	NLc
	Vesper sparrow	<i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>	SCd
	Lark sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	NL
	Brewer’s sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	NL
	Black-throated sparrow	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>	SP
	Sage sparrow	<i>Amphispiza belli</i>	SCe
	Grasshopper sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	SV
	Western meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	SCe
	Greater sage-grouse	<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	SVf
	Sage thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	NL
	Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	NL
	Green tailed towhee	<i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>	
Mammals	Preble’s shrew	<i>Sorex preblei</i>	NL
	Pygmy rabbit	<i>Brachylagus idahoensis</i>	SV
	Sagebrush vole	<i>Lemmiscus curtatus</i>	NL
	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus californicus</i>	SVe
	White-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus townsendii</i>	SV
	Kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis</i>	LT
	Pronghorn	<i>Antilocapra Americana</i>	NL
	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	
Reptiles	Northern Sagebrush Lizard	<i>Sceloporus graciosus graciosus</i>	SVe
	Mojave black-collared lizard	<i>Crotaphytus bicinctores</i>	NL
	Longnose leopard lizard	<i>Gambelia wislizenii</i>	NL
	Striped whipsnake	<i>Masticophis taeniatus</i>	NL
	Ground snake	<i>Sonora semiannulata</i>	NL

<sup>1</sup>Sensitive species codes begin with “S” and are further defined as follows: SC = critical; SP = peripherally or naturally rare; SU = undetermined status; and SV = vulnerable. Listed species codes: LE = listed as endangered and LT = listed threatened. NL Denotes a species not listed as sensitive by Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (Source: ODFW 2010).

**Birds:** Twenty-two species of birds use sagebrush as a key element in their life history requirements. The list of species that are considered obligates or near-obligates of sagebrush usually includes sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli*), Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*), black-throated sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*), lark sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), green-tailed towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), and sage thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), all of which occur in the CCAA geography. The sage thrasher is the only sagebrush obligate species on the birds of conservation concern list for the Great Basin Region which occurs in the CCAA geography. Oregon junco and chipping sparrow occur throughout the area and often use sagebrush habitats that are associated with juniper encroachment.

**Mammals:** Because there are no standardized surveys for mammal populations, there is little information available on long-term mammal population trends in sagebrush communities. The list of mammals considered obligate or near obligate species includes the sagebrush vole (*Lemmiscus curtatus*), pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), Townsend's ground squirrel (*Urocitellus townsendii*), kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), and pronghorn (*Antilocapra Americana*). Sagebrush voles are usually found in sagebrush but may occur in areas lacking a sagebrush overstory if grass understories are thick enough. Pygmy rabbits are not very common and are found primarily in areas dominated by tall, dense stands of sagebrush on deep soils that allow them to construct burrows to live in. Pronghorns are the only large herbivore that have a strong association with sagebrush and are most successful where sagebrush is available for winter forage (Hagen 2011), though mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus* spp.) and elk (*Cervus canadensis*) do occur in our geography and survive on sagebrush and bitterbrush almost exclusively during the winter months.

**Amphibians:** Because of dry climatic conditions and lack of open water, species richness and density of amphibians in shrub steppe communities is low. Nine species of amphibians are generally associated with shrub-steppe habitats, but none are closely associated with these habitats. Only two species of salamander occur in sagebrush habitat communities in Oregon: long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum*) and tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*). Seven of eleven species of native toads and frogs occur in shrub steppe habitat, of which the Great Basin spadefoot toad (*Spea intermontana*), western toad (*Anaxyrus boreas*), Woodhouse's toad (*Bufo woodhousii*), and Columbia Spotted frog (*Rana luteiventris*) are most likely to be found in the CCAA geography. Northern leopard frogs (*Rana pipiens*) are found in shrub-steppe communities, usually in close association with standing water, and may occur in the CCAA geography (Hagen 2011).

**Reptiles:** In contrast to amphibians, species richness and density of reptiles is relatively high in shrub-steppe communities because of the warm and dry climatic conditions. Twenty species of reptiles are generally associated with shrub-steppe habitats in Oregon. Lizards are the group of reptiles most closely associated with shrub-steppe. The Mojave black-collared lizard (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*), long-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia wislizenii*), and desert horned lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*) occur only in shrub-steppe, dwarf shrub-steppe, and desert playa/salt scrub shrublands. Ten of 15 snake species in Oregon occur in shrub-steppe communities or related shrub communities. The ground snake (*Sonora semiannulata*), western long-nosed snake (*Rhinocheilus lecontei*), and desert striped whipsnake (*Masticophis taeniatus*) are associated with shrub-steppe habitats, and six other species western yellow-bellied racer (*Coluber constrictor mormon*), Great Basin gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer deserticola*), Northern Pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis oreganus*), Great Basin rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis lutosus*), rubber boa (*Charina bottae*), western terrestrial garter snake (*Thamnophis elegans*), and common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) occur in a variety of habitats including shrub-steppe (Vander Haegen et al. 2001).

### Threatened and Endangered Species

**Bull trout** (*Salvelinus confluentus*) a threatened species, are found only in very cold water. Bull trout require stable stream channels, clean spawning gravel, complex and diverse cover, and unblocked migration routes. Sagebrush habitats may be found adjacent to bull trout streams.

The threatened **Lahontan cutthroat trout** (LCT, *Onchorynchus clarkihenshawi*) occupy numerous streams in southeastern Oregon such as Willow Creek, Whitehorse Creek, Little Whitehorse Creek, Doolittle Creek, Fifteen Mile Creek (from the Coyote Lake Basin) and Indian, Sage, and Line Canyon Creeks, tributaries of McDermitt Creek in the Quinn River Basin (Nevada). Surrounding habitats include sagebrush habitat.

**Hutton tui chub** (*Gila bicolor* ssp.) only occur in Hutton Spring, Lake County, Oregon. The spring is in a grassy area bordered to the north and west by occupied sage-grouse habitat, and to the east and south by Alkali Lake.

**Warner sucker** (*Catostomus warnerensis*) are a unique aquatic species found in the Warner Basin Watershed of Lake County Oregon. They occupy the streams of Twentymile Creek, Deep Creek and Honey Creek. Warner Suckers were historically abundant and widely distributed throughout the Warner Basin, but poor connectivity among the lakes and tributaries as a result of multiple factors has diminished Warner Sucker populations. Habitat fragmentation within the Warner Basin and non-native fish impacts reduce the potential for a naturally functioning Warner Sucker metapopulation. Surrounding habitats include sagebrush habitat.

The endangered **Malheur wire lettuce** is a narrow endemic plant located in shrub-steppe habitat and is currently only known in one location on BLM lands in Harney County. It occupies about 10 acres of a 70-acre BLM designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

**Yellow-billed cuckoo** (*Coccyzus americanus*) became an ESA listed species in 2014. Yellow-billed cuckoo are tied to wetland or riparian areas; however, surrounding habitat can include sagebrush; however no proposed critical habitat occurs in the CCAA geography.

### Local Communities, Economies, and Human Population

The seven counties within the CCAA geography make up the majority of the southeastern Oregon landscape. This area of the state is often referred to as the “high desert” and is typically an arid to semi-temperate region. The landscape is dominated by sagebrush and rolling grasslands, high mountain peaks and river valleys. Portions of Lake and adjacent counties are also known as “the Oregon Outback”. Much of the area was originally settled as gold and other precious metals were discovered and small-scale mining does continue in isolated places today. Timber harvest also contributes to the local economic base. Currently, the entire area’s economy is mostly agriculturally based, with some farming of wheat, fruit, vegetables, and grass seeds, but primarily livestock ranching. Tourism provides some economic base for many of the southeastern Oregon counties, with visitors drawn to the area for hunting, fishing, skiing, and other outdoor activities.

**Baker County** is the tenth largest county in Oregon, covering 3,068 square miles with a total population of 15,984 (U.S. Census 2019). It is a rural county with approximately 5.3 persons per square mile, and the county population fell by 0.7% between 2010 and 2013 (U.S. Census 2014). Countywide, the majority of the population (90.8%) is white. The minorities in Baker County include: Hispanic or Latinos (3.7%), Native Americans (1.6%), Black or African Americans (0.4%), Asians (0.6%), and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (<0.1%; US Census 2014). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of Baker County than the statewide average.

The median household income in Baker County 2017 was \$43,921, which is less than the median annual income of \$61,937 across the entire United States. The unemployment rate in Baker County was 6.1% in 2020, with a high of 10.8% in April 2009 and a low of 5.6% in February 2007.

**Union County** is one of eight counties in eastern Oregon covering 2,039 square miles. The population of Union is currently 26,835 (U.S. Census 2019). The overall population has increased in the last ten years by 4.2%. Countywide, the majority of the population is white (92.6%). Minorities in Union County include African Americans (0.8%), Hispanics (5.2%), Native Americans (1.3%), Asians (1.3%), and Native Hawaiians (1.3%).

The local economy continues to be based on natural resources, including farming (wheat, fruit, vegetables, mint, and grass seed), ranching (cattle and sheep), timber, and wind energy. The median household income in Union County 2019 was \$52,171, with the unemployment rate at 13.6%.

**Crook County** is the twelfth largest county in Oregon covering 2,979 square miles and a total population of 22,337 (U.S. Census 2018). According to US Census data between 2012 and 2018, the population increased by 0.9%. Countywide, the majority of the population is white (94.8%). The minority make-up of Crook County is as follows: Hispanic or Latino (7.8%), American Indian (1.4%), Black or African American (0.4%), Asian (0.7%), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (<0.1%). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of the population of Crook County than the statewide average (US Census 2018).

The median household income in Crook County 2018 was \$44,524, with 12.9% of the county's population living below the poverty level (US Census 2018). The median household income is lower than the state average and there is a higher percentage of households below the poverty line than the statewide average.

**Deschutes County** is the eleventh largest county in Oregon, covering 3,018 square miles and hosting a total population of 197,682 (U.S. Census 2018). According to U.S. Census data between 2012 and 2018, the county population grew by 0.9%. Countywide, the population is 94.2% white, with the following minorities represented: Hispanic or Latino (8.1%), American Indian (1.1%), Black or African American (0.6%), Asian (1.3%), and Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.2%). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of the population of Deschutes County than the statewide average.

The median household income in Deschutes County 2012-2018 was \$63,680, with 9.4% of the population living below the poverty level (U.S. Census 2018). The median household income is slightly higher than the statewide average, and there is a slightly lower percentage of the population living below the poverty line than the state average.

**Grant County** is the seventh largest county in Oregon, covering 4,528 square miles with a total population of 7,199 and a density of 1.6 persons per square mile (U.S. Census 2018). Population has decreased in Grant County by 1.02% between 2012 and 2018. Countywide, the majority of the population is white (94.3%) with the following minorities: Hispanic or Latino (3.9%), American Indian (1.7%), Asian (0.7%), Black or African American (0.3%), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.1%; U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of the county population than the statewide average.

The median household income in Grant County 2012-2018 was \$45,357, with 15.3% of the county population living below the poverty level (US Census 2018). The median household income was below the statewide average and the percentage of people living below the poverty level was almost the same as the statewide average.

**Harney County** is the largest county in Oregon covering 10,226 square miles with a total population of 7,393 (U.S. Census 2018). It is a rural county with one of the lowest population densities in the state and according to U.S. Census data between 2010 and 2018, the population of Harney County decreased by 1.0%. Countywide, the majority of the population (91.0%) is white. Minorities in Harney County include: Hispanics or Latinos (4.9%), American Indians (4.2%), Blacks or African Americans (1.1%), Asians (0.6%), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (<0.6%; U.S. Census 2018). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of the population of Harney County than the statewide average.

The median household income in 2011-2018 was \$41,797, with 10.1% of Harney County's population living below the poverty level (U.S. Census 2018). The median household income is lower than the statewide average and there is a higher percentage of households below the poverty line than the statewide average.

**Lake County** is Oregon's third largest county, covering 8,138 square miles with a population of 7,869 and a density of approximately 1.0 person per square mile (U.S. Census 2018). The population increased by 0.9% between 2013 and 2018. Countywide, the majority of the population is white (91.2%) with the following minorities: Hispanic or Latino (8.4%), American Indian (2.5%), Asian (1.4%), Black or African American (0.7%), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.2%). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller population than the statewide average, with the exception of American Indians, due to the proximity of the Klamath tribe (U.S. Census 2018).

The median household income in Lake County 2012-2018 was \$36,627, with 18.3% of the county population living below the poverty level (U.S. Census 2018). The median household income was below the statewide average, and the percentage of people living below the poverty level was slightly higher than the statewide average. The unemployment rate in Lake County was 5.4% in 2018.

**Malheur County** is the second largest county in Oregon, covering 9,887 square miles and supporting a total population of 30,571 (U.S. Census 2018). It is a rural county with approximately 3.2 persons per square mile, and the county population increased by 1.01% between 2013 and 2018 (U.S. Census 2018). Countywide, the majority of the population is white (92.0%), with the following minorities: Hispanic or Latino (34.4%), American Indian (2.0%), Asian (1.6%), Black or African American (1.6%), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.2%). Overall, minorities tend to make up a smaller percentage of the overall population than the state average, with the exception of the Hispanics or Latinos, due to the many farming operations that employ Hispanic or Latino workers in the county.

The median household income in Malheur County from 2012 – 2018 was \$42,478, with 21.0% of the county's population living below the poverty level (U.S. Census 2018). The median household income is lower than the statewide average. The unemployment rate in Malheur County was 8.3% in 2018.

### **Land Ownership**

At present, there are almost 18 million acres of sage-grouse habitat in the CCAA geography; approximately 69% is BLM-owned, 24% is privately-owned, and the remaining 7% is split among State lands, Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### **Land Use**

Approximately 3.5 million acres of private PPH/PGH lands occur within the current range of sage-grouse in the area. Many of these lands are zoned Exclusive Farm Use. This zoning designation specifies a minimum parcel size of 160 acres and 80 acres for irrigated parcels. The most prevalent development type on these lands, besides agricultural, is housing related to farm use. Other uses may be permitted either

administratively (e.g. accessory dwellings in conjunction with farm use) or by conditional use permit (e.g. mining operations); Harney County 2013.

Prior to settlement of these lands, most of the area was likely native shrub-steppe habitat and therefore, sage-grouse habitat. Livestock production is the dominant land use in the CCAA geography. Much of that production occurs in sagebrush habitat, and associated meadow and riparian habitats.

## 10. Conservation Needs and Opportunities

Greater sage-grouse conservation efforts are taking place across a 165-million-acre expanse of sage-grouse habitat that includes areas within eleven western states. In Oregon, the All Counties Steering Committee (SWCDs, PBWS and USFWS) is focused on specifically 18 million acres and eight eastern Oregon counties. As of 2021, the estimated sage-grouse population in Oregon is 15,927 individuals and has increased by 12.2% since 2020, representing the second year of statewide population increase following three consecutive years of decline (2017-2019; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2021). However, the 2021 estimate is still the third lowest estimated sage-grouse population in Oregon during the analysis period of 1980-2021. During 2020-2021, population increases occurred in Burns, Lakeview, and Vale BLM Districts, and the population within the Prineville BLM District declined. The population in the Baker BLM Resource Area increased, but this finding may be unduly influenced by the overall low population in Baker. ODFW’s population management objective is a minimum of 30,000 individuals (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2021).

### Key Documents Supporting Conservation Need

Baseline conditions and threats to sage-grouse within the scope of our SAP geography are characteristic of those that are documented across the range of sage-grouse in Oregon and the western United States. These conditions are described in key documents that are listed by their geographic scope from the entire range of sage-grouse to state and local levels:

Primary Ecological Limiting Factors
➤ Wildfire
➤ Exotic Annual Grasses
➤ Juniper Encroachment
➤ Unmanaged Grazing

- [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Conservation Objectives Team Report \(COT Report, 2013\)](#)—summarizes the current status of sage-grouse and threats across the range and conservation objectives.
- [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon: A Plan to Maintain and Enhance Populations and Habitat \(ODFW Conservation Strategy, 2011\)](#)—includes a description of sage-grouse habitat and factors related to habitat loss in Oregon circa 2011.
- [Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan \(State Action Plan, SageCon, 2015\)](#)—provides a comprehensive inventory of all threats to sage-grouse and estimates the spatial extent of the primary limiting factors compromising habitat condition in Oregon as of 2015.
- [SageCon Annual Rangeland Conditions Report \(SageCon, 2021\)](#)—provides an annual assessment of the ecological state of rangelands across eastern Oregon.
- [SageCon Invasive Geographic Strategy \(SageCon, 2021\)](#)—provides maps of intact, transitioning, and degraded habitat, each representing increasing degrees of invasive annual grasses and provides a framework for prioritizing work to address this threat within eastern Oregon.
- [Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances \(CCAA, 2015\)](#)—each programmatic CCAA describes the habitat, water resources and quality, land uses and ownership, and socio-economics at the scale of the corresponding county(ies) for which it provides coverage.

- [Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee Strategic Action Plan \(SAP, 2016 and 2022\)](#)— synthesizes data from the aforementioned plans to comprehensively discuss baseline conditions across the entire CCAA program area within eight counties.

### **Conservation Need (Ecological Threats and Limiting Factors)**

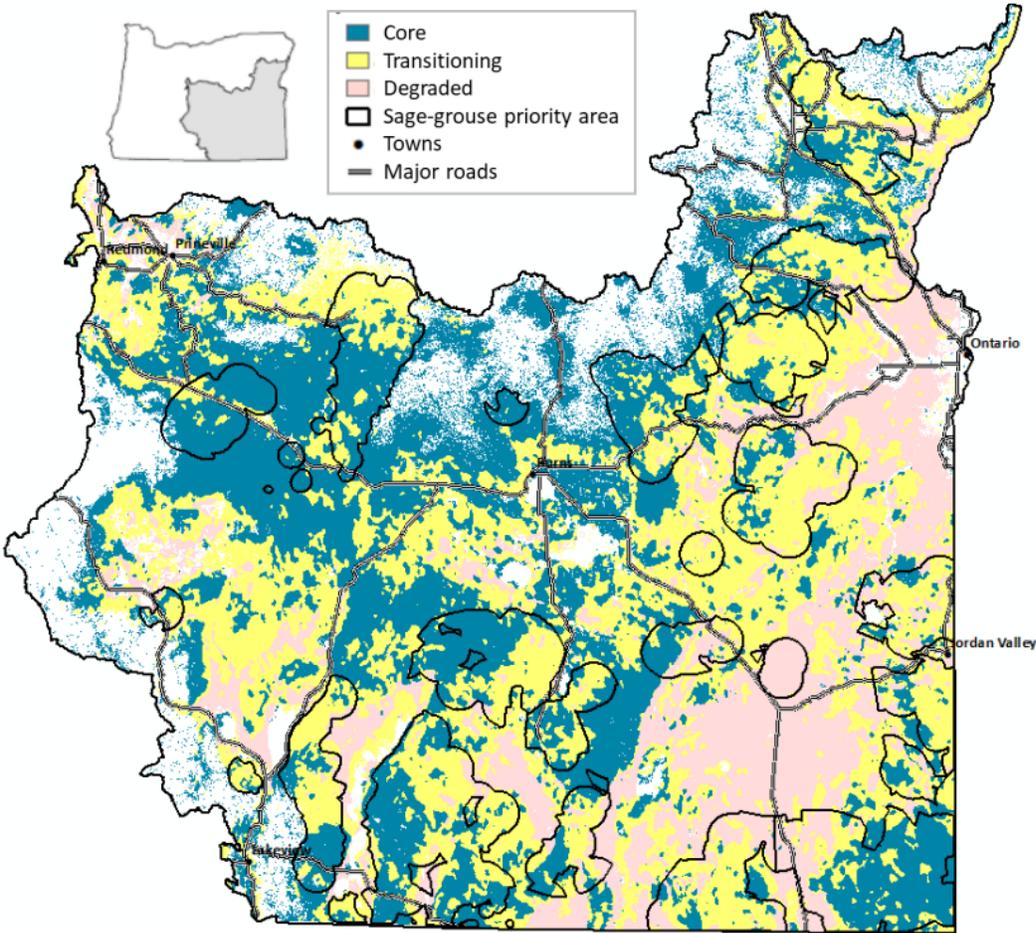
The primary ecological limiting factors expressed in the SAP geography have been described in the each of the assessments listed above: wildfire, exotic annual grasses, juniper/conifer encroachment, and improper grazing management. Combined, these factors contribute to yet another limiting factor: habitat fragmentation. We also identify sustained long-term finding as a limiting factor that is integral to our ability to address the aforementioned ecological threats. The nature and extent of the limiting factors are described below:

***Juniper-Conifer Encroachment:*** ODFW’s 2011 Conservation Strategy estimated that approximately 2.4 million acres of sage-grouse habitat is affected by juniper encroachment in Oregon. A 2015 analysis estimated that early conifer encroachment (Phases I and II, <10% canopy cover) occurs across 730,600 acres within Oregon’s Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs; Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership 2015). An additional estimated 408,600 acres in PACs is Phase III (>10% canopy cover). The majority (estimated 495,980 acres) of conifer encroachment (Phases I and II) in PACs occurs on federal lands, followed by private (estimated 281,658 acres) and state or local lands (estimated 14,473 acres; Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership 2015).

Conifer encroachment in sagebrush ecosystems has increased substantially as a result of settlement, changes in land-use practices and disturbance regimes, as well as climate-driven expansion (Romme et al. 2009). While juniper and other conifers are native components of sage-steppe ecosystems, their encroachment into sagebrush habitat disrupts the ecosystem and has been shown to negatively impact survival rates of nesting birds, reduce the probability of lek activity, and increase the presence and success of sage-grouse nest predators (Coates et al. 2017).

In most cases, juniper removal has a near-immediate benefit to the ecological health of a site and rapidly restores the utility as sage-grouse habitat. However, this effect is best achieved through large-scale and contiguous projects, spanning land ownership boundaries.

***Invasive Annual Grasses and other Noxious Weeds:*** Within our geography, vast areas are estimated to be dominated by invasive annual grasses (IAGs) such as cheatgrass, medusahead rye, and ventenata. In 2013, annual grasses were estimated to be the dominant or subdominant herbaceous vegetation across nearly 1 million acres (15 %) of sage-grouse PACs in Oregon (Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership 2015). IAGs are spreading across Oregon’s rangelands, increasing wildfire size and frequency, reducing forage productivity, and threatening wildlife habitat and rural economies. They are one of the single largest threats to the health and resilience of Oregon’s working landscapes. Other noxious weeds are also contributing to degraded conditions in our geography. The continued expansion of invasive vegetation indicates a high risk of conversion from robust perennial rangelands to invasive annual grass dominated systems, especially if impacted by ecological disturbances such as wildfire. SageCon recently completed an [Invasive Geographic Strategy](#) (2021) which maps Oregon’s sagebrush habitat into intact (minimal evidence of IAGs), transitioning (intermediate levels of infestation), and degraded (invasive annual grass monoculture) areas. According to this mapping effort, large portions of the OACSC’s geography are degraded, but there are also substantial areas of intact habitat in need of protection from areas in transition (Figure 5).

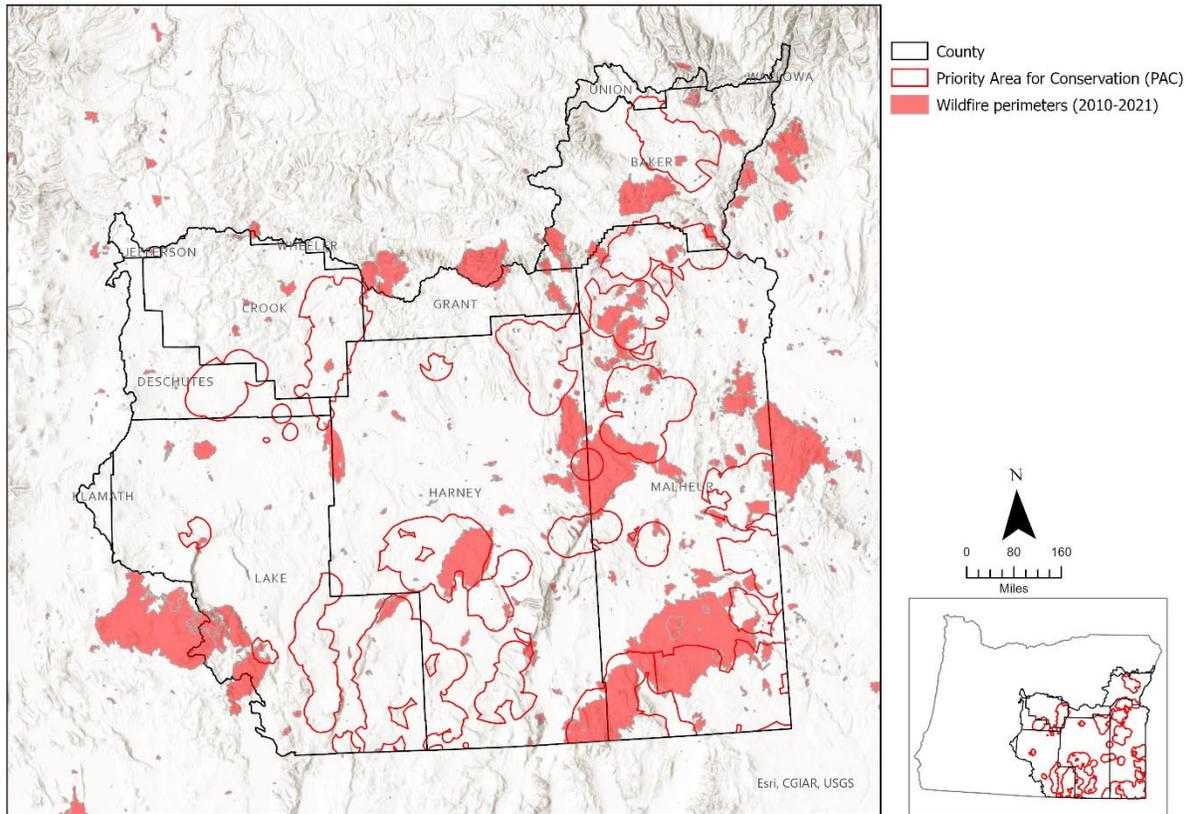


**Figure 5. Intact (core, minimal evidence of invasive annual grasses), transitioning (intermediate levels of infestation), and degraded (invasive annual grass monocultures) areas. Source: SageCon 2021**

Restoring sites dominated by invasive annual grasses and other weeds is typically characterized by low success rates and the need for on-going monitoring to inform subsequent steps (follow-up herbicide treatments, seedings, etc.) to ultimately achieve positive results. Many projects in our geography have and will require multiple treatments over several years. Historically, it has been challenging to maneuver agency funding availability and policies in order to provide the long-term investment required to effect and sustain ecological shifts.

**Wildfire:** Wildfire, both lightning and human-caused, in sagebrush ecosystems is one of the primary risks to sage-grouse, particularly as part of the feedback loop between exotic annual grasses and fire frequency (USFWS 2013). Significant portions of the OACSC geography have burned since 2010 (Figure 6). Low to moderately severe fires in intact sage-grouse habitats may burn perennial bunchgrasses and/or shrubs. While bunchgrasses may rebound after less severe fires, sagebrush can take decades to reestablish post-fire. This degrades the quality of the habitat for sage-grouse through the loss of nesting cover and winter forage. High severity fires may result in mortality of perennial bunchgrasses and forbs in addition to shrub mortality, resulting in a total loss of sage-grouse habitat until the plant community recovers. Grasses like cheatgrass, medusahead rye, and ventenata flourish after a fire and outcompete native perennial bunchgrasses and forbs, resulting in post-fire plant communities that fail to provide adequate nesting cover and food for sage-grouse. In addition, these annual grasses create a layer of fine fuels, increasing the risk

of more frequent and severe fires. Over time, plant communities may convert to exotic annual grasslands, resulting in a permanent loss of sage-grouse habitat.



**Figure 6. Burned areas with the OACSC's geography (2010-2021).**

**Grazing:** Related to the extent of invasive vegetation, as well as legacy effects from historical grazing, the native forb and grass community is degraded across much of the geography. Appropriate livestock grazing regimes are compatible with sage-grouse management, however, certain activities associated with grazing management can have detrimental impacts. Improper grazing can impact the amount and condition of perennial plants. Native, cool-season perennial grasses common in sagebrush systems can tolerate moderate grazing (40-60%) with a period of growing season rest. Heavy, repeated livestock use without at least some growing season deferment deplete root reserves and seed sources which ultimately reduces perennial plant abundance. Sage-grouse rely upon perennial grasses to provide screening cover in nesting habitat. Sustained improper grazing in riparian areas can inadvertently alter the hydrology of the system, resulting in loss of riparian habitat which serves as important brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse.

Rethinking grazing operations can have a significant impact on the ecological health of a property. Strategies that rotate livestock seasonally and through smaller pastures can positively change the duration and intensity of use, reduce pressure on desirable bunchgrasses, and ultimately increase resiliency. Other tactics use methods to improve livestock distribution and protect riparian areas and springs. Depending on the existing infrastructure, these strategies may be low-to-no cost, requiring only a change to operations. In some cases, to facilitate a more sustainable grazing plan, funding may be needed for fencing to subdivide pastures or water developments to serve livestock when they are excluded from natural sources.

**Fragmentation:** Sage-grouse and other wildlife require vast, intact sagebrush landscapes in order to maintain viable populations. Fragmentation of sagebrush habitats is a key cause, if not the primary cause, of the decline of sage-grouse populations. Fragmentation can make otherwise suitable habitat either too small or isolated to be of use to greater sage-grouse (i.e., functional habitat destruction), or the abundance of sage-grouse that can be supported in an area is diminished. Fragmented land can also serve as an ecological trap for sage-grouse because they show strong fidelity to seasonal habitats, their use of marginal and “edge” habitat can put them at greater risk for predation or decrease their productivity. As described above, wildfire, invasive plants, conifer encroachment, as well as activities such as energy development, building of infrastructure, and agricultural conversion and/or improper grazing have resulted in habitat fragmentation.

**Funding:** The lack of administrative capacity to coordinate efforts across all the sage-grouse CCAAs in Oregon, enroll private lands in the program, and execute SSPs to address threats is a limiting factor to sage-grouse recovery. Long-term management is necessary to achieve 30-year goals and objectives set forth in Partnership’s Strategic Plan. A staffing deficit is hindering progress in enrollment and conservation implementation. We expect that having dedicated personnel to manage and coordinate each aspect of the CCAA sage-grouse administrative framework will enable our Partnership to more efficiently manage cooperative functions, including facilitation of the Partnership, outreach to external state-wide partners, database management, and effectiveness monitoring and reporting across all counties. Adding field-based staff will accelerate our ability to enroll landowners, develop site specific plans, implement conservation actions on-the-ground, and complete required monitoring and reporting for each property. We have identified the need to increase administrative capacity by:

- Maintaining and/or increasing staff capacity to sustain a minimum of six sage-grouse staff to implement the CCAA program in Crook, Harney, Lake and Malheur Counties;
- Ensuring that CCAA partners have adequate equipment necessary to administer and implement CCAAs;
- Hiring a CCAA Coordinator to manage the FIP Initiative, facilitate the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee, and conduct all shared administrative functions;
- Hiring a database manager to train staff in each county, update database technologies as needed, and to consolidate data imputed annually.

### **Barriers and Conservation Opportunities**

While the OACSC faces many challenges in accomplishing its goals, there are considerable opportunities for collaboration and leveraging of efforts to achieve mutual goals among all stakeholders invested in the health of Oregon’s rangelands.

#### ***Barriers:***

- ***Funding:*** Long-term funding of CCAA administration and implementation is one of the most significant barriers our Initiative faces. The development of SSPs for landowners enrolled in CCAAs is imperative to addressing ecological threats on the landscape and is time consuming to produce because it is comprehensive (covering multiple threats) and long-term (covering 30 years). However, the opportunity for comprehensive, long-term planning to benefit sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats is one of the primary benefits of the CCAA program. The OACSC has committed to the 30-year goals outlined in our SAP to meet sage grouse population and habitat enhancement priorities, despite the lack of dedicated resources. While the Partnership has been proactive in pursuing funding opportunities, the tenuous nature of these funds unduly strains relationships with landowners and the long-term viability of the OACSC. Concurrently, maintaining capacity within each permit holding agency is vital to ensure that ecological outcomes are achieved in a consistent

and efficient manner. Providing critical resources for successful conservation and collaboration is essential for the program's success.

- Capacity: While capacity is related to funding, it is also a stand-alone barrier to Initiative success. Maintaining staff capacity is a constant challenge as SWCDs compensation cannot compare with state and federal partners who compete directly with the Partnership for staff. The result of this is a higher rate of turn over, which leads to additional training needs, loss of momentum, a reduction in overall efficiency, and a loss of coordination with partners. The relatively small size of our labor pool (currently 4.5 FTEs to address 3.5 million acres of private sage-grouse habitat in the state) exacerbates our higher rate of turn over.
- Complexity of Ecological Threats: Sage-steppe habitat is threatened by multiple ecological factors that interact in complex ways. Addressing these issues effectively is challenging as every site is unique, requiring a well thought out approach that incorporates multiple management tools and on-going maintenance. While land managers are collectively gaining experience addressing threats like invasive annual grasses, noxious weeds, and juniper encroachment, there are often variables beyond managers' control that influence success (e.g., timing and amount of precipitation, reinvasions or new invasions of other undesirable plant species, etc.). Although we may not achieve instant success, it is imperative that we undertake immediate and reinvest where initial success may be stymied by uncontrollable circumstances.
- Project Coordination across Ownership Boundaries: Although CCAA implementation is locally prioritized and led, conservation actions on federal lands are tied to regional and national priorities. Cross-boundary habitat conservation takes years to plan and coordinate. State and federal agencies' planning processes often initially operate at a scale that is beyond the scope of local agencies. Local agencies planning processes tend to be driven by local issues and typically occur at a swifter pace than those requiring federal NEPA process. With the reinvigorations of LITs throughout the state, it is becoming easier to bridge these differences in planning timelines and geographic scales.

Another aspect of this barrier is highlighted by the fact that CCAA properties are typified by livestock operations that utilize a combination of private land with government-permitted grazing allotments. These lands are rarely fenced separately making it very difficult to differentiate management from one property ownership to the next. As an example, medusahead treatments on private lands may be threatened by adjacent infestations on federal land that remain untreated due to any number of factors related to federal funding, planning, or NEPA processes.

- Social Limiting Factors: While efforts to conserve sage-grouse and sage-steppe habitat have resulted in a positive shift in opinion and behavior with regards to collaborative conservation, significant resistance still exists in many communities. Distrust of government agencies and regulation are a significant barrier to CCAA implementation. The involvement of SWCDs and PBWC as intermediaries between agencies and private landowners garners a level of trust that would not otherwise be possible. This trust requires constant outreach and communication on behalf of the CCAA permit holders.

## Opportunities

- Complementary Efforts: As described in greater detail below, many stakeholders have garnered resources to address threats to sage-grouse and their habitats in Oregon. These cumulative

improvements complement conservation efforts implemented on CCAA enrolled lands. Overall habitat will be greatly enhanced for sage-grouse and many other species, while also creating a more resilient and resistant landscape.

- *Private Land Relationships:* The work of the OACSC provides opportunities to merge and coordinate public and private land efforts. SWCDs and PBWC have credibility and a sound reputation with landowners and are well connected with local agency efforts within their respective counties. The CCAA permit holders have the ability to facilitate projects that are beyond the Initiative focus area, align with multiple ownership boundaries, and are essential to local efforts. The initiative also provides an opportunity to bring landowners together to address large-scale ecological threats as a united group, encouraging conservation and a like-minded approach to address said threats.
- *Collaboration with Key Partners:* The ability for the OACSC to strategize with other agencies complements work done by our partners and provides the unique opportunity for ecological uplift across millions of acres of core sage-grouse habitat. Due to the technical and financial needs to accomplish landscape-scale ecological outcomes, the ability to strategize and prioritize treatment with our partner agencies is extremely valuable. While the actions of the OACSC may be carried out over a very strategic timeline, their impacts help achieve the larger picture of landscape-level conservation when combined with complementary projects prioritized by other stakeholders. By adding dedicated staff and continuing outreach and relationship-building with landowners, our partners have already effectively built trust, reduced barriers, and increased participation rates.
- *Planned Strategy:* As indicated above, a suite of threats to sage-grouse and their habitat exists in our CCAA geographic area. While addressing each of these threats may seem insurmountable, the OACSC has already undertaken the ground work to identify threats on the landscape and develop a strategic approach to our work as documented in this SAP. Concurrently, the OACSC has the experience of completing our an initial Focused Investment Partnership grant (2016-2021), which resulted in staff supported positions, numerous conservation projects, a highly developed monitoring program, establishment of a database, and results that are leading to the overall ecological goals established in our SAP. These major undertakings have served as an important guide to our work thus far, and continue to direct our future efforts, and the actions proposed in this application. As demonstrated by these results, the Initiative has developed a method to engage stakeholders to collaboratively generate creative solutions.
- *Partnership Momentum:* The majority of the membership of the OACSC has been intact since 2015. Together we have overcome a variety of barriers associated with implementing a brand new conservation program in the state and have completed numerous goals. Challenges included staff turnover at both SWCD and USFWS, changes in funding levels, core partner participation, and difficulties in outreach to external partners. These challenges have galvanized our partnership and pushed us to overcome and adapt. The OACSC has significant accomplishments, which include but are not limited to the following: (1) development and implementation of a CCAA-specific database to collect and store large amounts of complex data that are necessary to document progress towards long-term ecological outcomes; (2) awards from multiple funding sources (NRCS RCPP, OWEB FIP [Phase I], OWEB Open Solicitation grants, National Wildlife Federation) aimed at both building capacity and implementing conservation measures; and (3) improvements to the partnership structure to be more effective at communication and outreach.

### Complimentary Efforts

The OACSC collaborates with other organizations involved in conservation actions within sage-grouse habitat. What separates the OACSC from other organizations is that core partners are focused on conservation actions that improve sage-steppe and sage-grouse habitats, within the Programmatic CCAAs, while other organizations may administer additional programs or address other watershed concerns outside of the Partnership's purview. In each county, public land management agencies such as the BLM, Department of State Lands, and US Forest Service are also addressing sagebrush steppe habitat needs, and other agencies, such as the NRCS (EQIP), conduct complementary work on private lands often in coordination with work identified in the SSPs. The following includes some highlights of activities undertaken by other organizations operating in the CCAA geography:

- 1) Crook/Deschutes Counties: The Crooked River Watershed Council identified restoration activities that will take place in the Crooked River watershed, which is. Their ecological priorities and conservation actions are centered around aquatic habitat and fish passage, which complement the activities of the OACSC and the watershed as a whole, but clearly focus on goals and ecological priorities that are different than those of the OACSC. To support these actions, they will be applying for OWEB Open Solicitation grants to fund these efforts. The Prineville LIT is also working in our CCAA geography to convene stakeholders and create a Threats Reduction Plan to encompass future conservation work to be implemented by all stakeholders in the region.
- 2) Harney County: Harney County has a complex group of entities that work together in the management and conservation of natural resources with special consideration given to its rural communities and economic impacts. An example of one such group is the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative. The Collaborative works to address wildfire concerns in the county and has been focused in the Lone Pine area to create a large-scale fuel break and fire management plan to protect the livelihoods of the local community and preserve existing healthy wildlife habitats. As part of the collaborative, Harney County Watershed Council and the High Desert Partnership are proposing a project that would encompass the Stinkingwaters treatment area, and a portion of our proposed FIP. This project has been proposed for funding available through Oregon Senate Bill 762 (SB762), legislation directed to address wildfire risk throughout the state, and other sources and would complement the efforts proposed in our FIP.
- 3) Lake County: The Lake County All Lands Initiative is planning and implementing strategic actions to reduce the risk of wildfire by proactively thinning conifer and juniper forest stands and addressing invasive annual grasses within priority areas identified as a state limiting factor "Dry Forest Type FIP geography". The partnership is applying for a FIP Initiative (2022-2028) focused on upper watershed conditions. The Initiative's treatments are strategically designed to reduce the risk of wildfire using actions that are less relevant in sagebrush steppe habitats. Additional SB762 funding has been requested for the Lake County All Lands Initiative.
- 4) Malheur County: The Owyhee Watershed Council works in the same areas as the CCAA program in Malheur County. The Council's ecological priorities are focused on aquatic habitat, instream restoration, and agricultural conversion projects that will improve riparian area function. The Council's work is complementary to the OACSC effort because of its aquatic versus upland focus. The Council is currently in a partnership with NRCS to implement a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) to conduct these activities. The Council may apply for Open Solicitation funding through OWEB to complement these efforts in the coming years. The Malheur

LITs are also in the process of coalescing around future conservation work to be implemented by all stakeholders in the region.

- 5) *Baker/Union counties*: Implementation of the Programmatic CCAA in Baker and Union counties occurs with strong coordination and partnership with the Baker LIT. This highly functional collaborative includes stakeholders from ODFW, Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, NRCS, USFWS, BLM, PBWC, and private landowners. The LIT's targeted ecological outcome is an increase in the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately an increase in the Baker sage-grouse population. With FIP funding, the group is currently implementing several actions in its [Comprehensive Sage-grouse Threat Reduction Plan \(TRP\)](#): 1) treat invasive annual grass/noxious weeds; 2) augment understory vegetation; 3) enhance mesic habitat; 4) reduce anthropogenic subsidies to sage-grouse predators; and 5) remove juniper.

## 11. Theory of Change

Sage-grouse habitat across Oregon is threatened by historic and ongoing changes to native plant communities and the impact of increasing catastrophic wildfires. Native shrubs and grasses have largely been replaced by invasive annual grasses and historic fire suppression has encouraged expansion of juniper. The invasive grasses provide inadequate cover for sage-grouse nesting and are highly flammable, promoting more frequent and more severe wildfire. Both the abundance of invasive grasses and the increased incidence and severity of wildfire prevent the persistence and/or re-establishment of native plant species.

### Approach

The results chain (**Figure 7**) articulates the OACSC's theory of change by displaying the relationships between strategies, implementation outputs and the intermediate ecological results partners predict will occur in response to strategy implementation. These links in the chain will ultimately lead to accomplishing the FIP's ecological priorities. The theory of change also provides a framework for the partnership to measure progress in both the near and long term, and to identify where uncertainties might exist with regards to confidence of predicted outcomes between results.

The OACSC's theory of change describes the strategies and actions outlined in this SAP which will reduce or eliminate factors limiting sage-grouse and their habitats primarily on privately owned land, but also adjacent state and BLM-managed acres in Crook, Harney, Lake, and Malheur counties. This work represents important contributions to the larger regional scale efforts to recover and conserve sage-grouse. The strategies focus primarily on reducing the spatial extent of undesirable plant communities dominated by juniper and invasive annual grasses. It is predicted that a reduction in the number of undesirable plant species will promote an increase in the extent and connectivity of the desired plant communities necessary to support all life stages of sage-grouse. It is also predicted that the strategies will reduce the frequency and severity of wildfires and allow the establishment and long-term stability of desired plant communities.

**Strategy 1:** This strategy ensures the administrative framework and capacity to enroll private lands in the Greater Sage-grouse Programmatic CCAAs and execute site specific plans. Aspects of this strategy include ensuring adequate staffing within each county, providing All County CCAA Coordination, maintaining the CCAA database, and communication/coordination with state-wide external partners to relay CCAA progress and accomplishments to remain engaged with state-level partners and funders.

The Theory of Change associated with Strategy 1 identifies that successful implementation of the 30-year CCAA program is contingent upon: 1) staff capacity to accomplish enrollment and conservation goals; 2) consistent implementation and coordination of each Programmatic CCAA; 3) facilitated communication among all CCAA permit holders; 4) the functionality of the CCAA database; and 5) outreach and coordination with statewide partners and funders. Strategy 1 addresses limiting factors associated with capacity needs, specifically that without sustained personnel and administrative support, progress towards our overarching ecological outcome will stall. Strategy 1 promotes our efficacy to carry out our operational and conservation strategies designed to reduce threats to sage-grouse within our planning area and halt the local sage-grouse population declines.

Near and long-term ecological outcomes will result because staffing capacity will be sufficient for enrolling private lands in programmatic CCAAs, for implementing activities associated with administration of the program (e.g. outreach, conservation implementation, baseline and repeat monitoring, database management, development of site specific plans, and annual reporting).

**Strategy 2:** This strategy focuses on communication to landowners and local partners. The goal of local outreach is to communicate enrollment opportunities and benefits to private landowners and local agencies with the purpose to enroll eligible lands according to the prioritization guidance in the programmatic CCAAs.

Strategy 2 is based on the theory that by providing the knowledge, tools, and financial assistance to implement vegetation and grazing management activities, we expect an increase in engagement in voluntary conservation programs like the CCAA and others (NRCS, SGI, etc.). By maintaining and or recruiting additional personnel, we anticipate the expansion of the CCAA program and implementation of vegetation enhancement activities in each county. Specifically, by increasing staff capacity the critical limiting factors, related to degraded sage-grouse habitat, will be addressed in a coordinated and expedited manner.

**Ecological outcomes:** Increased staff capacity will result in the ability to communicate with stakeholders and address immediate threats to sage-grouse habitat through conservation actions outlined in SSPs on enrolled private lands. Because of these actions we anticipate an expansion of contiguous habitat, improved resiliency of sagebrush communities, and increased sage-grouse population trends.

**Strategy 3:** This strategy focuses on management actions to reduce threats to sage-grouse on privately owned rangelands with the goal of maintaining or achieving high quality habitat conditions necessary to promote sage-grouse populations. This may include assisting landowners in applying for funding to implement conservation activities. A comprehensive set of conservation measures was designed and is listed within the CCAAs. These measures are meant to enhance and/or protect sage-grouse populations and their habitat. The most commonly applied include: 1) wildfire prevention; 2) invasive annual grass treatments; 3) conifer removal; 4) development of grazing management plans; 5) fence collision risk reduction; 6) installation of wildlife escape ramps. Some of these activities reduce direct mortality factors for sage-grouse, such as installing reflectors to prevent fence collisions and wildlife escape ramps to prevent drowning. Juniper removal results in desired vegetation outcomes, while also reducing predation of sage-grouse nests.

By removing or reducing threats (limiting factors) to sage-grouse habitat posed by invasive vegetation, wildfire, and improper grazing management, the extent and quality of sage-grouse habitat will improve in

the OACSC planning area, thereby positively impacting the sage-grouse population. The theories of change associated with conservation measures to resolve limiting factors are listed below:

- a) **Wildfire:** Conservation measures to reduce wildfire risk operate with the theory that a reduction in the frequency and severity of wildfires will reduce the area of habitat lost and fragmented due to fire and reduce the risk for invasive annual grass establishment. This will promote the intermediate ecological outcomes of a) maintaining connected plant communities composed of desired species and b) ecosystem structure and function across sufficient spatial extent. Both outcomes will provide sage-grouse habitat that supports all life stages of sage-grouse at a population scale and ultimately stabilize or increase sage-grouse populations (*overarching ecological outcome*).
- b) **Exotic Annual Grasses:** The theory of change associated with actions to treat exotic annual grasses is that these efforts will: a) reduce and/or remove exotic species from sage-grouse habitat; b) protect intact habitat from annual grass invasion; c) strategically manage grazing; and d) support conservation measures addressing severe wildfire threats. Restoring areas impacted by invasive vegetation will have the intermediate ecological outcome of supporting all sage-grouse life stages by maintaining or improving the quantity, quality, and connectivity of habitat through reduced wildfire risk and established desirable plant communities. Habitat connectivity and integrity will ultimately support stable or increasing sage-grouse population trends (*overarching ecological outcome*).
- c) **Juniper Removal:** Removal of juniper on CCAA enrolled properties will reduce the extent and density of juniper across CCAA enrolled properties. According to the theory of change associated with juniper removal, a reduction in woodland type plant communities will promote desired plant species, thereby improving the connectivity of sage-grouse habitat. In addition, a reduction in conifers will reduce avian predator perches and reduce predation of sage-grouse nests. Intermediate ecological outcomes are realized through a) reduced juniper extent and density; b) reduced avian predator perches; and c) an increase in desired plant cover. Long-term ecological outcomes include a) improved extent and connectivity of desired plant communities; b) reduced avian predation on sage-grouse nests; and ultimately c) stable to increasing trends in sage-grouse populations and ecological conditions (*overarching ecological outcome*).
- d) **Grazing Systems:** The theory of change invoked through the implementation of managed grazing systems leads to a reduction in the dominance of exotic annual grasses and promotion of the vigor of deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses and forbs. This will result in an increase in the extent of desired plant cover on grazed lands and diminish the frequency and severity of wildfire. *Intermediate ecological outcomes* are realized through the expansion of connected plant communities containing desired species that provide habitat structure (deep-rooted perennial vegetation) and forage (sage-grouse preferred forbs). These conditions are linked to our overarching ecological outcome of increasing the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat to promote sage-grouse populations statewide.
- e) **Grazing Infrastructure:** Conservation measures to address grazing infrastructure operate with the theory that the installation of wildlife escape ramps in livestock water troughs and marking fences in high-risk collision areas will reduce direct mortality of sage-grouse using these areas (*intermediate ecological outcome*). Reduced sage-grouse mortality confers the *long-term ecological outcomes* of stable to increasing sage-grouse populations.

Long-term ecological outcomes are realized through the increase in the size and spatial extent of sage-grouse populations. The reduced frequency and severity of wildfires and the recovery of desired plant communities leads to habitat connectivity and greater sage-grouse survival.

**Strategy 4:** This strategy focuses on the work that is required for ongoing monitoring of enrolled properties, not only a requirement per the terms of the Programmatic CCAAs, but also to document progress towards the goals stated above and to guide adaptive management of conservation measures.

Strategy 4 is based on the theory that by monitoring enrolled properties according to the intervals specified in site-specific plans, we will be able to determine if conservation measures are successful, and if not, adjust management as necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Annual meetings with landowners are useful for identifying any changed circumstances or new resource concerns. By thoroughly reviewing available data and consulting key stakeholders, we will have the opportunity to expeditiously resolve emerging threats or challenges and select feasible solutions with the highest likelihood of producing desired results. Strategy 4 relates to Strategy 3 because monitoring may result in the adjustment of ongoing or previously implemented conservation measures and/or the development and implementation of new conservation measures to continue progress towards maintaining or promoting sage-grouse habitat (intermediate ecological outcome). In this way, our efforts will continue to increase the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat on private lands and ultimately benefit of sage-grouse populations (overarching ecological outcome).

### **Conservation Actions**

Our overarching targeted ecological outcome is an increase in the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately an increase in sage-grouse populations. Each of the outcomes, goals, objectives, and conservation actions in this Strategic Action Plan and Work Plan have been carefully considered as incremental steps toward achieving this ecological outcome. The conservation actions we propose were specifically developed to address the major ecological problems and limiting factors identified in this SAP, specifically juniper removal, exotic annual grasses, grazing management, grazing infrastructure retrofits, and wildfire. This also includes administrative, outreach, communication and monitoring goals that support conservation actions and outcomes. Our proposed work is aligned with the key conservation issues and limiting factors for sagebrush habitats and sage-grouse populations identified in several conservation plans (detailed in Section 9).

Our conservation actions include:

#### **1. Juniper Removal**

**Ecological Problems:** As noted in [Section 9](#), increases in juniper cover is a major ecological threat because juniper encroachment: 1) depletes the understory species essential for sage-grouse; 2) increases fuel loads, intensifying wildfires; 3) demands water resources, reducing the quality of mesic habitat; and 4) facilitates depredation of sage-grouse nests by avian predators; and 5) increases vertical structure, which causes sage-grouse to avoid otherwise viable habitat.

**Conservation Actions:** *Juniper removal practices will be tailored for each property with priority given to early phases of encroachment (Phase I and II) and may include techniques such as:*

- Removal of juniper through hand felling, mechanical removal or prescribed fire;
- Removal of juniper from riparian zones;
- Limbing felled branches to less than 4 ft. to reduce predator perching (lop and scatter);

- Piling or jackpot burning of slash.

*Outputs Supporting Long Term Ecological Outcomes:* Conservation actions to remove juniper have the immediate effect of reducing fuel loads, thereby minimizing the threat of wildfire, and ultimately maintaining the quantity and quality of existing habitat. Sage-grouse readily resume use of conifer treatment areas and when predator perches are eliminated, sage-grouse nest success is promoted, and localized sage-grouse populations rebound (Severson et al. 2016, Olsen et al. 2021a, Olsen et al. 2021b). Restoring hydrological resources and soil nutrients through conifer removal halts further degradation and promotes mesic and upland plant communities essential to support healthy sage-grouse populations.

## 2. Exotic Annual Grass Treatments

*Ecological Problem:* This limiting factor is described in [Section 9](#). Preventing further spread and restoring areas already impacted by invasive vegetation is directly related to increasing the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat. Monocultures of invasive annual grasses have no ecological value to sage-grouse and fuel wildfires that can further reduce the extent and connectivity of habitat.

*Conservation Actions:* Invasive annual grass strategies include both prevention and treatment and depend on site-specific ecological conditions. Activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) activities, which may include roadside spraying, weed surveys, and spot treatments;
- Herbicide application, mechanical treatment, prescribed fire, biological treatment;
- Targeted grazing on invasive vegetation or other grazing management (e.g. rest to promote desirable vegetation);
- Fencing to exclude grazing from treated areas.

*Output Supporting Long Term Ecological Outcomes:* Our approach is to: 1) contain infestations to protect existing valuable habitat and 2) restore lightly to moderately impacted sites to promote desirable vegetation at a landscape scale. This approach will maintain or increase contiguous areas with the vegetation components needed by sage-grouse to thrive year-round (adequate cover of sagebrush, deep-rooted perennial bunchgrasses, and forbs).

## 3. Grazing management

*Ecological Problem:* Grazing management is critically related to maintaining desirable vegetation on the landscape. Improper grazing management can have a negative impact on native plant communities and promote undesirable shifts in plant community composition. Additionally, poorly placed and/or improperly installed infrastructure can result in sage-grouse mortality.

*Conservation Actions:* In order to implement grazing management plans, a variety of practices may be considered, including but not limited to:

*Development of grazing management plans that incorporate as necessary:*

- Rest/deferment schedules, changes to the season of use, timing, and intensity of grazing, targeted grazing to eradicate weeds, or rotational grazing techniques;
- Fencing to improve rotational capacity and protect riparian areas;

- Water/spring developments to provide livestock water when natural sources are excluded;
- Drought contingency planning.

*Practices to mitigate risks from grazing infrastructure:*

- Install wildlife escape ramps in all livestock water troughs;
- Mark high risk fences with anti-strike reflectors to make fences more visible to sage-grouse;
- Removal of unneeded fences.

*Outputs Supporting Long Term Ecological Outcomes:* Appropriate grazing systems can reduce the threat of invasive vegetation and promote the vigor of deep-rooted bunchgrasses and forbs, essential for sage-grouse cover and nutrition. This, in turn, enhances the resiliency of grazed lands in the face of disturbances like wildfire or drought, ultimately maintaining the overall extent and condition of sage-grouse habitat. Grazing management will be reviewed on all CCAA enrolled acres, and all FIP funded project sites to ensure grazing is compatible with promoting sage-grouse habitat. Grazing management plans are developed for each enrolled property. Additionally, by improving, removing, or re-locating grazing infrastructure documented sage-grouse mortality can be prevented.

#### 4. Wildfire risk reduction:

**Ecological Problem:** Fire (both lightning-caused and human-caused) is one of the primary risks to sagebrush ecosystems, particularly considering the direct correlation between exotic annual grasses and fire frequency (USFWS 2013).

*Conservation Actions:* Many of the aforementioned practices for juniper, invasive vegetation, and grazing management will reduce wildfire risk. Additional practices that may be considered include:

- Design and maintain fire breaks or green stripping to provide a fire fighting advantage or halt fire spread;
- Restore wildfire impacted areas with herbicide treatments and/or seedings;
- Encourage rest from grazing activities until burned sites have recovered.

*Outputs Supporting Long Term Ecological Outcomes:* Actions to reduce the risk of wildfire and to restore burned areas prevent further habitat fragmentation, enhance ecological resilience, and ultimately promote the persistence of sage-grouse populations.

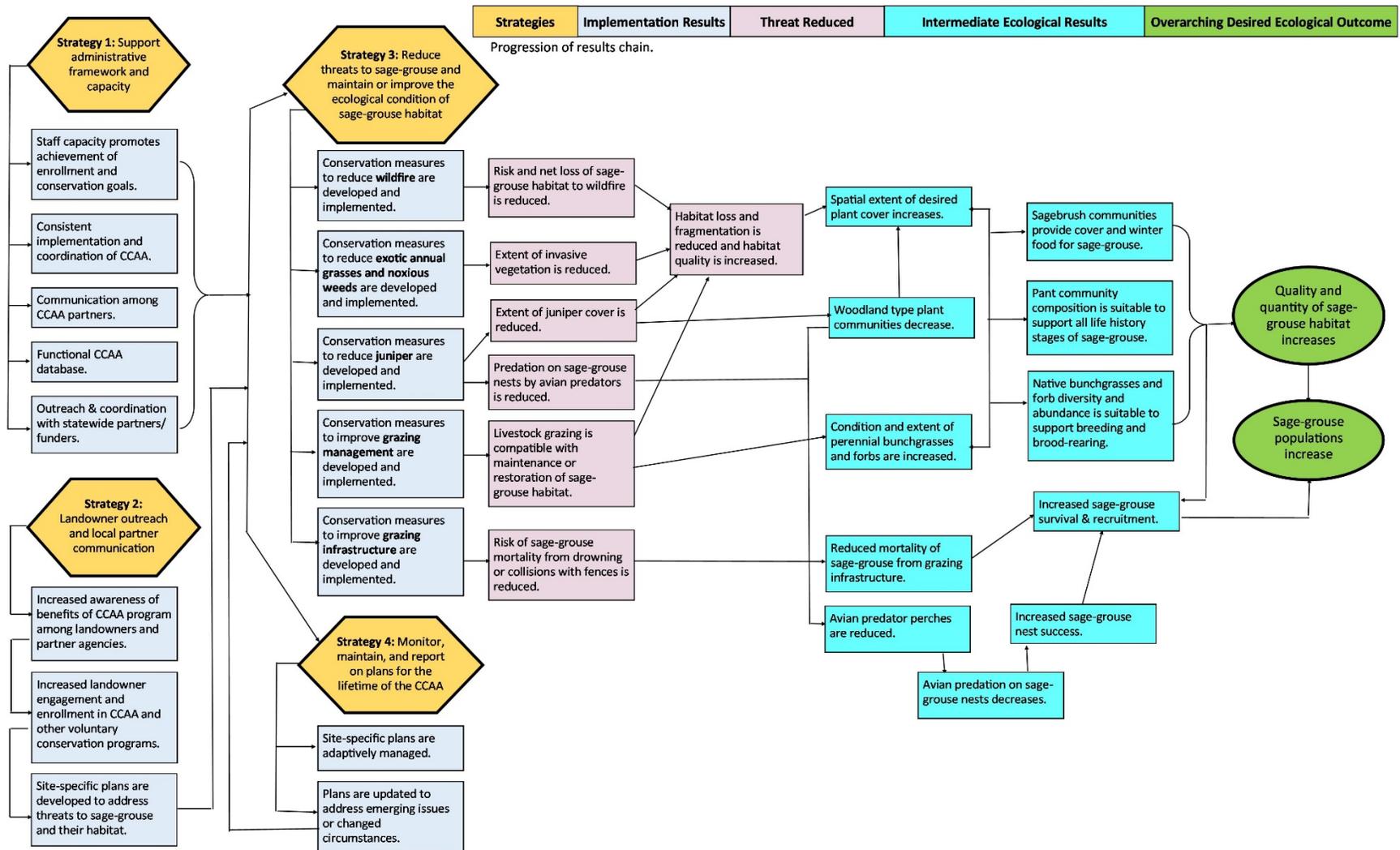


Figure 7. Results chain representing the OACSC's Theory of Change.

## 12. Monitoring Framework, Data Management, and Analyses

### **Monitoring Framework**

The Partnership has a very robust monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of CCAAs towards meeting ecological outcomes (Figure 8). (See also [Appendix B](#) for detailed SMART objectives, metrics, and outputs.) Implementation monitoring will collect quantitative and qualitative data, which will be used to assess progress towards our implementation goals. For example, numerical and spatial records will be maintained to document acreages enrolled in the CCAA, as well as the size, scope, and location of treatments and other conservation measures. Also, landowner participation rates and the effectiveness of outreach tactics will be recorded. Progress toward ecological outcomes will be measured using [Threat-based Ecological Models](#) (TBEMs), a monitoring protocol developed for use in the CCAA in 2015. This protocol was created by a diverse group of rangeland and wildlife experts, landowners, and other stakeholders specifically for use with Oregon’s Programmatic CCAAs.

***Baseline Data Collection and Repeat Monitoring Every 5-10 Years.*** Baseline data and repeat monitoring are assessed using the TBEMs for uplands and riparian areas and photo points (NRCS protocol). Ecological data include vegetation species composition and estimated cover, documentation of invasive annual grasses and/or other noxious weeds, ecological state (ranging from A-E, representing various degrees of desired conditions), documentation of observed or known ecosystem and/or sage-grouse specific threats, and an estimate of apparent trend.

Baseline conditions and permanent monitoring locations are established prior to initiating any treatments or practices. The first step in baseline data collection begins prior to site visits when the SWCD Rangeland Specialist reviews relevant geospatial and/or remotely-sensed data to expedite and inform field data collection. Examples of information that may be pertinent to review include: ecological site descriptions for the property, soil maps, aerial imagery, past treatments, fire history, etc. A landowner interview is also conducted to assemble information about current agricultural and other uses of the property, landowner goals, known resource concerns, and the property’s history. The second step of baseline data collection consists of upland and riparian ecological data, which are collected during private land site visits for each enrolled CCAA property owner. Photo points are established for every ecostate in every pasture as well as additional photo points that represent pre and post treatment conditions. Data are entered using tablets and are uploaded to a database created specifically for housing CCAA information. Repeat monitoring occurs on a 5-10-year interval where the CCAA permit holder completes baseline monitoring protocol (described above). The 5-10-year interval is designed to match restoration timelines given that change in ecological condition may take several years to be realized. Repeat monitoring is also stored in the CCAA database.

The CCAA monitoring protocol is useful for assessing change in ecological condition over time and across large landscapes. As described further below, data can be tracked to assess our effectiveness in accomplishing our ecological goals at the scale of individual pastures, properties, and across the entire CCAA program. Specifically, comparison of baseline ecological state, apparent trend, and photo points with those documented during follow-up monitoring will determine the extent to which ecological uplift occurred as a result of conservation measures implemented within pastures or an enrolled property, as a whole. Because all CCAA permit holders follow the same established monitoring protocol to ensure data quality, completeness, and compatibility across all counties, these data can also be “rolled up” to quantify the effectiveness of conservation efforts inclusive of all participating counties and across all CCAA-enrolled lands.

**Annual Monitoring.** Every year, CCAA permit holders meet with each enrolled landowner to discuss resource concerns, grazing, changed circumstances (like wildfire or drought), and CMs implemented in the prior year. This information is entered into the custom CCAA database and is used to adaptively manage the SSPs as needed. Annual reports are submitted to USFWS to document landowner compliance.

**Statewide Metrics:** Some metrics related to our ecological outcomes will be measured and analyzed by other agencies. Although specific geospatial data and PII for enrollees are protected, the OACSC participated with USFWS, ODFW, and the SageCon collaborative to develop a mechanism for reporting conservation efforts that have occurred on CCAA enrolled properties. The approach balances the requirement to protect enrollees' private information with the statewide need to collate conservation implementation activities and ultimately relate restoration work to sage-grouse population dynamics. CCAA data are reported to the statewide Conservation Efforts Database at the scale of Sagebrush Reporting Units. SRUs are biologically meaningful geographies in that they are informed by geography/topography and sage-grouse movement data (where available). Using the best available data, SRUs were developed to represent likely sub-populations of sage-grouse within Oregon. And, SRUs are large enough to prevent the identification of individual landowners, even if efforts are described in terms of the type of habitat in which they occurred (e.g. priority, general). Analyzing lek trends within SRUs alongside conservation measures implemented by all stakeholders, including CCAA enrollees, and with disturbance (e.g. development or wildfire), is one way to estimate the effectiveness of Oregon's sagebrush restoration efforts. SRUs provide a data reporting framework for future analyses of this nature to be by ODFW's Sage-grouse Conservation Coordinator and SageCon/Institute for Natural Resources.

The Institute for Natural Resources is leading SageCon efforts to track the ecological state of sage-grouse habitat range-wide in Oregon, using plot and remotely-sensed data. The [SageCon Annual Rangeland Conditions Report](#) provides an annual assessment of the ecological state of rangelands across eastern Oregon. On BLM-managed lands, Assessment Inventory and Monitoring protocols yield data that will be analyzed by the BLM to present an understanding of habitat conditions on BLM-managed lands. ODFW leads statewide sage-grouse lek monitoring efforts and publishes [annual sage-grouse population reports](#) that will serve to inform the overall effectiveness of our FIP work plans.

Oregon's sage-steppe ecosystem is both dynamic and diverse and there are many factors that can influence the quality and quantity of habitat available to sage-grouse and other sage-steppe obligates. While some factors are induced by humans, other factors such as drought or fire can be tied to climatic conditions or natural events. Ongoing monitoring will provide SWCDs the ability to adapt conservation measures to account for any unforeseen or changed circumstances that occur within the CCAA geography.

### **Ecological Outcome Indicators and Metrics that will be Tracked over Time**

A comprehensive set of monitoring metrics for each strategy and related actions is detailed in [Appendix B](#). These are summarized below:

Strategy 1 and 2 are included here because they focus on critical capacity and outreach outcomes which are integral in achieving ecological outcomes in strategies 3 and 4.

*Strategy 1:* ensures an adequate administrative framework and capacity exist for coordinated implementation of the Programmatic CCAAs throughout the life of the CCAA. This strategy is foundational to our ability to make a measurable difference in our long-term goals. To measure our effectiveness in accomplishing Strategy 1, we will report staffing needs annually and document funding secured and hiring tasks to ensure adequate capacity for CCAA implementation, including an All County CCAA Coordinator and

Database Manager. Other records will include meeting schedules and minutes, user guides for the CCAA database, and documentation of ongoing database maintenance/troubleshooting.

*Strategy 2:* is focused on outreach with landowners and local partner agencies to maximize enrollment in the CCAA Program, and thus actual on-the-ground work to increase sage-grouse habitat and, ultimately, populations. Monitoring will include maintenance of outreach and participation records to document progress towards our enrollment goals.

*Strategy 3:* represents implementation of on-the-ground conservation measures strategically designed to eliminate threats to sage-grouse and promote the quantity, quality, and connectivity of habitat. We will primarily measure progress towards these goals by maintaining comprehensive treatment records and by comparing baseline and repeat monitoring data (see above). We will track the enrolled acres that transition from degraded to more desirable ecological states (and conversely, acres in desirable ecological states that may become degraded due to wildfire, treatment failure, etc.) We are also tracking species composition, cover of desirable species, presence of noxious weeds, juniper encroachment, and other metrics that inform progress towards ecological outcomes, but are not necessarily reported individually. Data can be analyzed at various spatial scales ranging from the individual pasture, to entire properties, to all CCAA enrolled lands. Also, in partnering with statewide stakeholders, we will work to integrate our data into statewide assessments that span private and public lands.

*Strategy 4:* reflects our commitment to monitoring enrolled properties for the life of the CCAA and to complete required reporting to ensure program compliance. This strategy also relates to using monitoring data to adaptively manage our conservation efforts over time to ensure we continue to make progress towards our long-term goal of maintaining or improving sage-grouse habitat. Our monitoring metrics for Strategy 4 include documentation of completed monitoring and reporting activities and adaptations to SSPs to address emerging resource concerns.

### **Data Management**

Data are housed in newly developed CCAA database that utilizes Fulcrum (an online and table-based platform) and ArcGIS for geospatial data. This database streamlined data collection by incorporating the use of tablets in the field and allowing for data to be uploaded to a cloud-based database once connected to a network. Tablet-based forms have measures to ensure consistency across all counties implementing the CCAA and assure data quality and completeness. This uniform approach across all counties will facilitate “roll-up” reporting to assess the overall effectiveness of the CCAA program in Oregon. The new database integrates all ecological and spatial data for each pasture and riparian area along with photo points, allowing for a complete and easily retrievable record for each property.

Cloud-based data are password protected and any hard copies of data are housed within the corresponding CCAA permit holder’s office. All records are confidential and are protected by HB 4093 & ORS 192.501(33).

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once data are entered into the CCAA database, customized reports such as SSPs and annual monitoring reports can be generated. SSPs identify threats to sage-grouse and their habitat, as well as conservation measures that landowners voluntarily commit to implement to ameliorate threats. Thus, SSPs are land management plans that directly inform future voluntary restoration activities on private lands.

As described above, annual monitoring reports detail emerging resource concerns or changed circumstances. Thus, annual monitoring data and reports can guide any restoration activities necessary to maintain progress towards desired ecological outcomes on a yearly basis.

Every 5-10 years, the ecological condition of enrolled properties is completely re-inventoried using the same threat-based monitoring protocol used during baseline data collection at the time of enrollment. While annual reporting is in place to capture any rapidly emerging resource concerns, repeat ecological monitoring is only conducted every 5-10 years because positive shifts in sagebrush ecosystems are slow to manifest and inter-annual variability can mask longer-term ecological trends. Repeat ecological monitoring provides a new snapshot in time of a property's conditions to guide future voluntary restoration work.

**Tracking Progress toward Ecological Outcomes:**

As described above, there are several ways in which our implementation and ecological data are used to track progress towards our short, intermediate, and long-term ecological outcomes. Comparison of baseline and repeat data collection will convey the effectiveness of conservation measures, and ultimately the ecological uplift achieved at various scales (e.g. within pastures, enrolled properties, FIP focus areas, and all CCAA-enrolled lands). Additionally, monitoring data will serve as a communication tool between SWCD planners and the enrolled landowners. Monitoring data supports management decisions through science-based solutions reducing the subjectivity of why currently identified treatments are being recommended or what conditions are creating the need for adaptive management.

Although measuring shifts in ecological condition and sage-grouse population trends across the entire range of the species in Oregon is beyond the scope of the Partnership, several statewide agencies are leading these analyses. We contribute implementation metrics at the scale of SRUs to aid SageCon, Institute for Natural Resources, and ODFW in drawing inferences from conservation efforts and local shifts in habitat or populations.

Enrollment/Year 1 Baseline Inventory	Year 2-30 Annual Reporting	Every 5-10 Years Trend Monitoring
<p><b>Why?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document <b>baseline ecological conditions and threats</b> to sage-grouse at the time of enrollment in the CCAA.</li> <li>Important to <b>measure change</b> resulting from conservation measures, management decisions, or unforeseen circumstances.</li> <li>Guide <b>adaptive management</b>.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Why?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document <b>achievements</b> (conservation measure implementation or completion).</li> <li>Document <b>annual livestock management</b> as it may relate to current/future ecological condition.</li> <li>Document <b>external factors</b> that may influence current/future ecological condition.</li> <li>Guide <b>adaptive management</b>.</li> <li>Also useful for collating conservation measures for reporting to funders and CED.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Why?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document <b>effectiveness of active or passive management</b>.</li> <li>Confirm <b>initial apparent ecological trend estimates</b>.</li> <li>Guide <b>adaptive management</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occurs <b>once</b> during initial SSP development.</li> </ul>	<p><b>When?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Annually</b>, reports due Jan 30.</li> </ul>	<p><b>When?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>5-10 years</b> as prescribed in the initial SSP.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Upland ecological assessment</b> (classification into ecological states using threat-based models [TBMs]) including identification of primary and secondary threats</li> <li><b>Riparian ecological assessment</b></li> <li><b>Photo points</b> (one per pasture and two per riparian area)</li> </ul>	<p><b>What?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Site visit</b></li> <li><b>Annual Grazing and Habitat Summary</b></li> <li>Summary of <b>progress of CMs, recommended adaptive management</b>.</li> <li>Document any <b>changed circumstances</b> and how they will be addressed (e.g. wildfire, drought, etc.)</li> <li>Summary of any <b>trend monitoring</b> that occurred during the year</li> <li><b>Sage-grouse observations</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>What?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Repeat of initial baseline</b> (upland and riparian ecological assessment, photo-points).</li> <li><b>Summary of trend monitoring results</b> (Compare trend data to initial baseline data and provide an indication of the direction the site is trending).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACSC planners with landowners</li> <li>FWS as invited</li> </ul>	<p><b>Who?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACSC planners with landowners</li> </ul>	<p><b>Who?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACSC planners with landowners</li> <li>FWS as invited</li> </ul>
<p><b>Streamlining procedures implemented in 2019</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shift from Pace 180 to photo point monitoring.</li> <li>Introductions of tablets (electronic field data collection).</li> <li>Database development (expected February 2020).</li> </ul>		<p><b>Streamlining procedures implemented in 2019</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shift from Pace 180 to photo point monitoring.</li> <li>Shift from 3-5 year monitoring interval to 5-10 year monitoring interval.</li> <li>Introductions of tablets (electronic field data collection).</li> <li>Database development (expected February 2020).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Progress</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>143</b> Letters of intent covering <b>1.4 million acres</b></li> <li><b>41</b> properties currently covered by signed plans</li> <li><b>508,283</b> acers currently covered by signed plans</li> </ul>		
<p><b>5 Year Forecast</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>84</b> properties covered by signed plans</li> <li><b>1,070,983</b> acres covered by signed plans</li> </ul>		
<p>5 year forecast may change depending on funding for plan development</p>		

Figure 8. Description of CCAA monitoring protocol.

### 13. Adaptive Management

The results of monitoring efforts outlined above will be considered from an adaptive management perspective. Many of the potential conservation measures have been successfully implemented as part of other conservation efforts. However, outcomes of a few conservation measures may vary based upon local site conditions. Specifically, conservation measures with a vegetation rehabilitation component may have varying success based upon local soil type and climatic conditions such as rainfall timing and amount. For these conservation measures, careful monitoring both before and after implementation, along with the flexibility provided through adaptive management, will maximize the likelihood of success through possible changes to seed mixtures, rescheduling of rehabilitation efforts, timing of treatments, and other adjustments.

An adaptive, outcome-based approach (Walters 1986) will be used to allow management flexibility, recognizing conservation measures may need to be updated based on changing conditions or new information. Such an adaptive approach explicitly recognizes multiple factors (environmental conditions, biological processes) affect sage-grouse populations. Furthermore, the consequences of prescriptive conservation measures cannot be predicted with certainty. Therefore, the CCAA provides a framework for making objective decisions in the face of uncertainty. If the desired results of a conservation measures are not achieved, the member organization will work with the landowner to modify the conservation measure or enact another conservation measure in order to achieve the desired results. The OACSC also incorporated a “Changed Circumstances” section into the CCAA framework that helps to address any unforeseen events that impact an enrolled property owner. Lastly, adaptive management relies on an iterative cycle of monitoring, assessment, and decision making to clarify the relationships among the conservation measures and the response of habitat and, ultimately, sage-grouse abundance.

The OACSC will meet annually to review the findings of monitoring efforts across all counties and discuss successes and challenges. These meetings will allow for ongoing coordination and communication, including identification of training, staff, and funding needs as well as discussion of new information and emerging issues related to sage-grouse conservation. This strategic action plan will be updated and revised as needed.

The OACSC learned a great deal from the planning and implementation efforts completed in the last five years to improve sage-steppe habitat and increase and/or sustain sage-grouse populations. Lessons learned through implementation of the actions described in this plan will be incorporated into future activities and since the Strategic Action Plan is a “living document”, there is flexibility in adjusting the goals, objectives, and actions to better meet the intended outcomes.

**Table 4. Example of adaptive management used within the FIP process.**

Restoration				Engagement		
Restoration	Unpredictable weather conditions can cause project delays.	Ample time is necessary for planning and contracting a large landscape conservation project.	Grant budgets may have to be adjusted because of contractor costs increasing from the start of a large conservation	It can be difficult to balance staff workloads to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders	Pre-determined goal acres (608,000) associated with projected PPH enrolled properties on private land prior to initiating	It can be challenging to find enough time for multiple landowner meetings and site visits to work out project details

			project to the end.		enrollment in each county was ambitious, CCAAs have accomplished (528,993 acres after five years.	
<b>Lessons Learned</b>	Be prepared for any scenario during fieldwork. Poor weather and equipment failure can happen.	Completed SSPs ensures shovel ready projects. New interest is generated as landowners become aware of the partnerships ability to provide technical and financial assistance.	It is optimal to perform bid tours and receive bids prior to building the project budget.	Landowners are not all the same. Take time to work with them in a customized way. Discuss timelines and requirements during the project development phase.	Enrollment of new properties takes more time than anticipated. In the future a new goal will be established for enrollment based on the experience of the CCAAs	Communication between implementors and landowners is vital during and after the project to enable appropriate maintenance and management.
<b>Adaptations</b>	The flexibility of grant budgets is helpful when there are delays in restoration work due to weather conditions and or other factors.	Additional staff is often necessary to increase capacity and implement monitoring projects.	A streamlined process to solicit qualified contractors, run bid tours, evaluate and award contracts, and complete inspections results in efficiency and quality.	Cross jurisdictional relationships support fluidity of funds across county lines for project implementation and design	New goals associated with enrollment will be established for PGH and PPH. Evaluation of enrollment goals will occur annually	Clear and frequent communications helps staff align project objectives and landowner needs. Where possible, one staff person is assigned to a landowner from project inception to completion.

Strategic planning is essential for landscape scale conservation efforts to be effective across large landscapes, however, a good plan allows for flexibility as multiple moving parts are not always succinct. Our environment is constantly changing, and as managers, we have no control over weather conditions, fire behavior or drought. Outside of environmental fluctuations managers must adapt to project design alterations, equipment breakdowns, the rising costs of materials and contracted labor, or landowners that change their mind about a particular project component. Large projects are constantly evolving and while timelines may be altered, it does not mean that objectives will not be met. Instead, project managers re-group, make adjustments, address concerns at hand, and extend timelines as needed. Landscape conservation efforts are typically led by a highly functioning group of partners. They have experience and knowledge to meet action items. To function at this high level, understanding and adaptability from project partners and granting organizations is necessary so that projects are effectively designed and implemented to meet overall goals. This kind of trust in leadership abilities will result in a smooth process that ends with ecological success, even if timelines are altered or objectives are revisited.

## 14. Sustainability

The Partnership is implementing 30-year agreements to conservation (CCAAs), which directly commits us to sustain long-term ecological uplift within in our geographic planning area, with the goal of increasing local sage-grouse population trends through habitat conservation practices implemented. This commitment is evidenced in multiple ways and is complimented by the commitment of our partners:

- This Strategic Action Plan recognizes that actions to reduce threats to sage-grouse range from those that either (1) result in immediate and lasting reduction and/or elimination of the threat and require minimal follow-up (e.g. conifer removal, marking fences and installing escape ramps in water troughs); and (2) provide lasting threat reduction, but require long-term and ongoing investments to ensure success (e.g. invasive annual grass treatment and re-establishment of desirable perennial bunchgrasses). It is our view that, given the significant decline in the sage-grouse populations in Oregon, both categories of conservation actions must be implemented to halt further declines and promote long-term population growth. Prioritization of financial awards will be based, in part, upon the willingness of the landowner/manager to follow long-term guidance to promote project success (e.g. grazing rest).
- The USFWS remains committed to sage-grouse conservation through CCAA implementation and intends to continue to offer financial and staff support.
- The CCAAs are designed to sustain long-term outcomes through 30-year voluntary commitments from enrollees. As part of the SSPs, landowners have committed to implementing conservation measures that address limiting factors to sage-grouse population increases and agree to maintain positive ecological outcomes through 2045, the lifespan of the CCAAs. Implementation of CCAAs over the course of a 30-year enrollment period along with associated monitoring facilitates the SWCDs ability to evaluate ecological outcomes on an annual or semi-annual basis. Additionally, SWCDs meet with producers annually to discuss various facets of the enrolled property and evaluate the need for adaptive management.
- The BLM in each county solidified their conservation commitment through planning documents such as the Greater Sage-grouse ARMPA (Bureau of Land Management, 2015). The BLM is dedicated to assisting local field staff to implement the ARMPA by issuing several Instructional Memoranda and providing ongoing guidance. BLMs participation in LITs facilitates enduring collaboration with all stakeholders.
- The NRCS is implementing sage-grouse conservation efforts in Crook, Harney, Lake, and Malheur County since 2010 through the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) and other Farm Bill programs. NRCS preferentially ranks projects proposed on CCAA-enrolled lands, so the same CCAA 30-year commitment to sustain ecological outcomes applies to NRCS-funded projects. Some NRCS programs specify a long-term agreement duration (e.g. Conservation Reserve Program), and thus also support long-term ecological outcomes. Also, individual NRCS “conservation practices” applied on private lands require a specified length of landowner commitment to maintenance.
- The State of Oregon demonstrated commitment to sustaining conservation efforts in sage-grouse habitat through the Oregon’s Sage-grouse Action Plan (2015) and the development of a CCAA covering all state-owned sage-grouse habitat. These plans provide a coordinated framework for action, accountability, and the need for long-term investments and regulatory commitment to ensure ecological outcomes are durable. With the backing of an executive order from Oregon

Governor Kate Brown and forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding for SageCon partners, all stakeholders have committed to continued support and implementation of the Action Plan. Oregon's Sage-Grouse Mitigation program is a particular aspect of the Action Plan that may enable lasting contributions towards sage-grouse habitat in each county.

- Sustainability of our ecological outcomes may also be achieved by successfully competing for funds from other grantors, such as Intermountain West Joint Venture and national funding opportunities open to CWMAs and NGOs.



**Figure 9. Example of desired ecological conditions in sage-steppe habitat.**

## 15. Funding Strategy

The OACSC has a track record of working as a partnership to discern funding needs for each county. Individual members of the OACSC have acquired grant funding for over 30 years, placing millions of dollars into conservation actions. When working as a partnership and across county lines, they base funding needs and allocations in the following manner:

- Priority acres of habitat enrolled in CCAAs in each county
- Number of Site Specific Plans for individual private landowners
- Location of conservation treatment in relation to completed projects, thus enhancing larger acreages
- Estimations of cost for each conservation treatment outlined within each county
- Capacity and monitoring needs for each county, based on past and present focused investment projects

The OACSC as a whole seeks funding through two avenues: 1) Strategically, as a landscape effort, and 2) Individually, for each county to implement Site Specific Plans for landowners within their respective areas,

utilizing a variety of funding sources. Each member organization is responsible for determining their overall funding needs and leveraging dollars to both address immediate conservation actions and to match landscape level grants. Annual evaluation of conservation treatments and assessment of monitoring results provides guidance for the OACSC to prioritize actions and determine funding needs.

While state and federal budgets are often uncertain, sage-grouse habitat conservation remains a priority among the core partner agencies. Consequently, each local, state and federal agency brings funding to support annual conservation goals and treatments. Funding support also comes in the form of in-kind match from concurrent conservation projects that reach the same end result or landscape goal. This may be the BLM conducting conservation for sage-grouse on public land, or it could be County Weed Management Boards addressing invasive annual grasses on private land. In-kind contributions are also leveraged through private landowners who volunteer their time, equipment and/or materials for a conservation treatment. Despite funding uncertainty, agencies have maintained a high level of financial and in-kind contributions, as reflected in recent estimates for value-added funds for 2022-2028 (Table 5).

**Table 5. Projected in-kind contribution from project partners (2022-2028).**

Funding Source	Contribution Amount
<b>Natural Resource Conservation Service</b> NRCS has committed to in-kind match funding from EQIP & Sage Grouse Initiative and other Farm Bill programs on private land in each county.	\$2, 600,000
<b>Bureau of Land Management</b> BLMs match funding is sourced from cross boundary treatments to address wildfire risk, juniper encroachment, exotic weed treatments, and monitoring.	\$6,000,000
<b>ODFW</b> ODFW contributions include staff time for OACSC Partnership meetings and consultation for siting treatment acres to benefit sage-grouse.	\$2000
<b>USFWS</b> USFWS provides match funds for on-the-ground conservation work via the Partners Program. Budgets average \$25,000 per project with an estimated 1-2 projects implemented annually. USFWS matches funds through staff participating in the LIT and USFWS' work to implement the CCAA in each county. USFWS also assists with on-going field work associated with sage-grouse habitat	\$135,000
<b>Private Landowners</b> We anticipate that landowners will provide over 2400 hours of in-kind by initiating and maintaining CCAA plans, (e.g. reporting, meetings, tracking grazing, maintenance and management of projects).	\$60,000
<b>Core Partners</b> Core partners contribute in-kind time annually to outreach with private landowners and partnering organizations in each respective county.	\$6,000
<b>SWCDs</b> Crook, Harney, Lake and Malheur counties annually contribute staff in-kind time to strategic planning, outreach, database management, and monitoring sage-grouse activities taking place in each county to address threats to sage-grouse and meet long-term ecological goals.	\$60,000
<b>ODF</b> Pending match is anticipated through SB762 funding for wildfire risk reduction projects and forest health thinning practices, which will take place in Harney, Lake and Malheur counties.	\$600,000

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17. Partnership Certification Page

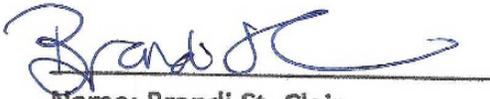
I certify that this strategic action plan is a true and accurate presentation of the proposed work and that I am authorized to sign as the Partner Representative or Co-Representative(s).



Name: Andy Gallagher  
Crook County SWCD  
Date: 1/13/2022



Name: Bret Cleaver  
Malheur County SWCD  
Date: 1/13/2022



Name: Brandi St. Clair  
Lakeview SWCD  
Date: 1/13/2022



Name: Jason Kesling  
Harney SWCD  
Date: 1/13/2022



Name: Emmy Tyrrell  
Powder Basin Watershed Council  
Date: 1/13/2022

PAUL HENSON Digitally signed by PAUL HENSON  
Date: 2022.01.13 12:31:56 -08'00'

Name: Paul Henson  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix A: Governance Document

# 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 OASCS 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 OASCS 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”.**

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

- 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.

Appendix B: Detailed Work Plan

Strategy	Objective	Restoration Actions	Lead Partner	Outputs	Metrics	Baseline Monitoring	Effectiveness Monitoring	
<b>Biennium 1</b>								
<b>Goal 1: Ensure the administrative framework and capacity exists for Programmatic CCAAs throughout the life of the CCAA (30- years), e.g. for the life of the FIP (3 biennia)</b>								
<p><b>Strategy 1:</b> Increase and/or maintain staff capacity of FIP partners to ensure the administrative framework and capacity to enroll private lands in the Greater Sage-grouse Programmatic CCAAs and execute site specific plans. This includes ensuring staffing within each county, providing All County CCAA coordination maintaining the CCAA database, and communication/coordination with statewide external partners to relay CCAA progress and accomplishments to remain engaged with state-level partners and funders.</p>	<p>Administrative Capacity</p>	<p><b>Objective 1-1:</b> By December 30, 2014, programmatic CCAAs will be completed and signed for all counties with sage-grouse habitat, giving all private landowners within Oregon the opportunity to enroll.</p>	<p><b>Action 1-1:</b> Develop and sign programmatic CCAAs for Baker, Harney, Malheur, Union, Grant, Deschutes, Lake, and Crook Counties</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<p>5 programmatic CCAAs covering 8 counties will provide all landowners the opportunity to enroll</p>	<p>Number of CCAAs/Counties</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
		<p><b>Objective 1-2:</b> Throughout the life of the 30-year CCAAs, increase and/or maintain technical staff capacity of CCAA partners to fully implement the CCAA program in Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Lake and Malheur counties.</p>	<p><b>Action 1-2</b> Assess the staffing needs of each CCAA permit holder every biennium.</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<p>Biennial staffing needs assessment</p>	<p>Completed staffing needs assessment</p>	<p>Biennially Assess staffing needs</p>	<p>A documented staffing needs assessment</p>
		<p><b>Objective 1-3:</b> For the life of the FIP (3 biennia), increase and/or maintain technical staff capacity of CCAA partners to fully</p>	<p><b>Action 1-3-A:</b> Assess the staffing needs of each CCAA permit holder every biennium.</p>	<p>SWCDs</p>	<p>Biennial staffing needs assessment</p>	<p>Completed staffing needs assessment</p>		

		implement the CCAA program and achieve targets identified in the FIP 2 workplan in Crook, Harney, Lake and Malheur counties.	<b>Action 1-3-B:</b> Secure funding through OWEB, USFWS, and other grantors to maintain staffing capacity required for implementation of programmatic CAAs.	SWCDs, USFWS	A minimum of 6 FTE is employed for the next 3 biennia.	Number of CCAA staff	A minimum of (6) FTE are employed for next 3 biennia	A documented number of CCAA staff - FTEs
		<b>Objective 1-4:</b> For the life of the 30-year CCAAs, ensure CCAA partners have adequate equipment necessary to administer and implement CCAAs. This includes but is not limited to vehicles, computers, tablets, etc.	<b>Action 1-4-A:</b> Assess the equipment needs of CCAA partners every biennium.	SWCDs	Biennial equipment needs assessment	Completed equipment needs assessment	A 2021 equipment needs assessment identified the need for a minimum per county: 1-2 4WD vehicle(s); 1 UTV, 1 laptop per employee; 1-2 tablets; database, GIS, and In Reach subscription fees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary report of biennial equipment needs</li> <li>• Documentation of equipment secured</li> </ul>
			<b>Action 1-4-B:</b> Secure funding through OWEB, USFWS and other grantors to maintain equipment required for implementation of programmatic CCAAs.					
		<b>Objective 1-5:</b> Hire an All County CCAA Coordinator to facilitate the work of the All County CCAA Steering Committee, including but not limited to, management of the FIP 2 grant, and facilitation of meetings, tracking and reporting SAP progress and serving as a liaison to state wide partners.	<b>Action 1-5:</b> Conduct outreach and recruitment to identify and hire qualified candidate.	SWCDs, USFWS	All County CCAA Coordinator hired (.5 FTE)	Completed hiring of All County CCAA Coordinator	Through FIP funding, .5 FTE is employed to provide All County CCAA Coordination. This funding will expire 2028	Documented CCAA coordination capacity as demonstrated through .5 FTE All County CCAA Coordinator position employed for the life of the FIP
	<b>Administrative Framework</b>	<b>Objective 1-6:</b> Annually, hold quarterly All County CCAA Coordination business meetings.	<b>Action 1-6:</b> Hold quarterly meetings to provide partnership updates, discuss CCAA implementation concerns as identified,	SWCDs, USFWS	Four All County CCAA Coordination meetings, annually.	Number of meetings and participants	Plan and hold 4 All County CCAA meetings annually	Document the number of meetings and participants at each meeting annually

			and conduct routine partnership business.					
		<p><b>Objective 1-7-A:</b> For the life of the FIP (3 biennia), maintain staff capacity to manage and update CCAA database to store spatial data, site specific plans, baseline and monitoring data, and annual reports to track effectiveness.</p>	<p><b>Action 1-7-A:</b>                      1. Hire 0.5 FTE to maintain and update CCAA database as required.                      2. Conduct ongoing maintenance and updates to database.                      3. Conduct database trainings with CCAA staff as training needs are identified.</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCAA Database manager hired.</li> <li>• Current functional CCAA database.</li> <li>• Training needs of CCAA staff are met.</li> <li>• Database guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed hiring of CCAA database manager.</li> <li>• Updates and maintenance to database implemented in a timely manner.</li> <li>• Number of database trainings provided.</li> <li>• Database guide completed and updated as needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current database management is provided in-kind by Crook SWCD and with a \$8500 grant from USFWS. Currently there is no dedicated funding for a CCAA database manager.</li> <li>• A guide for use of the database is under development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documented increase in technical staff capacity to maintain and update the database as demonstrated through 0.5 FTE hired for this purpose for the duration of the FIP.</li> <li>• Maintain records documenting maintenance and updates made to database</li> <li>• Maintain records documenting database trainings provided</li> <li>• Database guide is updated to reflect upgrades or maintenance actions.</li> </ul>

	Partnership Communication Statewide	<p><b>Objective 1-7-B:</b> By December 2022, the All County CCAA Steering Committee will develop shared outreach resources, such as a website, social media, or other outreach platform targeting statewide SageCon partners.</p>	<p><b>Action 1-7-B:</b> 1. By December 2022, conduct a special All County CCAA Coordination meeting to discuss outreach goals and determine appropriate outreach tools.  2. By June 2023, identify resources available to implement statewide outreach plan.</p>	SWCDs, USFWS	Shared outreach tools developed, as identified.	Number of statewide outreach resources developed.	Shared outreach tools developed, as identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a statewide outreach plan identifying goals and appropriate outreach tools.</li> <li>• Development of identified outreach tools; implementation of the statewide outreach plan.</li> <li>• Monitoring of outreach tools developed specific to the outreach method (e.g. website visits; social media shares; email recipients, etc.)</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Objective 1-8:</b> Annually, hold quarterly All County CCAA Coordination partner meetings in conjunction with CCAA business meetings.</p>	<p><b>Action 1-8:</b> 1. Hold quarterly meetings to provide CCAA updates to partner agencies and exchange information from partners relevant to CCAA implementation.</p>	SWCDs, USFWS, OACSC	Four All County CCAA partner meetings, annually.	Number of meetings and participants	Four All County CCAA partner meetings, annually.	Maintain a record of the number of meetings and participants who attend these meetings

**GOAL 2: By 2028, a minimum of 40% of eligible acres will be enrolled with a signed SSP, USFWS letter of concurrence, and issuance of a certificate of inclusion.**

<p><b>Strategy 2:</b> Landowner outreach and enrollment and local partner communication: This strategy focuses on communication to landowners and local partners. The goal of local outreach is to communicate enrollment opportunities and benefits to private landowners and local agencies with the purpose to enroll eligible lands according to the prioritization guidance in the programmatic CCAAs.</p>	<p><b>Landowner Outreach and Local Partner Communication</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 2-1:</b> Annually, each CCAA permit holder will conduct outreach activities with community members, private landowners, organizations, and agency personnel.</p>	<p><b>Action 2-1:</b> 1. Conduct outreach activities appropriate to each permit holder's region and stage of CCAA implementation. These will vary regionally. Examples: one-on-one meetings, events, agency meetings, articles in local news media, mailings, social media, etc.</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS, OSU Ext,</p>	<p>A minimum of 2 outreach activities completed by each CCAA permit holder annually</p>	<p>Number of outreach activities completed.</p>	<p>As of December 2028, there are 47 properties enrolled in the CCAA within the FIP Phase 2 geography</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain program enrollment records to document participation rates to meet enrollment goals for the FIP Phase 2 geography.</li> <li>• Enrollment will be reported annually to the CCAA Coordinator and records are also maintained by USFWS.</li> <li>• Maintain project records documenting number of outreach events and participants.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Landowner Enrollment</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 2-2-A:</b> By September 30, 2015, 40% (608,000 acres) of privately owned PPH sage-grouse habitat will be covered by a signed letter of intent or enrolled in a CCAA. Outreach activities will take place to inform interested landowners, this action will lead landowners to submit letters of intent.</p>	<p><b>Action 2-2-A</b> 1. Meet with new landowners 2. Maintain interest with engaged landowners 3. collect letters 4. Develop capacity to develop SSPs</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<p>Minimum of 608,000 acres of privately owned sage grouse habitat covered by signed letter of intent</p>	<p>Number of PPH acres represented by letters of intent</p>	<p>As of September 30, 2015 40% of privately owned PPH have signed letter of intent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain program enrollment records to document 100% of eligible acres enrolled. Enrollment will be reported annually to the CCAA Coordinator and records are also maintained by USFWS.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Objective 2-3-A:</b> By June 30, 2028, enroll a minimum of 35 of privately owned sage-grouse habitat in CCAAs within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area. For reference, there are currently</p>	<p><b>Action 2-3-A:</b> 1. Prioritize landowners for enrollment as detailed in CCAA. 2. Conduct baseline inventories. 3. Develop site specific plans detailing threats</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<p>Minimum of 322,351 acres of privately owned sage-grouse habitat enrolled within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area.</p>	<p>Number of eligible acres in FIP Phase 2 Focal area enrolled.</p>	<p>As of December 2028, 35 % of eligible acres within the FIP Phase 2 geography have been enrolled in CCAAs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain program enrollment records to document 100% of eligible acres enrolled. Enrollment will be reported annually to the CCAA</li> </ul>	

		163,724 acres enrolled which equals 18% of the total eligible acres.	and conservation measures. 4. Submit site specific plans for USFWS review; obtain USFWS Letter of Concurrence. 5. Issue landowner Certificate of Inclusion."					Coordinator and records are also maintained by USFWS.
		<b>Objective 2-3-B:</b> By September 2045, enroll a minimum of 40% of privately owned sage-grouse habitat in CCAAs. There are a total of 3,480,187 eligible acres.	<b>Action 2-3-B:</b> 1. Prioritize landowners for enrollment as detailed in CCAA. 2. Conduct baseline inventories. 3. Develop site specific plans detailing threats and conservation measures. 4. Submit site specific plans for USFWS review; obtain USFWS Letter of Concurrence. 5. Issue landowner Certificate of Inclusion.		Minimum of 1,392,075 acres of privately owned sage-grouse habitat enrolled.	Number of eligible acres enrolled.		

**GOAL 3: By 2028, Implement 90% of the conservation measures that are prescribed in signed SSPs to guide conservation measures to address threats to sage-grouse on enrolled lands in the focal area.**

<p><b>Strategy 3:</b> Reduce threats to sage-grouse and maintain or improve the ecological condition of sage-grouse habitat: This strategy focuses on management actions to reduce threats to sage-grouse on privately owned rangelands with the goal of maintaining or achieving high quality habitat conditions necessary to promote sage-grouse populations. This may include assisting landowners to apply for funding to implement conservation measures.</p>	<p><b>Overarching</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 3-1:</b> Assist landowners in applying for and receiving technical and financial assistance as needed to implement CMs according to the time frames specified in the site specific plans.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-1,2:</b> Match technical and financial resources to the conservation measures necessary to execute SSPs.</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS</p>	<p>Landowners have the capacity to implement CMs identified in their SSPs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of landowners assisted within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area.</li> <li>• Match funding received to implement CMs within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area.</li> </ul>	<p>Document initial match contribution source and contribution amount</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the technical and financial assistance received to implement CMs to maintain records of match funding for CCAA implementation.</li> <li>• Document the number of landowners and/or projects for which technical and financial assistance was secured.</li> <li>• Report records to CCAA Coordinator</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Objective 3-2:</b> Communicate ecological priorities with partners at quarterly meets to increase availability of funding to implement conservation measures</p>						

								for tracking across all counties.
Wildfire Threat	<p><b>Objective 3-3-A:</b> By June 30, 2028, 90% of acres within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area have conservation measures applied to address the threat of wildfire, where wildfire is identified as a threat.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-3-A:</b> Need to detail the actions associated with this</p>	SWCDs, USFWS		Number of pastures within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with CMs to address wildfire	A minimum of 90% of enrolled acres within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with wildfire threat have CMs applied.	Document number of acres within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with CMs to address wildfire threat annually in database.	
	<p><b>Objective 3-3-B:</b> By 2045, conservation measures to address the threat of wildfire will be applied on 90% of the acres enrolled where wildfire is identified as a threat. 90% of enrolled landowners within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area become members of local Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-3-B:</b> Assist landowners in applying conservation measures 6, 7, and/or 8 from Programmatic CCAA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juniper removal</li> <li>• Invasive annual grass treatment</li> <li>• Grazing management improved</li> </ul>	SWCDs, USFWS		A minimum of 90% landowners within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area are RFPA members.	Number of landowners within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area who are RFPA members.		
Invasive Annual Grass	<p><b>Objective 3-4-A:</b> By June 30, 2022, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of exotic annual grasses and other invasive vegetation on 8,550 acres of enrolled sage grouse habitat.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-4-A,B,C,D:</b> Assist landowners in applying conservation measures 31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38, 39,40,41,42 from Programmatic CCAA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herbicide treatment</li> <li>• Mechanical treatment</li> </ul>	SWCDs, USFWS, BLM, NRCS, CWMAAs	A minimum of 8,550 acres of CMs to address the threat of exotic annual grasses and other invasive vegetation	Number of acres of enrolled sage grouse habitat with invasive vegetation CMS implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using CCAA database and tablet-based field data forms:</li> <li>• Collect baseline data using methods identified in the CCAA (e.g. threat-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect post treatment data using methods adopted by OACSC &amp; CCA/AA.</li> <li>• Follow up data collection will occur on a 5-10-year schedule through life of project.</li> </ul>	

		<p><b>Objective 3-4-B:</b> By June 30, 2028, within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of exotic annual grasses and other invasive vegetation on 90% of pastures where IAGs are identified as a threat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted grazing treatment</li> <li>Biological treatment</li> </ul>		A minimum of 90% of pastures with CMs implemented within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area to address invasive vegetation	Number of pastures within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with CMs to address invasive vegetation	<p>ecological state, photo points).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess apparent ecological trend using methods identified in the CCAA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain treatment records documenting acres treated in CCAA database.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Objective 3-4-C:</b> By 2045, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of exotic annual grasses and other invasive vegetation on 90% acres where Invasive vegetation is identified as a threat.</p>			A minimum of 90% of pastures with CMs implemented to address invasive vegetation	Number of pastures with CMs to address invasive vegetation			
	<p><b>Objective 3-4-D:</b> By June 30, 2028, within the FIP phase 2 Focal Area, conservation measures will be implemented to treat exotic annual grasses on 30,000 acres of enrolled sage grouse habitat</p>				A minimum of 30,000 acres of treatments implemented within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area to address invasive vegetation	Number of acres within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with Invasive vegetation treatment		
	<p><b>Improved Grazing Management</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 3-5-A:</b> By June 30, 2022, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of improper livestock grazing on 90% of management units where improper livestock grazing is identified as a threat.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-5-A,B,C:</b> Assist landowners in applying conservation measures 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and/or 30 from Programmatic CCAA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rotational grazing</li> <li>Rest rotation</li> <li>Deferred grazing</li> <li>Cross fencing</li> <li>Riparian area fencing</li> </ul>	SWCDs, USFWS, NRCS	CMs to address improper livestock grazing will be implemented on a minimum of 90% of pastures where it is identified as a threat.	% of pastures with CMs to address improper livestock grazing.		

		<p><b>Objective 3-5-B:</b> By June 30, 2028, within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of improper livestock grazing on 90% of management units where improper livestock grazing is identified as a threat.</p>			<p>CMs to address improper livestock grazing will be implemented on a minimum of 90% of pastures within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area where it is identified as a threat.</p>	<p>% of pastures within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with CMs to address improper livestock grazing.</p>		
		<p><b>Objective 3-5-C:</b> By 2045, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of improper livestock grazing on 90% of management units where improper livestock grazing is identified as a threat.</p>			<p>CMs to address improper livestock grazing will be implemented on a minimum of 90% of pastures where it is identified as a threat.</p>	<p>% of pastures with CMs to address improper livestock grazing.</p>		
	<p><b>Juniper Threat</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 3-6-A:</b> By June 30, 2022, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of conifer encroachment on 14,680 acres of enrolled sage grouse habitat.</p>	<p><b>Action 3-6-A,B,C:</b> Assist landowners in applying conservation measures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and/or 18 from Programmatic CCAA</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS, BLM, NRCS</p>	<p>A minimum of 14680 acres of CMs implemented to address conifer encroachment</p>	<p>Number of acres with CMs implemented to address conifer encroachment</p>		
		<p><b>Objective 3-6-B:</b> By June 30, 2028, within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of conifer encroachment on</p>			<p>A minimum of 50,000 acres of CMS implemented within the FIP Phase 2 Focal Area to address conifer encroachment</p>	<p>Number of acres within FIP Phase 2 Focal Area with CMs to address conifer encroachment</p>		

		50,000 acres of enrolled sage grouse habitat.						
		<b>Objective 3-6-C:</b> By 2045, conservation measures will be implemented to address the threat of conifer encroachment on 70% acres where conifer encroachment is identified as a threat.				A minimum of 70 % of acres with conifer encroachment identified as a threat will have CMs to address the threat	% of acres within FIP phase 2 focus area with CMs to address conifer encroachment	
	Increase Habitat	<b>Objective 3-7-A</b> By June 2022, 60% of enrolled private lands in Oregon will exhibit a stable to improving trend in ecological condition	<b>Action 3-7-A,B,C:</b> Implement SSPs and Complete Monitoring	SWCDs, USFWS	60% of enrolled private land will have stable or improving trend	% of acreage with stable or improving trend		
<b>Objective 3-7-B</b> By June 2022, 117,680 acres of potential habitat identified as being ecological states that do not currently provide season or year- round habitat during baseline inventory will transition to ecological states capable of providing seasonal or year- round habitat		117,680 acres of non-habitat will be transitioned to states capable of providing seasonal or year- round habitat			Number of acres transitioned from non-habitat to seasonal or year round habitat			
<b>Objective 3-7-C</b> By 2045, identified threats within the control of private landowners will be removed or reduced on 90% of enrolled privately owned sage-grouse habitat in Oregon.		90% of enrolled private land will have threats within control of private landowners removed or reduced			% of land with threats removed or reduced			

GOAL 4: Monitor 100% of SSPs for the life of the CCAA and complete required reporting to assess effectiveness.								
<p><b>Strategy 4:</b> Monitor, maintain, and report on plans for the lifetime of the CCAA: This strategy focuses on the work that is required for ongoing monitoring of enrolled properties, not only a requirement per the terms of the Programmatic CCAAs, but also to document progress towards the goals stated above and to guide adaptive management of conservation measures.</p>	<p><b>Monitor</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 4-1:</b> For the life of the CCAA, 100% of enrolled properties will be monitored according to intervals specified in their SSPs.</p>	<p><b>Action 4-1:</b> 1. Complete repeat monitoring using Upland Documentation forms, Riparian Documentation form, photo points (and Pace 180s as indicated) to document ecological state and apparent trend.</p>	<p>SWCDs USFWS</p>	<p>Completed monitoring of enrolled properties.</p>	<p>Number of enrolled properties with repeat monitoring completed.</p>	<p>Using CCAA database and tablet-based field data forms: • Collect baseline data using methods identified in the CCAA (e.g. threat-based ecological state, photo points) • Assess apparent ecological trend using methods identified in the CCAA</p>	<p>• Program records stored in CCAA database that document follow-up monitoring successfully completed on time per the intervals specified in SSPs.</p>
	<p><b>Report</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 4-2:</b> For the life of the CCAA, 100% of enrolled properties will have completed reports completed annual detailing conservation measure accomplishments, changed circumstances, and grazing use.</p>	<p><b>Action 4-2:</b> 1. Meet with landowners annually to document progress and challenges during current year. 2. Compile data in CCAA database, 3. Submit annual reports to USFWS.</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS, land-owners</p>	<p>Annual reports completed for each enrolled property.</p>	<p>Number of annual reports.</p>	<p>Using CCAA database and tablet-based field data forms:  • Record information from annual landowner interviews</p>	<p>• Program records stored in CCAA database that document annually reporting successfully completed on time and reports submitted to USFWS by Jan 30 deadline.</p>
	<p><b>Changed Circumstances</b></p>	<p><b>Objective 4-3:</b> For the life of the CCAA, monitoring information will be used to inform adaptive management decisions including identifying new threats and applying additional conservation measures.</p>	<p><b>Action 4-3-C:</b> 1. Meet with landowners annually to document situations that lead to a changed circumstance. 2. Repeat baseline monitoring to reflect the changed circumstance. 3. Apply a Changed Circumstances Conservation Measures</p>	<p>SWCDs, USFWS, land-owners</p>	<p>Annual reports completed for each enrolled property.</p>	<p>Number of CCCMs  Acres where CCCMs are applied</p>	<p>Collect baseline data using methods identified in the CCAA  Record information from annual landowner interviews</p>	<p>• Program records stored in CCAA database that document annually reporting successfully completed on time and reports submitted to USFWS by Jan 30 deadline</p>



**Appendix II. Letter of Participation**



Crook County Soil & Water Conservation District  
488 SE Lynn Blvd.  
Prineville, Oregon 97754

Phone: (541) 447-3548 Fax: (541) 416-2115

Andy.gallagher@oregonstate.edu

## Attachment A- Letter of Participation Core Partnership Agreement

This letter expresses the interest of each Core Partner (Crook SWCD, Lake SWCD, Harney SWCD, Malheur SWCD and USFWS) in OWEB's Focused Investment Partnership Program. The Core Partnership of the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee invested significant time developing a working model that will provide tangible economic, ecological, and social benefits to Oregonians and the rural lands they depend on for ecological resiliency. Our team built a strategic plan, which is rooted in common ground rules, respect, values, and trust. Our working relationship coalesced around a common mission to develop collaborative approaches to conservation delivery in Sagebrush/Sage-steppe Habitat.

In 2011, a grassroots group of private landowners; conservation groups; and local, state, and federal agencies formed the Harney County Sage-Grouse Steering Committee to develop a programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for private rangelands in Harney County, Oregon. In March 2014, core partners, private landowners, and stakeholders from the other counties within the range of sage-grouse in Oregon began meeting to pursue development of CCAs for those counties, using the Harney County CCAA as a template. On March 18, 2015, CCAs were signed for Baker, (Union?), Malheur, Grant, Lake, Crook, and Deschutes Counties. Crook and Deschutes Counties are covered under a joint CCAA, with the Crook County SWCD serving as the permit holder. These CCAs are heavily dependent upon partnerships and create an incentive based alternative to top-down regulatory species management.

The Core Partnership completed initial analysis and planning and then prepared a portfolio of conservation investment opportunities. This portfolio identifies specific initiative focus areas within the 30-year Strategic Action Plan we are seeking funds to implement.

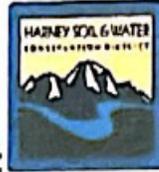
Our organizations are committed to the long-term success of the CCAA program within the sideboards of our respective agencies. The Partnership is comprised of representatives from an incredibly broad and diverse group of stakeholders. This team includes local, state, and federal agencies; nongovernmental organizations; universities; conservation groups; and literally hundreds of landowners. Our effort is supporting a focused conservation effort that is unparalleled in the West, with a proven track record of successfully developing external partnerships.

By signature of the attached agreement, the Core Partnership makes a pledge to uphold the guiding principles and stands committed to achieving the vision for The Model to Protect Sage-grouse, All Counties Initiative.

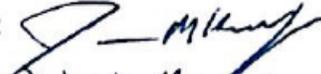
Sincerely,

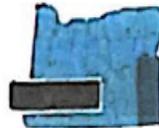
Andy Gallagher, Crook County SWCD

Attachment A- Letter of Participation  
Core Partnership Agreement



**Harney Soil and Water Conservation District**

Signature:   
Title: District Manager



**Malheur County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Signature:   
Title: District Manager

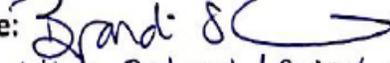


**Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District**

Signature:   
Title: District Manager

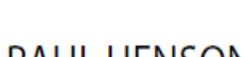


**Lakeview Soil and Water Conservation District**

Signature:   
Title: Wildlife Biologist / Project Manager



**US Fish and Wildlife Service**

Signature:   
Title: PAUL HENSON  
Digitally signed by PAUL HENSON  
Date: 2022.01.12 10:26:24 -08'00'