

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership
FROM: INR Staff
SUBJECT: September SageCon Draft Meeting Notes
DATE: September 30, 2013

This memo follows up on the September 19, 2013 meeting of the Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership. The memo includes the following: (1) upcoming meetings (2) identified action items and (3) brief meeting summary.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Date	Meeting	Location	Potential Agenda Items
Mondays Ongoing	Core Team Meetings	Portland	Share updates to align federal and state processes
September 24, 25	Federal Family Meeting	Denver	Focus will be on status and conservation management of sage grouse and species habitat
September 30	Agency Alignment Meeting	Portland	Coordinate federal and state processes
November 21, 22 (October 24-cancelled)	Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership	Prineville	Next iteration of baseline maps showing disturbance by PAC's and further delineation of the impact and footprint of threats in OR BLM RMP Process, anticipated public comment period Review draft state action plan
October TBD	Energy/Utility Focused Meeting	Portland	Review ODOE draft feasibility analysis

ACTION ITEMS

Action Item	Who	Date
Develop next iteration of maps to establish baseline conditions. Integrate partnership feedback and work with county planners to refine development information.	Technical Staff	Next meeting date TBD
Revise Draft Action Plan	Core Team	October 24
Develop and share schedule for Local Implementation Teams	ODFW	Ongoing

MEETING MATERIALS TO POST TO WEBSITE

- FINAL SAGECON OVERVIEW DOCUMENT
- HELPFUL TERMS

BRIEF MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome, Introductions, Meeting Objectives and Agenda

The meeting was convened by Brett Brownscombe – Governor's Natural Resources Office, Rolando Mendez – BLM and Bill White – NRCS. The conveners thanked all the partners for their continued participation and particularly recognized the work of Dawn Davis, Theresa Burcsu, Eric Rickerson, Bruce Taylor, Jeremy Maestas and Cathy Macdonald for their contributions to the technical work necessary to progress these discussions.

The purpose for this meeting included reviewing the status of sage grouse on the ground across its range in Oregon, better understanding the tolerance of sage grouse for disturbance and framing how much decision space exists for additional disturbance before adversely affecting leks and populations.

SageCon Plan and Process Status and Work Group Updates

Jamie Damon (OSN Sage Grouse Project Manager)

- The Core Team with representation from the Governor's Office, FWS, ODFW, NRCS and BLM continue to meet weekly to coordinate and move tasks forward.
- The Technical group has met 3-4 times to advance data analysis and mapping efforts that will support decisions going forward. The first iteration of maps will be shared at this meeting.

- The State Technical Team met in August and has agreed to provide feedback on products from our efforts.
- September 10-11th OWEB Board Meeting, agenda item “Sage-Grouse and Healthy Rangelands Update and Discussion” was well-received with a good discussion between the board and SageCon presenters.
- An Energy/Utilities focused meeting was held in Portland, it was well-attended and will meet again to review ODOE's feasibility analysis in October.
- Jamie met with Mark Nystrom from AOC to discuss county participation and anticipate having the SageCon partnership represented at AOC's annual meeting in November. Judge Grasty requested SageCon staff reach out to the Harney County planners to assist with land use documentation and support.
- Mindful that the SageCon meetings this month conflicted with the OCA meetings in Maupin, Jamie has offered to schedule a meeting in the future with OCA stakeholders. Invitation to other stakeholder groups to reach out to Jamie if there are agenda items from past or future meetings that would benefit from further discussion in a smaller group setting.
- Theresa and others developed a succinct overview summary document to provide information about the SageCon Partnership and associated work groups that were sent out with the agendas. NRCS has offered to improve formatting in the final iteration of the document.
- Agency alignment meeting is being held September 30th to continue agency coordination at the director level.
- September 19th and 20th Fire and Invasives, Habitat Fragmentation and Mitigation meetings will be held to provide guidance for the next iteration of maps and data analysis for the technical team as well as further refine work plans and tasks.

Introduction of the Action Plan

Ken Mayer (Fire and Invasives Work Group Lead) and *Dawn Davis* (ODFW) –

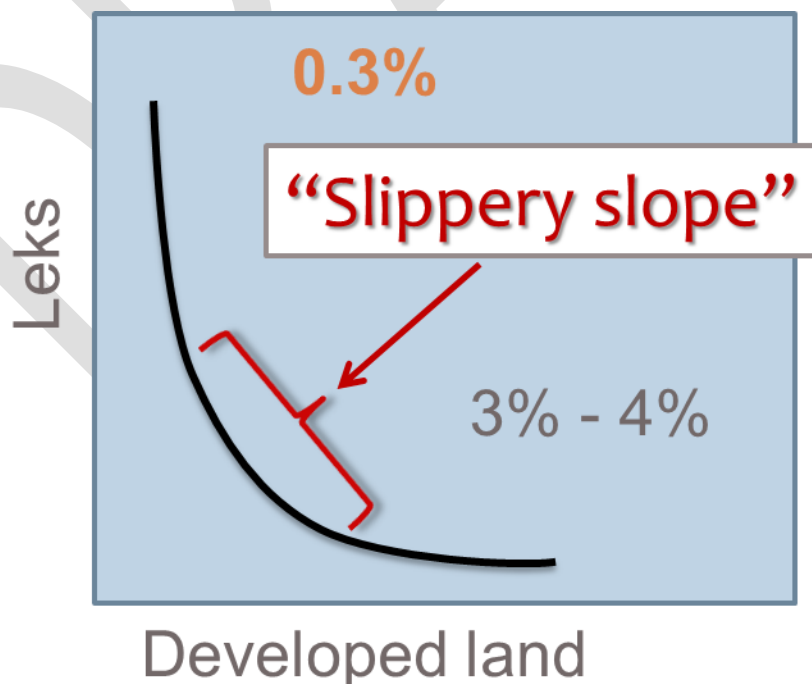
- Ken has been leading a bi-state action planning effort for FWS for Nevada and California. Though the sage grouse populations in this region are genetically different with unique threats, the structure of the action plan is useful as a template for Oregon. Dawn Davis has taken the initial steps of populating data from Oregon into the draft action plan using available data at the landscape and local level.
- The next step will be working with the ODFW Local Implementation Teams to further document current and future efforts that will positively or negatively impact the bird. If possible the plan will identify details about implementation such as budget, lead organization, landowner, number of acres, etc.
- Ken and Dawn shared the Baker action area as an example to demonstrate the geographic scale for property owners to choose actions by ESA factor and provide FWS more objective information and higher level detail than past ESA efforts.
- John O’Keefe reminded the group the importance of documenting local fire efforts that have expanded in response to the real and widespread threat of fires in the area. The work of Rangeland Fire Protection Associations should be

documented and supported as an example of capacity that has increased since 2010. LIT meetings are a place to have deeper discussions on how to continue maximizing the use of local resources to address ongoing threats.

- Brett Brownscombe committed to continue working with BLM to ensure the documentation at the local level is consistent with BLM's efforts to address conservation threats in PACs across private/public land ownership.
- It is important to have widespread participation in documenting all of the ways in which conditions are improving on the ground for species protection. There is intent to track all of the good work that has already been implemented since 2010 in and around sage grouse habitat. Brett encouraged participants to reach out to him with any questions or concerns about the process to continue to have an open dialogue so we can all move forward together.
- A revised draft of the action plan will be shared at the October meeting where we can have a more robust discussion about the format and content. Further review will be done at the LIT's (the meeting schedule is not yet confirmed).

Presentation and Discussion: Assessing Baseline Conditions for Key Habitat Characteristics
Theresa Burcsu (Technical Lead)

Theresa presented a series of slides with information about existing conditions in Oregon based on the Knick model and the threat factors that shape the disturbance threshold. This is the first iteration of maps developed for group discussion primarily based on high level landfire data. Future maps will incorporate more Oregon-specific detail including ILAP data. Below is a graph adapted from the Knick model showing the clear negative correlation between leks and developed land.



For a pdf version of the powerpoint presentation and the "helpful terms" document, visit the SageCon website:

http://orsolutions.org/beta/wpcontent/uploads/2013/10/Burcsu_SageCon_20130919_Final.pdf

Presentation Notes:

- Complex question: how do we manage for multiple objectives? We need to use a landscape approach to understand interactions between humans and sage grouse.
- Tech team is working to understand current conditions, agency capacities and best data for management and monitoring. Template in place to organize and contain results (the draft Action Plan presented by Ken Mayer and Dawn Davis)
- Produced preliminary baseline maps as part of an analysis designed to illustrate current habitat conditions for OR starting from 2010, year of last ESA decision. The final results of the analysis are strongly dependent on the geographic units used.
- John O'Keefe-we need to make sure we are differentiating agriculture by land cover as some agricultural uses are complementary even beneficial to sage grouse habitat and not all have associated adverse impacts or require a buffer.
- To date, we have been focused on large scale characteristics. It is known that these data sources do not include the full development footprint (missing some linear features such as transmission lines and roads). It also does not include detailed understory information and will need to be updated using ILAP data for vegetation such as cheatgrass. This data will help us determine best potential habitat in developed and nondeveloped areas.
- Keep in mind there is a lot of variability in the ratio of sagebrush to nonsagebrush cover across the landscape.
- In Harney County it's mostly ranching that shows up for agriculture based on land classes. Baker has highest percentage in core area but still below 5%.
 - At the next meeting we will have more analyses completed on threats to better understand current disturbance levels in core for agriculture and development and then fires and invasives. We will work on groupings of sage grouse (active/historic). Need to acquire more local data and then refine classes of landcover data.
- Studies showing negative correlation between developed land and lek activity. How will we develop policies and programs that distribute development in a way that meets community needs and protects sage grouse habitat? How to tie these findings to policy, not there yet.
- Developed logic table for determining the correct geographic units for the baseline analysis and monitoring/reporting.

Comments and discussion:

- Is it possible to parse out direct vs. indirect impacts to discern mitigation values? Disturbance categories could include direct, indirect or cumulative impacts as well as diffuse vs. discrete, anthropogenic vs. natural.
- What data do we have for dispersed recreation?
- Post-fire interest in what are the ecological impacts, what plant and animal species are showing resilience? Need to be able to present, at least in the

narrative of the plan, what our expectation is for recovery in burned areas (and basis for that). Does the Landfire mapping pick up young sage brush

- Judge Grasty encouraged technical staff to reach out to Harney County planners for detailed information about land use to help refine maps. He also suggested that we include more information about where the data is coming from, who is responsible for data inputs in order for participants to track any bias.
- Similar to transition model to be adapted for different ecosystems. Expecting a publication of standards from BLM that may be useful in shaping state approach.
- Keep in mind, at over 3% disturbance the science suggests the leks will not be successful which is what the core model is based upon.
- BLM is still determining approach, though looking at the same geographical units of PACS's with reliance on local implementation units. The state and BLM will have a common target; what is the condition within PAC's based on guidance from the COT report. The BLM RMP revisions will be out for public review in October. Early feedback from FWS to BLM emphasized need to provide scientifically sound analysis of impacts to sage grouse to show positive population trends.
- Not necessarily one scale or one answer. Need to create dynamic network that can be responsive to needs of the species as they evolve.

Meeting and Status Update Roundtable

Rolando Mendez – BLM RMP Process

In October it is anticipated that the RMP revisions will be open for a 90 day public comment period. If the process stay on schedule, it is anticipated that one year from now there will be a formal signing for the Record of Decision. BLM posts updates for Sage grouse work being conducted across the range here: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse.html>

Oregon specific documents are being posted here:
<http://www.blm.gov/or/energy/opportunity/sagebrush.php>

Jeff Everett – Status of Disturbance Threshold Progress Outside OR

All 11 states within the range have existing management plans/strategies addressing sage grouse conservation. Many of the state processes date back to 2000 following the WAFWA memo and the [Connelly guidelines](#). Others initiated their efforts after the 2006 [WAFWA guidelines](#). The Knick model was released in February 2013 and is being utilized to update data inputs and approaches. Many states are in the process of updating their plans, we will continue following those efforts to learn from their progress and sync approaches as appropriate.

Eric Rickerson – State Technical Team August Meeting

The Technical Team has been meeting for over 10 years and most recently met August 28th, 2013. The Team continues to meet annually when not overseeing an intensive planning process. It is not directly affiliated with SageCon but has duplication in participation with AOC, NRCS and ODFW representation. Theresa Burcsu attended the meeting and confirmed that there is an opportunity to share products from the state process with this group for review.

Research updates of note:

- Nevada has developed a study on feral horse and burros on mountain refuge and the impacts to sage grouse.
- Dr. John Crawford has taken on a large study of after livestock grazing to understand response and other impacts on sagebrush steppe. Four study areas are being monitored by two Ph.D. students.
- Research is advancing on naturally occurring soil bacteria that appears promising in stunting growth of cheat grass root growth. May be option for restoration activities. Year or two out for full analysis.
- Fire impacts data update from ODFW study, will be shared at the Fire and Invasives Work Group meeting.

Ken Mayer – AFWA Sage Grouse Executive Oversight Committee

EOC meets typically four times per year, this year there was a meeting at the AFWA in September and also at WAFWA and the North American Wildlife gathering. Ken shared an organizational chart for WAFWA and related processes to show the national level of coordination and communication channels involved in sage grouse planning efforts to date.

Bill White – NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative

The Sage Grouse Initiative is a proactive, primarily private lands approach, to conservation that works with local partners including ranchers and other community members and organizations to secure sage grouse population strongholds and model where to invest resources for the most benefit to the species. A recent study, [Saving Sage Grouse from the Trees](#) has been released to detail the outcomes of juniper removal within a 6 million acre study area in Oregon showing that as little as four percent tree cover can deter sage grouse population activity. Juniper treatment has been the first priority for SGI with over 146,000 acres treated from 2010-2013. NRCS has developed a protocol for lek sites in treated areas to measure effectiveness for FWS documentation. NRCS is committed to expanding strategic investments to reduce other threats in the future.

High Country News Article: [Oregon study confirms that cutting conifers can help sage grouse](#)

For more information and or to sign up for the SGI newsletter, visit the website here:
<http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/>

Further, congratulations are in order for team members from SageCon that recently received an NRCS CIG, please see announcement below.

The Nature Conservancy (OR, NV, ID) \$324,851

Sage-Grouse Conservation: Linking Practices to Habitat Metrics

Land managers in the Interior West's sagebrush landscape have made significant efforts to improve habitat for the greater sage-grouse and all sagebrush-obligate species. However, there is a serious lack of information about the best conservation practices to implement in sagebrush ecosystems, due to their complexity in terms of factors such as soil, microclimate, invasive species, fire regimes, current habitat state, historical impacts, and more. All of these factors play a role in determining which conservation practices should be implemented at each site. Yet land managers often have no tools to determine which actions at each site would provide the most benefits to sagebrush habitat at the least cost. This project will develop new tools for land managers to more effectively and efficiently conserve and restore sagebrush habitat in the Interior West by merging and refining existing models linked to important ecological sites; reviewing and summarizing existing literature about the effectiveness and benefits of key conservation practices for sage-steppe ecosystems and sage-grouse habitat; and incorporating findings into existing models. The literature review will also identify knowledge gaps to be addressed in future work.

The grant will support a partnership between TNC, ARS, OSU, and INR to work together to create a new "Manager's Guide to Sage-Steppe Practices" and workshops to gather information and expertise.

Attendance

Conveners:

Bill White, NRCS

Brett Brownscombe, Governor's Natural Resource Office

Rolando Mendez, BLM

Andrew Shields, Roaring Springs Ranch

Bill Zelenka, Crook County

Bob Hooton, ODFW

Brian Pew, ODF

Bruce Taylor, Defenders of Wildlife

Cathy Macdonald, TNC

Chad Karges, USFWS

Christian Jilek, ODOT

Craig Goodell, BLM

Dan Morse, ONDA

Dan Hilburn, ODA

Dawn Davis, ODFW

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Jamie Damon, Governor's Office
Jeff Everett, USFWS
Jeff Fedrizzi, BLM
Jimmy Kagan, INR
John O'Keefe, OCA
Jon Jinings, DLCD
Ken Mayer, WAFWA
Lanny Quackenbush, DSL
Lynn Sharp, Renewable Northwest Project
Mike Freese, OFB
Peter Gutowsky, Deschutes County
Roy Elicker, ODFW
Shauna Ginger, USFWS
Stacey Baczkowski, Idaho Power
Toby White, BLM
Varner Seaman, Renewable Northwest Project

By Phone

Angela Sitz, USFWS
Jodie Delevan, USFWS
Steve Grasty, Harney County
Timothy Barnes, BLM
Todd Cornett, ODOE
William Renwick, Harney SWCD
Zola Ryan, NRCS

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