



OREGON'S **SAGE-GROUSE** CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP (SAGECON)

What is the Purpose?

In 2010, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined the Greater Sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, listing was precluded at that time because of other higher priority species making sage-grouse a “candidate” for future protection. A final listing determination will be made by September 2015.

Oregon is one of eleven western states participating in a rangewide State/Federal Sage-grouse Task Force. The Task Force is working to identify and address high priority conservation actions and integrate ongoing efforts to ensure protection of key habitat leading to sustainable sage-grouse populations and strong western economies. As part of this effort, states and federal agencies are developing conservation plans and implementing measures to contribute to rangewide conservation of the species and potentially preclude the need for federal listing under the ESA.

In 2012, the Oregon Sage-grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon) was convened at the request of the Governor's office to formulate an “all lands, all threats” approach to sage-grouse conservation. This effort was to address both USFWS' sage-grouse listing decision in 2015 and support long-term community sustainability in central and eastern Oregon. To accomplish this, the SageCon Partnership is working to:

- Provide a forum to coordinate federal, state, local and private efforts to conserve sage-grouse in Oregon,
- Inventory existing strategies and approaches and, where appropriate, identify additional means to address the full range of threats to sage-grouse viability and recovery in Eastern Oregon and
- Coordinate with USFWS requirements and schedule for the sage-grouse ESA listing decision, in order to provide timely and relevant input on Oregon's sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat conservation strategies and approaches.



How does SageCon relate the ODFW Oregon Sage-grouse Plan?

In 2011, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) completed a significant planning effort with diverse stakeholder involvement and support that resulted in the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (Hagen 2011; hereafter, Oregon Sage-grouse Plan). This established the biological foundation for long-term conservation of sage-grouse in the state based on the best available science. The primary objective of this plan is to maintain large expanses of intact sagebrush habitat for the benefit of sage-grouse and other sagebrush associated species. The plan also provides guidelines and recommended conservation actions for public land management agencies and other land managers to aid in sage-grouse conservation.

The SageCon Partnership builds on the Oregon Sage-grouse Plan by engaging additional stakeholders to coordinate and accelerate implementation of strategic conservation actions and strengthen regulatory mechanisms across land ownerships to alleviate threats to sage-grouse while ensuring sustainable rural economies. SageCon compliments existing sage-grouse conservation efforts, such as the ODFW-led Local Implementation Teams and State Sage-grouse Conservation Planning Team, by providing a broader forum for coordination and improved integration of strategies across agencies and jurisdictions. SageCon also utilizes new rangewide information, including the USFWS' Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Report (USFWS 2013), to ensure all necessary actions are being taken to reduce threats in the state and better inform the 2015 listing decision.

Expected Products and Outcomes

The SageCon Partnership's overarching goal is demonstrate how Oregon is implementing the policies and conservation actions needed to adequately reduce threats to sage-grouse and Oregon's sagebrush ecosystem.

The primary product of the SageCon Partnership will be an amendment to the Oregon Sage-grouse Plan for Oregon to: (i) update the status of the species and its habitat conditions, (ii) identify existing conservation measures that have been implemented in Oregon since 2010 to reduce threats to the species, and (iii) formulate new regulatory and voluntary programs the state of Oregon, local governments, and public and private land managers can utilize to establish more predictability and certainty in the permitting process and ensure that mitigation dollars are invested in the highest value sage grouse habitat.

This product will frame new state and local policies to reduce threats; commit state and local resources to sage-grouse recovery; form partnership agreements to streamline implementation; and help to design assessment, predictive modeling, and adaptive management data and tools needed to target habitat protection, restoration, and maintenance investments to get the highest return on investment. Ultimately, the desired outcome is to achieve stable-to-increasing sage-grouse populations and sustainable rural economies.

Organization and Working Group Tasks

SageCon is composed of a core planning and advisory group (Core Team), three working groups, a supporting Technical Team, and ad hoc working groups. The **Core Team** provides direction in terms of key needs for policy, meeting organization and agendas, work planning, and funding. The **Habitat Fragmentation Work Group** focuses on anthropogenic disturbances contributing to habitat fragmentation. The **Fire and Invasive Work Group** focuses on natural disturbances contributing to habitat degradation and fragmentation. The **Mitigation Work Group** focuses on data and information needed to formulate a feasible mitigation policy and plan. The **Technical Team** provides direction in terms of the data and analyses needed to support the amendment. Additional ad hoc work groups form and dissolve as necessary to meet specific work objectives.



SageCon Work Plan

Tasks	Resources	Time Frame
Initiate SageCon Partnership	GNRO, NRCS, BLM	7/1/2012
Organize work structure and secure funding	All partners	7/2012 – 8/2013
Current status and trends of sage-grouse since 2010	ODFW	5/2013 – 11/2013
Baseline analyses of habitat conditions	INR, TNC, NRCS, ODFW, DoW, BLM, USFWS	7/2013 – 11/2013
Trend analyses of threats to sage-grouse ¹	DLCD, ODOT, ODOE, ODFW, INR, PSU, DoGAMI, SE Oregon Counties, OPRD, AOC, TNC	2/2013 – 2/2014
Inventory of ongoing and past conservation measures ²	ODFW, INR, TNC	8/2013 – 11/2013
Projections of conservation measures and future benefits	ODFW, TNC	11/2013 – 2/2014
Conservation strategy document development	GRNO, TNC, INR	11/2013 – 2/2014
Action plan development ³	ODFW, GNRO	8/2013 – 2/2014
Mitigation plan development	GRNO, TNC, DoW	9/2013 – 2/2014
Final Plan	To Be Determined	2/2014 – 6/2014

1 Includes: Land use and threats assessment compiled by counties; ODOT transportation assessment; ODOE's energy development feasibility analysis and inventory of existing infrastructure; ODOT, BLM, DLCD assessments of traffic and OHV use; TNC's fences assessment and needs report for expanding statewide; an assessment of grazing distribution and impacts; ODF/ODFW/TNC assessment of fire history, severity, and policies; assessment of fire recovery; assessment of current, past, and future distribution of invasive weeds and juniper encroachment (incl. simulation modeling; INR/PSU/ARS, SGI).

2 Includes work that ODFW is compiling for the draft action plan.

3 Describes the actions provided by the inventory of the ongoing and past conservation measures as well as planned conservation measures and research needs.

Acronyms: AOC - Association of OR Counties; BLM - Bureau of Land Management; DLCD - Department of Land Conservation and Development; DoGAMI - OR Department of Geology and Mineral Industries; DoW - Defenders of Wildlife; GNRO - Governor's Natural Resource Office ; INR - Institute for Natural Resources; NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service; ODF - OR Department of Forestry; ODFW - OR Department of Fish and Wildlife; ODOE -OR Department of Energy; ODOT- OR Department of Transportation; OPRD - OR Parks and Recreation Department; PSU - Portland State University; TNC - The Nature Conservancy; USFWS - US Fish and Wildlife Service

References

Hagen, C. A. 2011. Greater sage-grouse conservation assessment and strategy for Oregon: A plan to maintain and enhance populations and habitat. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Salem, OR.

US Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Conservation Objectives: Final Report. US Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, CO. February 2013.