

## Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan

# Ranching and Livestock Grazing

### ***Agriculture has an important role***

Well-managed livestock grazing and other traditional ranching practices are not considered major threats to sage-grouse in Oregon. Agriculture, the dominant land use in sage-grouse habitat, has an important role in the state's sage-grouse conservation strategy.

Most sage-grouse habitat has a long history of grazing, and most livestock operations involve grazing on both public and private lands. Although sage-grouse use sagebrush habitats throughout the year, the birds depend on seasonal wetlands in late spring and summer to rear their young. Most of the wet meadows and flood irrigated hay fields are in private ownership.

Ranchers and public lands managers are the primary stewards of sage-grouse habitat and are important partners in implementing conservation efforts. Private landowners have a lot to lose if sage-grouse declines lead to new regulatory constraints.

Private landowners and public land managers must take a leading role in combatting the two biggest threats to sage-grouse in Oregon – fires and invasive species. Most of that work is expected to also improve grazing opportunities. As the cattleman say: what's good for the bird is good for the herd.

### ***Oregon's approach - CCAAs***

Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), ranchers and other stakeholders have developed umbrella conservation agreements. The agreements protect participating landowners from more restrictions under the Endangered Species Act if they commit to managing livestock grazing and other land uses in ways that help conserve sage-grouse and their habitat.



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## ***Local, State, and Federal partners working together***

Formally known as “candidate conservation agreements with assurances” (CCAAs) this approach was pioneered in Harney County where 50 land owners have already signed up more than 330,000 acres. With many landowners in Crook, Deschutes, Malheur, Lake and Baker counties developing agreements following Harney County’s lead. The Oregon Department of State Lands is developing a CCAA to cover state-owned rangelands, and the Bureau of Land Management and the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association have participated in a similar agreement with the USFWS covering grazing on federal lands.

## ***Adaptive management builds on local knowledge***

Instead of dictating specific grazing regimes, CCAAs require adaptive management based on regular monitoring and evaluation to maintain or improve conditions for sage-grouse. Site-specific plans identify conservation measures to address threats to sage-grouse and include a requirement to maintain contiguous blocks of habitat and avoid further fragmentation. In return, the USFWS gives landowners legal assurances that current ranching practices can continue even if sage-grouse are listed under the ESA.

The management strategies embodied in the CCAAs are grounded in research done by scientists at the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center in Burns. These ecological models provide a framework for understanding what factors contribute to ecological conditions and trends on any particular site and how lands can be managed to improve habitat values for sage-grouse.

CCAAs will protect participating landowners from more restrictions under the Endangered Species Act if they commit to managing livestock grazing and other land uses in ways that help conserve sage-grouse.

## **For more information:**

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