



**SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION
(SAGECON) PARTNERSHIP**

**June 29, 2012
9:00-11:00 a.m.**

DRAFT Meeting Summary

MEETING OVERVIEW

Meeting Objectives

- Share updates on the current status of sage grouse conservation efforts; and
- Organize stakeholder involvement in the development of a *unified all-threats, all-lands approach* to sage grouse conservation in Eastern Oregon.
 - *The proposed Oregon Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership (the “SageCon Partnership”) will coordinate federal, state and local efforts (current and projected) to address the multiple threats to sage grouse across the Eastern Oregon sagebrush landscape in anticipation of the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) review of the bird’s “Warranted But Precluded” status under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) (listing decision and critical habitat proposal due in September 2014).*

Overarching Process Goal

- By January 2014, the SageCon Partnership will present USFWS with a *unified all-lands and all-threats approach to sage grouse conservation* in Oregon.

Conveners

- Brett Brownscombe, Governor’s Natural Resources Office;
- Mike Haske, Deputy State Director, Bureau of Land Management; and
- Ron Alvarado, State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Action Items & Next Steps

- Oregon Solutions Staff to work with Partnership members to draft organizational commitments for a Declaration of Cooperation. Include discussion of a communications plan. Progress to be shared at September Partnership meeting
- Governor’s Office to outline Table of Contents for an “all threats, all lands” plan to guide working group membership, chartering, process and products.

Emerging Timeline

Reference Draft Timeline: Attachment B

- Summer 2012
 - Ten Year Energy Plan development continues.
 - NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant Decisions (July)
 - COT Report (July)

- NRCS Oregon Sage Grouse Initiative forum (late July)
- ODFW Local Implementation Team meetings (late July)
- State Technical Team Annual Meeting (August)
- BLM/Oregon Cattlemen's Association Candidate Conservation Agreement with USFWS (August)
- March 2013
 - BLM Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Resource Management Plan revisions
- January 2014
 - BLM – State Consistency Review of proposed Resource Management Plan Revisions

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

I. Welcome, Introductions & Agenda Review

NRCS is joining as a co-convener with BLM and the Governor's Office for future SageCon meetings.

II. Current Status: Sage Grouse Conservation Efforts

ODFW Conservation Strategy and LITs

Reference handout: "ODFW activities since last REECon (SageCon) Meeting"

- Mining & Geothermal activities: Coordinating to tour sites including Aurora Uranium, Calico Gold and Glass Buttes geothermal. Recommendations: Celatom Diatomite.
- Wind activities focused on the Echanis project.
- Transmission activities include coordinating with USFWS to develop Sage-grouse mitigation document for Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) transmission line and creation of a Working Group.
- Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) meetings with Harney County, Silvies Valley Ranch.
- Local Implementation Teams are scheduled to meet in July as follows:
 - Vale/Jordan Valley 7/24
 - Lakeview 7/25
 - Prineville 7/26
 - Baker 7/30
 - Hines 8/2

BLM National Sage Grouse Planning Strategy

Reference Draft Timeline: Attachment B

- The National Sage Grouse Planning Strategy continues to guide the agency's activities. Specifically Section V., Sage Grouse Conservation Guidelines (pages 98-121) were developed to "assist resource managers in achieving population and habitat objectives for sage grouse."
<http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse.html>
- The BLM state office is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to revise or amend the Resource Management Plans (RMPs):
 - Andrews Burns District
 - Steens Burns District

- Three Rivers Burns District
- Brothers LaPine (East) Prineville District
- Two Rivers Prineville District
- Upper Deschutes Prineville District
- The RMP revision process is described in the fact sheet:
http://www.blm.gov/or/news/files/sage-grouse_fact_sheet.pdf
 - The Draft EIS is set to be completed by March 2013.
 - Final EIS and Proposed RMP Amendment: 2014
- State Office Planning Chief position is vacant at present, and a recruitment is underway.

NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI)

Reference handout: Powerpoint presentation

- NRCS became more deeply involved in sage grouse conservation in 2010 as concerns were growing about the status of sage grouse as an icon for sagebrush habitat and the potential impact of a listing decision on the ranching community. Information about the SGI is on-line at
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/farmbill/initiatives/?&cid=steldevb1027671>
- In Oregon, NRCS has been able to provide proactive technical support for private landowners through farm bill funds with a focus on phase I and phase II juniper for treatments and working in partnership with ODFW.
- “The Oregon Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Initiative, developed collaboratively with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, focuses on making measurable and significant progress toward treating a specific threat to sage-grouse on private lands through strategic use of conservation programs. This approach is based on the principle that focusing resources on a specific problem in the most critical locations on the landscape results in the highest likelihood of affecting sage-grouse populations in the shortest amount of time.” See: <http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/sage-grouse/>.
- Additional details can be found in the Oregon Implementation Plan. See the Executive Summary at: http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/sage-grouse/fy12/NRCS-ODFW_Sage-Grouse_Initiative_Executive_Summary.pdf
- NRCS will be meeting later in July to discuss next steps for the Oregon SGI work including upcoming opportunities in the farm bill, other treatment plans and range management activities. BLM is looking to identify more opportunities to leverage treatments on public lands with those on private lands.

Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCA), CCA with Assurances (CCAA)

- USFWS is working with BLM and the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association (OCA) to finalize a CCA with an agreement anticipated in August 2012.
- ODFW has been consulting with USFWS and Harney County to develop CCAA. For more information on the Harney County Sage-Grouse CCAA Steering Committee see: <http://beefcattle.ans.oregonstate.edu/documents/HCSage-GrouseCCAA.pdf>
- Part of developing the CCA and CCAA’s is reviewing threats from grazing to sage grouse habitat. Findings from a twelve-month study show grazing implemented through best management practices can be neutral, in some cases positive. Intent is to work with landowners to develop site plans next year with core areas as first priority (Animal

Management Plan already in place). BLM working with OCA to develop education and roll out. BLM appreciates OCA proactive approach.

- Funding: may be possible to link up CCA lands with CCAA's on private land and leverage with NRCS-funded projects. BLM Burns District for resource management and fuels treatments includes about \$900K annually for juniper treatments. The budget has been as high as \$2M in prior years. The Lakeview District has a similar budget, with Prineville about ½ the amount and the Vale District an even smaller budget. ODFW is in conversations directly and through the Western Governors Association to prioritize funding for sage-grouse related initiatives.
- Potential issues with “lining up” CCAs and CCAAs based on discussions in Harney County. BLM and ODFW are working with USFWS to address the threats as ranked in the “warranted but precluded” findings based on the specifics of geographic areas (for example, Harney County and juniper encroachment) and what's in control of the landowner.

III. SageCon - An Oregon Solution: Proposed Organizational Structure and Process

Overview

The Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon) is not only focused on the outcome of USFWS's listing decision, it is also an opportunity to strengthen the communities in Eastern Oregon by supporting the traditional ranching and farming communities as well as finding ways for other industries such as mining and renewable energy to emerge. It will be a challenge to change the direction of USFWS's “warranted but precluded” listing status determination for sage grouse. The Partnership will work together to pull together an “all lands, all threats” approach to sage grouse conservation to meet that challenge while providing a model for a sustainable future for central and eastern Oregon communities.

Reference Draft Process Diagram: Attachment A

Initial Feedback/Discussions

- There was appreciation expressed for the recognition that the Partnership creates an opportunity to help Central and Eastern Oregon address related community needs and issues.
- Habitat fragmentation is identified as a primary threat to sage grouse and includes activities such as energy development (renewable, pipelines, transmission), roads, mining and solid waste facilities.
- Desire to sync with ten year energy plan to address opportunities and challenges of energy generation and transmission projects, including coordination between EFSC and county level review processes for new projects.
- The ODFW Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy advises no impact on core areas. The reality is there will likely be some projects that have impacts Under what conditions and how much? There needs to be more policy discussion around this issue.
- The Counties review and implementation of State Land Use Goal 5 in relation to development and protecting sage grouse will be important. Presently DLCD has \$50K available for Counties to work on this issue.
 - <http://www.oregon.gov/LCD/docs/goals/goal5.pdf>
- The Sage Con Partnership discussion is an opportunity to inform the BLM EIS alternatives.

- Focus first on sage grouse and keep in mind future conservation needs of other species (for example, mule deer and pygmy rabbit).
- The Partnership will need a high level of communications, a strong web presence and consistent material distribution to support participants who can't attend every meeting in person.
- Stay connected to work being done regionally and nationally. Suggested to review AWWT's work for instance.
- Deliverable to USFWS: need to develop a table of contents to guide the effort. (State, local regulations; voluntary actions – CCAs, CCAAs, mitigation, BLM RMPs, etc.). Timeline: January 2014.
- Need to identify resources for all partners to engage in the Partnership (meetings every 6-8 weeks) and particularly the work groups that may meet as often as twice/month.
- The Nature Conservancy has an application to NRCS for a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) (Total amount approximately \$800K).
 - The NRCS CIG grant application targets three key outcomes:
 1. Developing landscape tools to help guide conservation investments to the most important places;
 2. Quantifying the benefits from conservation practices; and
 3. Developing incentive and mitigation programs and policies to advance conservation for sage grouse that will work for agricultural producers.
 - These landscape tools and information could create a framework for additional work to look at how to best place other uses on the land to provide benefits to sustainable communities. Because of the nature of the CIG funding program, broader land use planning is not specifically addressed in the proposal. The Nature Conservancy is committed to helping to address these broader interests through other sources of funding.
 - If funded the project would support capacity to engage stakeholders and experts in key areas of conservation, ranching, energy production and transmission development to create products that the State and BLM could use or build from to develop a course of action to recover sage grouse consistent with the USFWS direction. The tools could both help direct actions to the most important places as well as predict benefits from those actions. Predicting benefits will enable quantifying what people in Oregon are doing and proposing to do to benefit sage grouse.
 - NRCS plans to notify applicants regarding the grant requests in late July. If successful, The Nature Conservancy desires to work with NRCS and others from the Partnership to refine the process and grant products in August. NRCS would enter into a grant agreement with The Nature Conservancy in September to begin work.

Proposed SageCon Process Structure

In terms of structure, the following initial working groups were identified with interest in organizational membership as follows:

Habitat Fragmentation Work Group

- To address habitat fragmentation (what is put on the ground, development) related to energy generation and transmission, mining and other types of *development* such as roads, other infrastructure and rural land development.

- Deliverable: Document and propose permitting, land use regulatory mechanisms and voluntary actions for sage grouse conservation
- Potential Members:
 - Association of Oregon Counties
 - ODFW
 - Energy Developers
 - Department of Land Conservation and Development
 - Oregon Department of Energy
 - Department of Geology & Mineral Industries
 - Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
 - Oregon Cattlemen's Association
 - Northwest Energy Coalition
 - Tribes
 - Renewable Northwest Project
 - Oregon Department of Transportation
 - Public power, rural co-ops

Fire and Invasives Work Group

- To address threats from fire and invasives as well as consider grazing and agricultural activities. These threats relate to *land management* practices and what is done on the ground.
- Deliverable: Document and propose programmatic regulatory mechanisms for sage grouse conservation
- Potential Members:
 - Association of Oregon Counties
 - NRCS
 - ODFW
 - BLM
 - Oregon Department of Forestry (Rangeland Fire Districts)
 - Oregon Cattlemen's Association
 - The Nature Conservancy
 - Oregon Department of Agriculture (Invasives Council)
 - Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
 - Tribes

Mitigation Work Group

- To address potential opportunities to protect sage grouse that offset land development and management activities
- Proposed Members:
 - Association of Oregon Counties
 - BLM
 - NRCS
 - ODFW
 - Defenders of Wildlife
 - The Nature Conservancy
 - Renewable Northwest Project
 - Willamette Partnership
 - Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
 - Oregon Cattlemen's Association

- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- NWECA
- Department of Geology and Mineral Industries
- Tribes

Technical Work Group

- To provide technical support for the working groups.
- Proposed Members:
 - TBD

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June 29th SageCon Meeting Participants

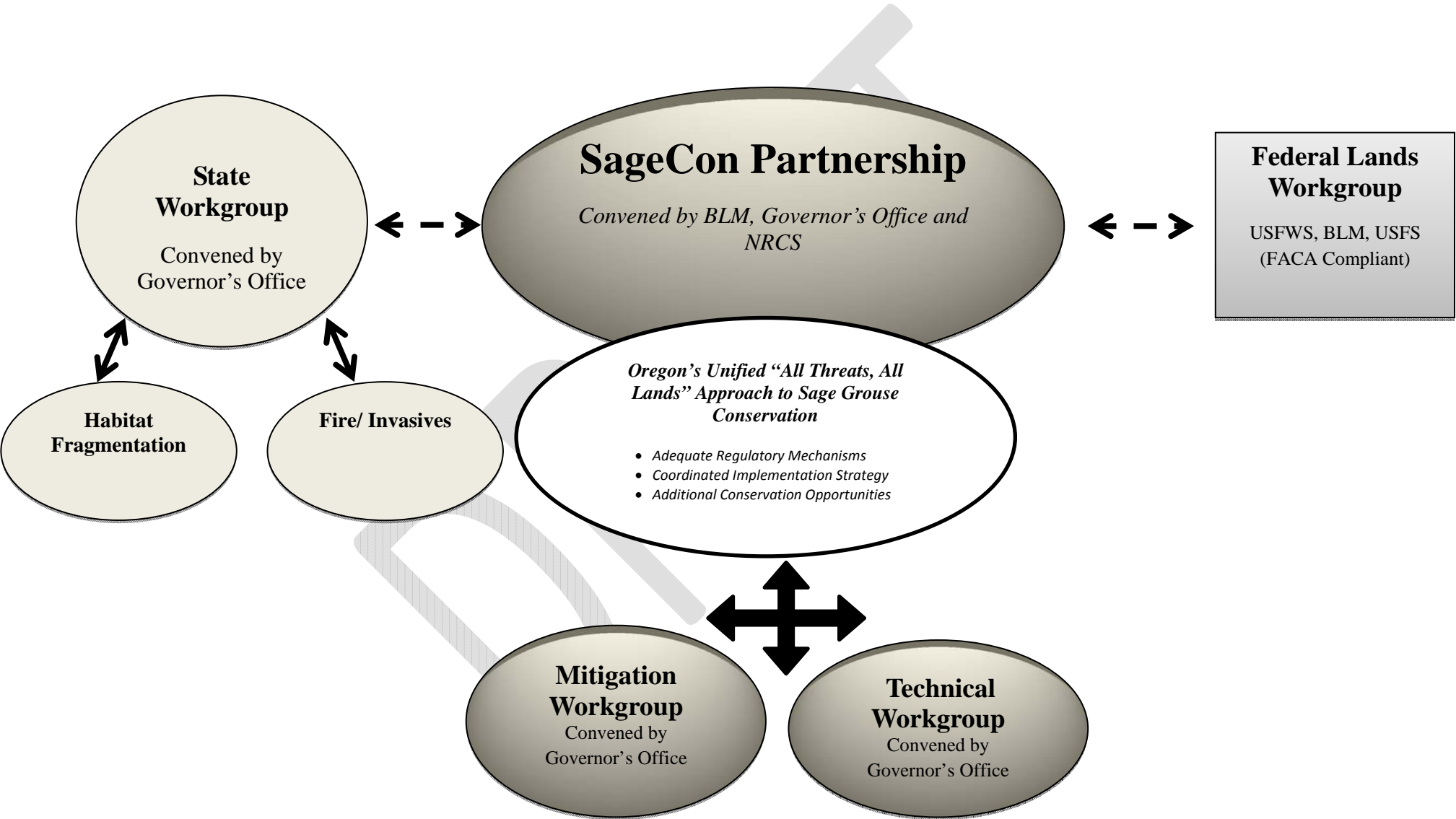
Conveners: Richard Whitman and Brett Brownscombe, Governor's Natural Resources Office
Mike Haske, BLM Deputy State Director, Resource Planning, Use & Protection
Bill White, NRCS Partnership Liaison

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Attendee</u>
Governor's Office	Richard Whitman
Governor's Office	Brett Browncombe
Governor's Office	Greg Wolf
Governor's Office	Margi Hoffman
BLM	Mike Haske
BLM	Glenn Fredrick
NRCS	Bill White
OACD	Jerry Nicolescu
ODFW	Roy Elicker
ODFW	Bob Hooton
ODFW	Ron Anglin
OWEB	Meta Loftsgaarden
DLCD	Jon Jinings
Harney County	Judge Steve Grasty
Association of Oregon Counties	Emily Ackland
TNC	Cathy Macdonald
TNC	Garth Fuller
Defenders of Wildlife	Bruce Taylor
Defenders of Wildlife	Sara O'Brien
Sen. Merkley's Office	Daniel Whelan
Renewable Northwest Project	John Audley
Vestas	Dorthe Nielsen
T Roosevelt Conservation Part.	Mia Shepherd
Teratech	Lynn Sharp
Willamette Partnership (WRI)	Todd Gartner
DOGAMI	Isaac Sanders
Mike Crouse	PSU

<u>By Phone:</u>	
ODOE	Matt Krumenauer
ONDA	Brent Fenty
USFS	Dede Steele
Harney CCAA Steering Committee	Tom Sharpe
BLM-Burns District	Jeff Rose
USFWS-Bend	Nancy Gilbert
Oregon Hunters Assoc.	Al Elkins
Ag Research Station, Burns	Tony Svejcar

NPCC Staff: Pete Dalke, Turner Odell, Julia Babcock

Attachment A-Draft Process Diagram



Attachment B –Draft Timeline

