

Oregon's Sage-grouse Action Plan

Fire and invasives

Juniper expansion into sagebrush steppe on Horse Ridge (Deschutes County)

Fire and invasive species: The biggest threats in Oregon

The biggest threats to sage-grouse in Oregon are fire and invasive species.

Large wildfires in recent years have eliminated vast expanses of the sagebrush that sage-grouse depend on for their survival. Invasion of sagebrush habitat by non-native annual grasses and native juniper has made large areas unsuitable for sage-grouse.

Exotic annual grasses like cheatgrass and other weeds fuel more frequent sagebrush fires and crowd out native species. Juniper's expansion into sagebrush steppe, in part a result of decades of fire suppression, results in abandonment by sage-grouse, which typically avoid areas with trees.

With more frequent and larger fires, and juniper continuing its dramatic expansion, sage-grouse today are dependent on a dwindling base of habitat.

Fire and invasives, driven largely by natural forces operating on a landscape scale, are not particularly susceptible to traditional government regulatory strategies. Instead, scientists say, Oregon will need to invest in strategic actions designed to protect and restore the health of the sagebrush ecosystem.

Early action is key

State and federal investments in on-the-ground work to address fire and invasive species (non-native annual grasses and juniper) will be targeted strategically to priority areas and actions that are most likely to generate sustainable benefits for sage-grouse.



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Cheatgrass-dominated sagebrush steppe in Malheur County

Managing for resilient landscapes

Management strategies will be tailored to fit site-specific needs based on the land's inherent ecological resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasive species. Under this science-based framework, resilience refers to a sagebrush ecosystem's ability to bounce back from disturbances like fire and grazing; resistance is the system's natural ability to keep out invading plant species.

Addressing Invasive species

Building on past strategic efforts for juniper removal near leks, habitat restoration efforts will target sagebrush habitats in areas that are more resistant and resilient. These are typically cooler and wetter sites, often at higher elevation or on north-facing slopes. Juniper removal and replanting of native bunchgrasses have much higher success rates on these sites.

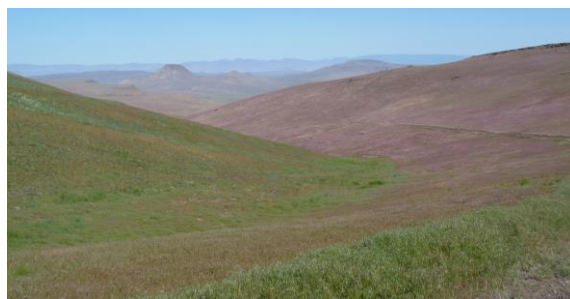
Addressing Fire

Measures to limit the spread of fires and invasive weeds will focus on areas with lower natural resistance and resilience. Restoring sagebrush habitat at lower elevations in hotter, drier settings is extremely difficult, reinforcing the importance of protecting intact habitats in these areas. Increased support for local Rangeland Fire Protection Districts, strategically placed fuel breaks, and improved post-fire re-seeding practices will help limit large fires and reduce the risk of invasion by non-native annual grasses.

Early investments are critical

State and federal agencies are targeting funding to the highest priorities across public and private ownerships. Oregon brought together federal, state and local agencies, landowners and other stakeholders to develop and implement a sage-grouse conservation approach that aligns funding from multiple sources. A joint state-federal mitigation program will steer funding from development fees toward projects that have potential to generate larger-scale habitat benefits.

The Governor's proposed 2015-17 budget proposes a significant investment of resources to address fire and invasives, including strengthening local Rangeland Fire Protection Districts. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's new Focused Investments Program will consider a six-year, multi-million dollar commitment to local sage-grouse conservation efforts. In addition, stakeholders are advancing proposals in the 2015 legislature to create new funding sources, including taxes on wild bird seed and mineral supplements used by livestock producers.



Post-fire cheatgrass in Trout Creek Mountains (Harney County)



Juniper cutting near Drewsey (Harney County)



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