

Oregon's Sage-grouse Action Plan

Land use and development

Fish Creek on Steens Mountain (Harney County)

Oregon's land use system has done a good job

With a few exceptions, urban, residential and industrial development are not a major threat to sage-grouse in Oregon. Oregon's land use system has done a good job of containing development and maintaining the wide-open spaces that support sage-grouse in eastern Oregon.

Development is one of the few threats to sage-grouse the state can directly control. To avoid new restrictions under the federal Endangered Species Act, Oregon needs to show it can effectively manage development to protect sage-grouse.

Focus on protecting priority areas for conservation (PACs)

Habitat protection measures will focus most heavily on "priority areas for conservation" (PACs). These are core areas that encompass about one-third of Oregon's sage-grouse habitat but support more than 90 percent of the bird's populations.

Strengthening state land use rules will limit development in PACs and require compensation for impacts on any sage-grouse habitat through conservation investments. These are designed to provide a net conservation benefit for sage-grouse through a combined federal-state mitigation program.

These land use rules will provide stronger protection for sage-grouse habitat with greater flexibility to accommodate needed development than is available under current policies. The rules will address the potential for a small set of large scale development activity that could occur in sage-grouse habitat.

Avoid, Minimize, Mitigate

To be permitted, projects must demonstrate that impacts cannot be avoided; seek to minimize the impacts; and compensate for any remaining unavoidable impacts through mitigation (e.g., habitat restoration or enhancement) that provides a net conservation benefit for sage-grouse.

Oregon will manage its land use system to ensure development in PACs does not exceed three percent, with increments of allowable development metered over time based on trends in sage-grouse population and habitat availability. Sage-grouse are not typically found in areas where levels of human development exceed three percent. Current levels of development in core habitat are less than 1.5 percent in most of Oregon's 20 PACs.



Strengthening Oregon's land use rules will provide more protection for sage-grouse habitat with greater flexibility to accommodate needed development in rural communities.

Counties and the state working together

Sage-grouse counties (primarily Harney, Malheur, Lake, Crook, Deschutes, Grant and Baker) are working closely with the DLCD and ODFW to develop rules to guide a small set of potential future development.

Local governments can retain responsibility for permitting projects in sage-grouse habitat under local land use ordinances if their processes meet standards in the Land Conservation and Development Commission's new rule. Alternatively, local governments may decide to let the state take on permitting responsibilities.

Implications for future development

Development pressure is generally low across most of southeast Oregon's remaining sage-grouse habitat. Existing laws strictly limit most forms of development outside urban growth boundaries. Most sage-grouse habitat is under little pressure for development because PACs in particular tend to be found in relatively remote areas with few roads or residences and little surface water.

Energy development may face conflicts with sage-grouse conservation needs in a few areas, but the state's analysis suggests that major new renewable energy projects are unlikely in the next 10 years.

Oregon's high desert offers abundant opportunities for development of solar – and to a lesser extent, wind – facilities outside of sage-grouse habitat. Potential for development of oil and gas and new mining operations is low in most areas. Major new electrical transmission lines may face challenges in avoiding sage-grouse habitat (e.g., the proposed Boardman to Hemingway project's route across Baker and Malheur counties) but the state's plan is designed to accommodate essential infrastructure projects.

Rural residential and agricultural development are expected to have negligible impacts on sage-grouse habitat in the near future and effects of the new regulations on these uses will be minimal.



Elkhorn Wind Farm (Baker County)

Development pressure is generally low across most of southeast Oregon's remaining sage-grouse habitat.



Roaring Springs Ranch (Harney County)



For more information:

Jamie Damon, SageCon Project Manager: jamie.damon@oregonstate.edu

Brett Brownscombe, ODFW Interim Deputy Director: brett.e.brownscombe@state.or.us
<http://oregonexplorer.info/SageCon>