



Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership January-March News and Updates (Sent April 9, 2020)



SageCon Invasives Initiative

Invasive annual grasses remain one of the primary threats to the sagebrush ecosystem, sage-grouse habitat, and livestock producers. The SageCon Partnership recently started the **SageCon Invasives Initiative** to strategically address the threat of invasive annual grasses throughout rangelands in southeastern Oregon. The effort is informed by interviews conducted with practitioners in eastern Oregon. [Summary of interview findings](#). The invasives initiative working group developed a [concept paper](#) outlining the strategic approach to filling gaps or addressing needs, and three work teams will begin to tackle the highest priority items: funding, grazing flexibility, and development of a geographic prioritization strategy. In addition, so as not to duplicate but rather try to amplify good work others are already doing, the group will also track and coordinate among important ongoing efforts, including seed technology research, local production of native plant materials, increasing local coordination capacity, and connecting to regional efforts. [Contact Megan Creutzburg](#) to get involved.

Federal Updates

WAFWA

The Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) released “Western Invasive Plant Management: A [Strategic Action Plan](#) for the Sagebrush Biome” on February 1, 2020 as a culmination of four years of collaboration among state and federal agencies investigating the threats

of invasive plants to the sagebrush biome.

BLM Updates

On April 1, BLM released its Record of Decision for its Feb. 14, 2020 issuance of a final [programmatic environmental impact statement \(EIS\)](#) to evaluate a system of fuel breaks in the Great Basin region. “The project area, covering nearly 224 million acres. The fuel breaks would be placed along a subset of available linear features, such as roads and rights-of-way on BLM-administered lands within sagebrush communities; these potential treatment areas cover approximately 38 million acres within the project area boundary. The BLM is developing two landscape scale Programmatic EISs to analyze potential effects of: 1) constructing fuel breaks, and 2) reducing fuel loading and restoring rangeland productivity within the Great Basin Region (Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, northern California, Utah, and eastern Washington) in order to protect and conserve the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem from loss as a result of wildfires.” **BLM has extended the comment period until May 21, 2020.** [BLM's ePlanning documents](#) remain available online, with information on methods for submitting comments.

BLM is also preparing a separate Tri-State EIS for fuel breaks (led by BLM OR and ID), that intends to advance implementation of strategic fuel breaks at the project level.

NRCS

NRCS is leading [Cheatgrass Challenge](#) initiatives in Idaho and Wyoming teaming up with partners to address these invasive annuals including agricultural producers, federal and state agencies, educational institutions and non-profit organizations are all involved in tackling the challenge.

In Oregon, NRCS is participating in the SageCon Invasives Initiative along with its financial and technical assistance programs for landowners. Check out the list of Oregon [EQIP Funds](#) available with an April 17th deadline.

USFWS

On March 30, 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it is withdrawing a 2013 proposed rule to list the bi-state distinct population segment of greater sage-grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The bi-state sage-grouse population is an isolated group of sage-grouse living along the California-Nevada border at the southwest edge of the species' range. [Official Press Release](#)

USFS

USFS features the first long-term study comparing seed mixes in the Great Basin in its April 2020 Rocky Mountain Research Station Newsletter: [Post-Fire Native Species Seed Mixes Are Effective at Keeping Out Cheatgrass in the Great Basin](#)

State Updates

State Legislature

Many Oregon legislative bills were scuttled by the walk-out and early termination of the Oregon 2020 legislative session. This included bills related to ODFW's mitigation program and cost reductions ([HB4091](#)) as well as funding efforts focused on addressing rangeland wildfire and invasive annual grasses (including Governor's legislation tied to the State's Wildfire Response Council and related Mitigation Committee recommendations for rangeland fire and invasives management). The Coordinating Council discussed an approach to work with state agencies on how to maintain funding levels for implementation of the State Action Plan for FY 2021-2023. [March 11, 2020 Coordinating Council Meeting Materials](#).

ODOE

The Boardman to Hemingway project is moving through federal and state reviews. ODOE released the [Draft Proposed Order](#) in May 2019, public comments are available on the state's project website and the applicant had until November 2019 to respond. In the coming months, ODOE will release its

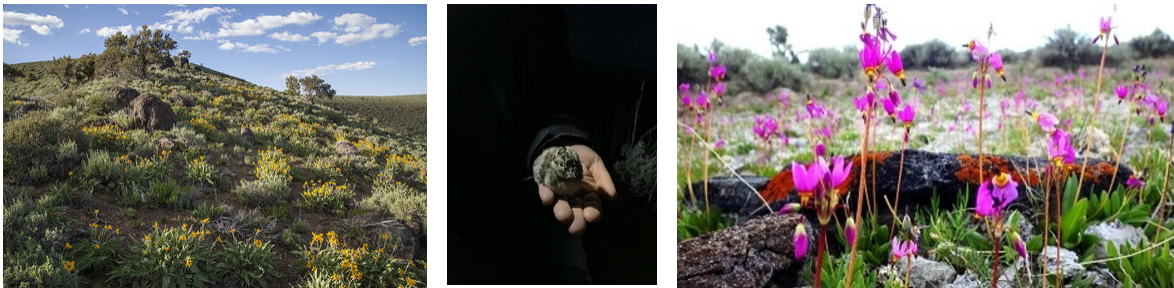
Proposed Order, which will respond to public comments that were received on the Draft Proposed Orders. When the Proposed Order is released, ODOE will also open the opportunity for those persons and organizations that submitted comments on the record of the Draft Proposed Order to request party status in the contested case, a quasi-judicial review of the Proposed Order regarding compliance with the applicable standards and rules. The contested case will be managed by an independent hearing officer from the Oregon Office of Administrative Hearings. Following the conclusion of the contested case, the Energy Facility Siting Council will take final action on the application. Final action is anticipated in 2021. [Official state project website](#). [Receive B2H updates or all EFSC updates](#)

DLCD

The Land Conservation and Development Commission will be conducting a five-year review (expected to begin in May 2020) of its [Land Use Rule for Sage Grouse](#). The Rule was established in 2015 as a critical part of the State's effort to demonstrate that, instead of a federal ESA listing, Oregon's land-use planning system can adequately ensure development proceeds in a conservation-based framework that adequately protects habitat. Separate from but related to this, eastern Oregon Counties, Regional Solutions, DLCD and ODFW staff are working together to discuss concerns related to the State's mitigation program.

LIT's

[Local Implementation Team quarterly updates](#) shared by Sage-Grouse LIT Coordinator, Julie Unfried.



Recent Research Publications, Stories and Reports

- "[Rancher and Democratic Governor Come Together For the Good of the Land](#)" tracks how a friendship between two Oregon leaders helped build common visions through some tumultuous times.
- Audubon's National Magazine featured participants in the [Sagebrush in Prisons Projects](#)
- The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) has posted all presentations from its "[Working Lands for Wildlife Series](#)" SGI featured Joe Smith in its [Ask an Expert series](#) to discuss his [recently published paper](#) in the Journal of Wildlife Management, entitled "Are Sage-Grouse Fine-Scale Specialists or Shrub-Steppe Generalists?"
- "[Generational Fidelity: Sage-Grouse in the American West](#)" tracks ranching operations across multiple generations as a feature from REI.
- Partners in the Sage showcases how [BLM is partnering with private landowners to enroll Outcome-Based Grazing Authorizations](#). And another featured article on mesic rangelands and the odds stacked against sage-grouse: <https://www.partnersinthesage.com/blog/gambling-grouse-mesic-rangelands>



SageCon Technical Resources on the Web

Stay connected and find resources through the [SageCon Partnership website](#). On the site, find the [SageCon Tools Navigator](#), which provides a one-stop-shop for SageCon tools and technical resources such as:

- The [SageCon Landscape Planning Tool](#) allows you to view, download and query local spatial data.
- The [Oregon Sage-Grouse Development Siting Tool](#) provides site-specific information for developers about sage-grouse mitigation.
- Guidance for [using rangeland vegetation maps](#) in habitat assessment and management planning.

Over the next year, the partnership will create an online SageCon Dashboard to highlight implementation and monitoring information related to cross-ownership conservation actions across Oregon; population, habitat condition and threat status; development and economy-related work; as well as partnership success stories. In the meantime, check out the information compiled for the [2019 SageCon Summit](#).

Save the Dates

Great Basin Fire Exchange Webinar Dates [Register](#)

April 15, 2020 The ecology, history, ecohydrology, and management of pinyon and juniper woodlands in the Great Basin

May 27, 2020 New tools for pinyon-juniper management: Balancing needs of sagebrush and woodland obligate birds

SageCon Partner Meetings

May 19, 2020 9-11 a.m. SageCon Staff Implementation Team Meeting (By Zoom)

June 12, 2020 8-11 a.m. SageCon Coordinating Council Meeting (By Zoom)

POSTPONED till 2021 32nd Annual Sage and Columbia Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop

NOTE: we'll be monitoring dates closely to update when meetings become cancelled or moved to online sessions due to COVID-19 and the Governor's EO for shelter in place issued March 23, 2020.

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