



Oregon

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May 8, 2014

TO: Land Conservation and Development Commission

FROM: Jim Rue, Director
Jon Jinings, Community Services Specialist

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item 4, May 22-23, 2014, LCDC Meeting**

I. AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Under this item the commission will receive an update on the progress of Oregon's Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon) and hear about local efforts regarding sage grouse and sage grouse habitat.

For additional information about this report, please contact Jon Jinings, Community Services Specialist, at 541-325-6928 or jon.jinings@state.or.us.

II. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The Greater Sage Grouse is a species common to the western United States. Over time, much of the sagebrush ecosystem needed to maintain a healthy population has suffered. Habitat has eroded as a consequence of the introduction of invasive weeds, juniper encroachment, large-scale development, wildland fire, and intensive agriculture. Strong concerns about the future of the species have resulted in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) receiving multiple petitions to list the Greater Sage Grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

In April 2010, the Service determined that protection of Greater Sage Grouse under the ESA was warranted. The Service did not list sage grouse at that time in order to address other species facing greater risk of extinction, but stated its intent to revisit its "Warranted but Precluded" decision. The Service must still make a determination whether the species should be proposed for ESA listing or be removed from the candidate list, which would result in no further consideration by the end of the 2015 fiscal year.

In Oregon, sage grouse habitat includes about 11 million acres distributed across five Bureau of Land Management (BLM) management districts in seven central and eastern Oregon counties

(Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Lake, Malheur and Union). Private lands account for about 21 percent of this total while BLM controls about 70 percent. The remaining lands are made up of other public agencies including the Oregon Department of State Lands.

III. OREGON'S SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

In early 2012, the governor's office, BLM, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service convened SageCon to serve as an ongoing venue for interagency and stakeholder coordination on issues related to sage grouse habitat conservation. The group includes local, state, and federal agencies and stakeholder organizations. SageCon has been broadly divided into state and federal teams with the state team directed to begin work on an "All Lands, All Threats" plan for nonfederal lands to complement efforts being conducted by the federal agencies. SageCon's goal is to demonstrate that listing the sage grouse is not necessary.

IV. DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATION

The department regularly attends SageCon meetings and has served as a liaison between state government and our local partners. The department is also a member of the state's core team.

V. RECENT ACTIVITIES

Much has happened since the commission met in Burns, Oregon last year. On the ground activities include completion or near completion of the work of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and BLM to create a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and Harney County's efforts to create a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA).

The CCA and CCAA programs would be approved by the Service and create a set of rangeland management guidelines. Producers could voluntarily enroll and, so long as they abided by the terms of the program, would receive additional protections against claims of "take" should the species become listed. The CCA would apply to BLM lands managed as grazing allotments. Enrolled grazing permit holders would be less likely to suffer penalties under the ESA. The CCAA would apply to private lands in Harney County. Enrolled private property owners would receive assurance (hence the extra A) that they would not suffer penalties under the ESA.

The report produced by the seven affected counties and funded by a technical assistance grant provided by DLCD has been completed and was presented to SageCon in November Of 2013. The "County Report" as it is often called documents existing land use conditions and development trends between 2003 and 2013. The County Report stands to serve as a foundational part of Oregon's response to the Service.

Moving into 2014 a major focus of the state's efforts was to provide BLM detailed comments regarding their efforts to update Resource Management Plans (RMP) to better account for the presence of sage grouse. Comments were gathered from a multitude of state agencies and combined into a single set of unified comments dated February 20, 2014. A draft Disturbance Framework that was informed by the County Report was also included with the state comments. Among other things, the draft Disturbance Framework suggests possibilities for a state administrative rule.

Work to identify disturbance cap thresholds and a mitigation framework has also been underway. Draft estimates of existing disturbance levels in priority conservation areas have been calculated to serve as a baseline for monitoring and adaptive management purposes. Draft increments of future anthropogenic disturbance potential have also been prepared. This information along with continued work on the state's mitigation framework was presented to local and federal partners over a series of meetings occurring in the last three weeks.

Future activities include meeting with the county planning directors on May 13, county commissioners on June 10, and another SageCon meeting also to occur in June. State teams will continue to meet regularly. SageCon participants providing the Service with Oregon's All Lands All Threats approach to sage grouse management in September 2014.

VI. ATTACHMENT

A. ODFW Sage Grouse Habitat Maps

ODFW Sage-Grouse Core Areas

