



Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., Governor

Department of Land Conservation and Development

635 Capitol Street NE, Suite 150

Salem, Oregon 97301-2540

Phone: (503) 373-0050

Fax: (503) 378-5518

www.oregon.gov/LCD

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TO: Land Conservation and Development Commission

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

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item 7, July 25-26, 2013, LCDC Meeting**

I. 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 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. Therefore, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received multiple petitions by various entities 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.

Four workgroups have been established to assist Oregon's efforts: fire and invasive species, habitat fragmentation, mitigation, and a technical team. Each group includes one or more core state agencies and is lead by a member of the governor's staff. The state's goal is to demonstrate that listing the sage grouse is not necessary.

IV. DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATION

The department regularly attends SageCon meetings and is directly involved in the habitat fragmentation workgroup. This group is led by the governor's natural resources advisor, Richard Whitman. Among other things, the group has been tasked with considering several types of large-scale land disturbances with the potential to threaten sage grouse habitat: conversion to agriculture, urban sprawl, infrastructure, energy development, and mining. These uses have been identified by the federal Conservation Objectives Team as creating threats to sage grouse habitat.

The department has also directly assisted the seven affected counties to document existing land use conditions and development trends. This work has been funded by a technical assistance grant provided by DLCDC to Harney County. The project hopes to include policy recommendations for future consideration.

V. ADDITIONAL LOCAL EFFORTS

Beyond serving on SageCon and participating in workgroups, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations have been involved in multiple on-the-ground efforts to arrest the decline of the species. Two of the most celebrated projects are the ongoing 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.

ATTACHMENT

ODFW Sage Grouse Habitat Maps

