



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

## Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

**FROM:** Meta Loftsgaarden, Executive Director

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item I: Sage-Grouse Conservation (SageCon) Update  
January 27-28, 2015 OWEB Board Meeting**

### I. Introduction

This report provides an update of the SageCon Partnership and ongoing implementation work related to sage-steppe habitat conservation. The Governor's office will provide a SageCon update at the meeting to supplement the background provided in this report.

### II. Background

Governor Kitzhaber's Natural Resources Office is working with landowners, counties, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to develop a comprehensive plan that, when combined with updated Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Resource Management plans, will maintain and improve sage-grouse populations and habitat in Oregon. The short-term objective of the state's planning effort is to inform the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)'s listing decision under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2015. The Governor's long-term goal is to protect and restore sage-grouse populations and the ecological health of lands across southeast Oregon and other areas of the state and, in so doing, promote the stability and vitality of rural communities and economies. This goal would be accomplished through a planning framework that protects key habitat, undertakes priority conservation actions tied to key sage-grouse and habitat threats, and advances responsible stewardship that generates and allows for economic use and development of lands vital to healthy rural communities.

While the Continuing Resolution passed by Congress and signed by the President in December 2014 precludes the USFWS from expending funds on a listing decision for Greater Sage-Grouse under the federal ESA, work continues to develop the plan in anticipation of a 2016 decision.

Sage-grouse and their habitat cover nearly 25 percent of the state's land area in southeast, central and northeastern Oregon, in addition to extensive areas across many other western states. As a result, this listing decision and the subsequent related actions and obligations have the potential to impact land uses and management practices in Oregon at a scale similar to the actions related to salmon in the 1990s.

OWEB has a vested interest in sage-grouse, their habitat, and associated rural communities. The habitat area spans three OWEB regions and has been a major focus of watershed restoration investments for the Board. The area comprises large tracts of private, state, and federal lands. Over the years, numerous watershed projects funded by OWEB on private lands have been

designed to enhance sage-grouse habitat. Other projects have been conducted in conjunction with federal land managers with the same purpose in mind.

### **III. Current Status of the State's Planning Effort**

A team of partners including Portland State University, Oregon State University/Institute for Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, the Governor's Office, state and federal agencies, and myriad local partners and contractors have been moving forward with the effort to complete the State of Oregon's All-Lands, All-Threats Approach to Sage-Grouse Habitat Protection. The SageCon effort has involved county commissioners and judges, county planning departments, state and federal agencies, landowners and a variety of non-profit organizations. Development of the State's plan and coordination with federal planning efforts is part of the SageCon effort.

The Board has provided \$650,000 in funding for SageCon since early 2013. Since that time, a number of significant accomplishments have been made. The Governor's Office will report at the January Board meeting on the current status of the state's planning efforts and local implementation accomplishments to date.

### **IV. Recommendation**

This is an information item only. No action is requested