



## OWEB Focused Investment Partnership Priority SAGEBRUSH/SAGE-STEPPE HABITAT- 2025 Draft Revisions

### Summary Statement of Priority

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The OWEB Board will consider proposals for investment in **sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat** for initiatives that address habitat conservation and restoration needs to achieve ecological outcomes over time at the landscape scale.

OWEB's Focused Investment Priority for sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat guides voluntary actions that address primary ecological threats and limiting factors related to the quality of this habitat type. These actions also will support and/or improve ecosystem functions and processes, including those required by Greater sage-grouse, which is an indicator species for this habitat type. **These actions will be guided by the habitat, limiting factors, ecological outcomes, and conservation approaches outlined in Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan and other plans listed at the end of this document.**

While sagebrush/sage-steppe habitats support a variety of species, focal areas for this Priority are: 1) Existing healthy, functioning sagebrush/sage-steppe habitats that support a variety of species, and areas of opportunity to grow this habitat identified by Oregon State University, the Institute for Natural Resource, and the USDA Agricultural Research Service, and 2) Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs) for sage-grouse and the important connectivity corridors between these areas (see explanation and map). PACs do not represent individual populations, but rather key areas that have been identified as crucial to ensure adequate representation, redundancy, and resilience for conservation of its associated population or populations. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW's) sage-grouse strategy identifies core areas of habitat that align with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS's) PAC habitats. The core area approach uses biological information to identify important habitats with the objective of protecting the highest density breeding areas.

### Background

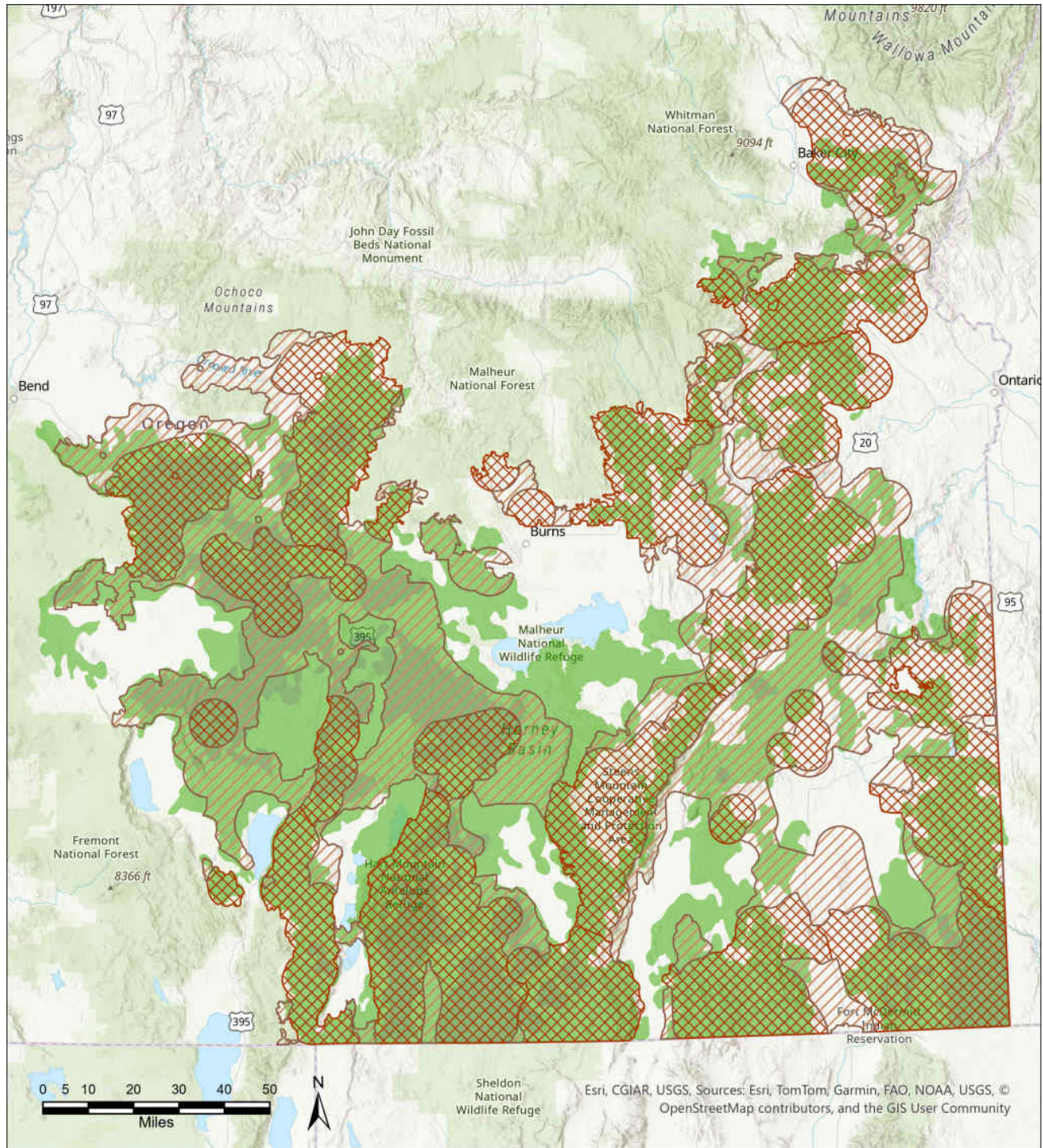
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#### Where it occurs

Sage-steppe habitat occurs throughout eastern Oregon and in parts of Central Oregon. Several ecoregions identified in the Oregon State Wildlife Action Plan (i.e., Northern Basin and Range, Blue Mountains, Columbia Plateau, and East Cascades) contain this habitat type. Since the 1800s large areas of sagebrush habitat have been lost, including 82% of the habitat in the Blue Mountains ecoregion and an estimated 59% of habitat in the Northern Basin and Range ecoregion.

These habitats are both extensive and diverse. In general, sagebrush habitats occur on dry flats and plains, rolling hills, rocky hill slopes, saddles and ridges where precipitation is low. Sagebrush-steppe is dominated by grasses and forbs (more than 25 percent of the area) with an open shrub layer. In sagebrush steppe, natural fire regimes historically maintained a patchy distribution of shrubs and predominance of grasses. Connectivity corridors of similar habitats between these areas are important to connect otherwise fragmented sage-steppe habitat.

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### **Indicator species and/or species of interest supported by this habitat**

State Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Conservation Need associated with sagebrush include Greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sagebrush lizard, Washington ground squirrel, and pygmy rabbits. Other wildlife closely associated with sagebrush include black-throated sparrow, sage thrasher, sagebrush vole, and pronghorn.

### **Why it is significant to the state**

Sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat is an imperiled habitat that supports a range of species. These areas have deep historic and cultural significance to Native Americans and are associated with an economically and socially important ranching and agricultural industry in communities throughout a large portion of the state. Healthy sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat provides opportunities for carbon storage, which can be quickly lost with catastrophic wildfire and resulting proliferation of invasive annual grasses that offer limited carbon storage benefits.

### **Key limiting factors and/or ecological threats, with a focus on ecosystem function and process**

- Altered fire regimes, including decades of fire suppression and climate change has resulted in changes to native plant communities and increased risk of habitat loss due to intense wildfires.
- Juniper encroachment on sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat and proliferation of invasive annual grasses, which increase the frequency, intensity and extent of wildfires.
- Conversion to other land uses, which results in habitat loss and connectivity.
- Limitations of current restoration techniques and the need for additional restoration approaches, particularly in low-elevation areas that face severe challenges to native plant species regeneration following wildfire.
- Landscape-scale disturbance, including wildfire, landslides, flooding or similar events may occur within the FIP geography. Post-disturbance restoration actions addressing landscape-scale disturbance may be eligible FIP actions.
- Loss of wildlife habitat connectivity. Many species rely on the ability to move throughout the landscape to fulfill their daily and seasonal needs for access to food, shelter, and opportunities to reproduce. ODFW produced [Priority Wildlife Conservation Areas \(PWCAs\) maps](#) to show where habitat connectivity is most important. Fifty-four species were selected for the project as surrogates, representing a variety of taxa, movement types, dispersal capabilities, and sensitivity to anthropogenic threats. FIP Initiatives may include actions enhancing PWCAs within the geographic boundary of their FIP Initiative.

### **Reference plans**

- 1) Oregon State Wildlife Action Plan <https://dfw.state.or.us/SWAP-Revision/>
- 2) ODFW's Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon [https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/sagegrouse/docs/GRSG\\_Conservation\\_Assessment\\_and\\_Strategy\\_April\\_25-11.pdf](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/sagegrouse/docs/GRSG_Conservation_Assessment_and_Strategy_April_25-11.pdf)
- 3) Bureau of Land Management Sage-Grouse Habitat Plans <https://www.blm.gov/programs/fish-and-wildlife/sagegrouse/blm-sagegrouse-plans>
- 4) Oregon Sage Grouse Action Plan <https://hub.oregonexplorer.info/pages/sagebrush-oregon-sage-grouse-action-plan>