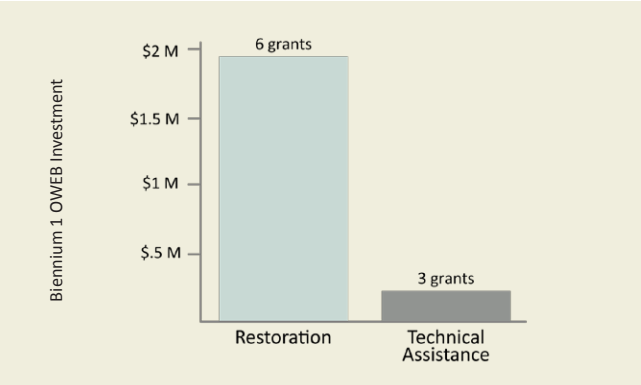
Focused Investment Partnership Progress Report: 2015-2017 Biennium 1
Sagebrush / Sage-Steppe Habitat

OREGON MODEL TO PROTECT SAGE-GROUSE, ALL COUNTIES

The Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee is focusing on privately-owned priority habitats for Sage-Grouse occurring within Harney, Lake, and Malheur counties. Conservation measures support the design and execution of Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) in partnership with private landowners through the development of Site Specific Plans (SSP) by soil and water conservation districts. The CCAA is an agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), soil and water conservation districts, and non-federal landowners, in which the landowner agrees to reduce or eliminate threats to a candidate species on lands they manage in exchange for assurances from USFWS that they will no longer face further regulatory requirements should the species become listed in the future.

Funding



OWEB awarded $2,342,727 in funding that leveraged $1,902,961,759 in matching funds.

Benefits

- Restored diverse plant communities that support all-life stages of Sage-Grouse
- Reduced risk of frequent, damaging wildfires
- Created small business opportunities for juniper removal and rangeland treatment
- Engaged private landowners in a local, collaborative solution to improve Sage-Grouse and rangeland health
- Provided technical and financial support to farmers and ranchers to implement conservation measures

About This Report

The Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant program is a bold, new conservation approach that supports high-performing partnerships to strategize restoration actions and measure ecological outcomes through coordinated monitoring. In January 2016, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board awarded an Implementation Focused Investment Partnership grant to the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee. This report documents progress made in their first biennium of funding (2015 to 2017) to meet their strategic action plan goals. Work completed under the FIP grant program is part of a much larger on-going collaborative effort of federal, state and local agencies, private landowners and non-governmental organizations to meet Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan goals.

Goal

Restore Oregon's private rangelands and sustain abundant populations of Sage-Grouse, where threats of wildfire, exotic annual grasses, juniper invasion, and detrimental grazing practices are minimized in a way that supports and promotes local economic and social needs

Strategies

- Execute Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances for private lands.

Implementation Actions (2016-17)

Restoration

19 ESCAPE RAMPS for Sage-Grouse

6,589 ACRES exotic annual grass treatments

12,106 ACRES juniper treatment

30.08 MILES marked fence

Planning

186,325 ACRES in site-specific plans for private land

186,325 ACRES in managed grazing plans

Near-Term Outcomes (0-5+ Years)

- Decrease of woodland-type conifer communities
- Invasion of exotic annual grasses is reduced

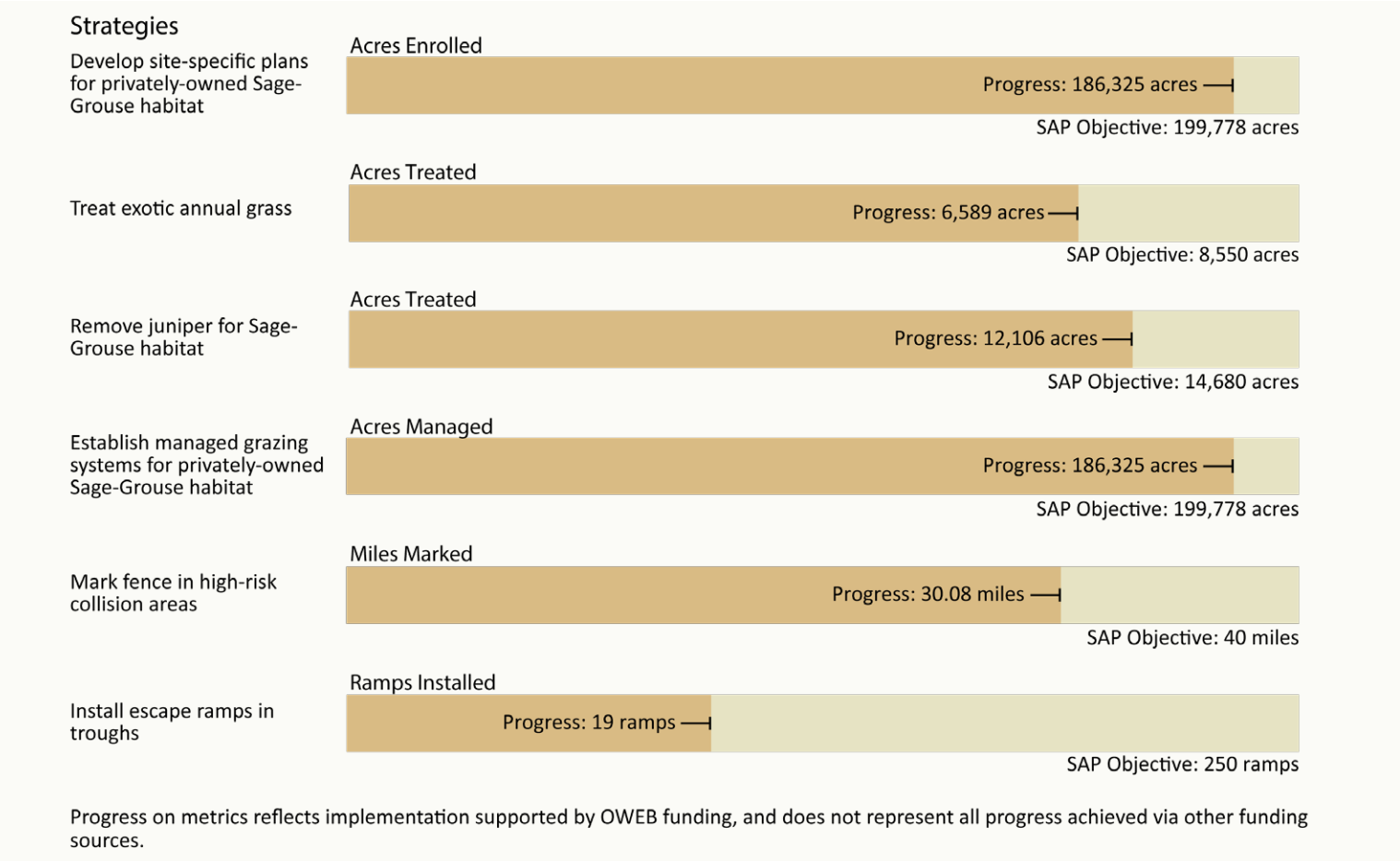
Intermediate-Term Outcomes (5-20+ Years)

- Desired plant cover of sagebrush, perennial bunch grasses, and wildflowers increases
- Less predation of Sage-Grouse by raptors perched on junipers

Long-Term Outcomes (20+ Years)

- Connectivity of habitats increases and is maintained
- Sage-Grouse population size and spatial extent increases

Strategic Action Plan (SAP) Progress, Biennium 1



Monitoring Approach

- Completes required monitoring for CCAA on private lands, including annual monitoring
- Collects baseline ecological data
- Tracks improvements in Sage-Grouse habitat over time, including upland and riparian ecosystems, habitat expansion, and rangeland improvements
- Monitors the effectiveness of weed spraying, juniper cutting, rangeland seeding, and grazing management practices

Greater Sage-Grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)* are upland bird species completely dependent on sagebrush.

Adaptive Management in the FIP

	Restoration				Engagement
Challenges	Unpredictable weather conditions caused project delays.	The abbreviated timeframe of the first biennium created challenges for planning and contracting.	Grant budgets had to be adjusted because of inaccurate assumptions about contractor costs, creating an extra step in the project management process.	It was difficult to balance staff workloads to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders.	It was challenging to find enough time for multiple landowner meetings and site visits to work out project details.
Lessons Learned	Be prepared for any scenario during fieldwork. Poor weather and equipment failure can happen.	Completed SSPs ensured shovel-ready projects. New interest was generated as landowners became aware of the FIP's ability to provide technical and financial assistance.	It is optimal to perform bid tours and receive bids prior to building the project budget.	Landowners are not all the same. Take time to work with them in a customized way. Discuss timelines and requirements during the project development phase.	Communication between implementers and landowners is vital during and after the project to enable appropriate maintenance and management.
Adaptations	The flexibility of FIP budgets was helpful when it became necessary to adjust timelines because of poor weather conditions.	Additional staff were hired to increase capacity to implement and monitor projects.	A streamlined process was established to solicit qualified contractors, run a bid tour, evaluate and award contracts, and follow through to final inspection and certification.	Cross-jurisdictional relationships supported fluidity of funds across county lines for project implementation and design.	Clear and frequent communications helped staff align project objectives and landowner needs. Where possible, one staff person was assigned to a landowner from project inception to completion.

Removing encroaching junipers increases the amount of quality sagebrush habitat available. Harney Soil and Water Conservation District works with private landowners to voluntarily conserve Sage-Grouse habitat on their property. At this site, western juniper was cut from over 500 acres to improve conditions.

For More Information

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