From:	Bean, Michael
To:	Beyer, Emily
Cc:	Press_Review; Hugh Vickery; Sarah Greenberger; James Lyons; Janice Schneider; Israporn Pananon; Neil Kornze; Celia Boddington; Craig Leff; Jeff Krauss; Dan Ashe; Betsy Hildebrandt; Gavin Shire; Brian Hires; Theresa Rabot; Richard Hannan
Subject:	Re: For review by COB: OR CCAA Release
Date:	Thursday, March 26, 2015 11:51:10 AM
Attachments:	03-27-15 Oregon CCAA DRAFT v3 Bean edits.doc

A couple of minor edits are highlighted in the attached.

On Thu, Mar 26, 2015 at 11:09 AM, Beyer, Emily <emily_beyer@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

Hi all,

Please send any edits to me by 6pm ET today. This will be released tomorrow at the start of the event tomorrow.

Thanks!

Emily

March 27, 2015
Contact: Jessica Kershaw (Interior) Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
Justin Fritscher (USDA) 202-375-0871
OREGON GOV BROWN CONTACT

Secretary Jewell, Governor Brown Celebrate Landmark Agreements to Conserve 2.3 Million Acres of Sagebrush Habitat in Oregon

Landowners gain regulatory certainty under innovative, voluntary program; Entirety of Oregon's greater sage-grouse habitat on private, state and federal lands covered under conservation agreements

BEND, Oregon – Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today joined Oregon Governor Kate Brown and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Under Secretary Ann Mills to celebrate landmark agreements that will allow landowners in all eight Central Oregon counties with greater sage-grouse habitat to enroll their property in a voluntary conservation program – with the potential to protect more than 2.3 million acres of important sagebrush landscapes. The landowners in return receive assurances that they will not face additional regulatory requirements if the bird is protected under the Endangered Species Act.

"These voluntary agreements establish a collaborative partnership to ensure the conservation of the greater sage-grouse and sustain working western rangelands," Jewell said. "The

agreements in Oregon are a model for how we can work together to provide regulatory certainty for ranchers and other westerners who rely on sagebrush habitat for their livelihoods, and also take important steps to protect the hundreds of species that rely on these landscapes."

"These agreements are essential to the continued health of the sagebrush ecosystem and the livelihood of ranchers," Brown said. "By working together, the state, ranchers and the Fish and Wildlife Service have devised a plan that advances both the principles of conservation and the local economy."

"Over the past five years, USDA has worked closely with partners and landowners to restore more than 4.4 million acres of sage-grouse habitat across the West, demonstrating the real impact that voluntary, collaborative conservation on private lands can have on a landscape scale," USDA's Mills said. "These voluntary practices have a proven track record, and today's announcement will go a long way towards advancing our shared vision of healthy ranges and a healthy rural economy."

Assurances to landowners can now be provided in at least two ways, through Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) and through agreements with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service that provide equivalent assurances to landowners. Under these types of agreements, landowners and permittees voluntarily agree to manage their lands to remove or reduce threats to species. Landowners, in return, receive 20 to 30 year assurances from the Fish and Wildlife Service that no additional conservation measures will be required or new restrictions imposed if the species becomes listed, so long as the agreements are being properly implemented. The goal of the programs is to encourage immediate benefits for a species while providing the landowner with the ability to plan for the future with certainty.

The Multi-County CCAAs covers 2,312,673 acres, and the Division of State Lands CCAA includes 630,000 acres. In combination with the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District CCAA finalized in 2014, more than 4 million acres are now covered under these conservation agreements. All federal lands in Oregon are covered in parallel conservation agreements such that the entirety of greater sage-grouse habitat on private, state, and federal land is covered under conservation agreements that provide these assurances.

Since the Harney County Soil and Water Conservation District entered into its CCAA with the Service in May 2014, it has enrolled over 53 landowners with more than 320,000 acres. Numerous ranchers are also ready to enroll under these new CCAAs.

Each CCAA was developed through locally-driven efforts with a steering committee that

included private landowners, livestock associations and stock growers, watershed councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, County Courts, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State University Extension, The Nature Conservancy, Oregon Department of State Lands, and Native American Tribes.

Through its leadership of the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI), NRCS has been working to provide predictability for ranchers and private landowners who voluntarily conserve and restore sage-grouse habitat. The SGI approach provides ranchers confidence that the practices they implement today are not only effective, but also provide them with long-term peace of mind: ranchers who voluntarily participate in conservation through SGI will be recognized for their contributions to improving the health of the range and will not be asked to undertake additional conservation measures on their operations without their consent for up to 30 years. This has proved to be a popular combination, as over In the past five years more than 1,100 ranchers across the West have partnered with NRCS to deliver sustainable ranching measures on over 4.4 million acres through SGI.

In Oregon, USDA has invested $18.4 million through SGI in on-the-ground restoration since 2010, helping more than 100 ranchers remove conifers from 200,000 acres of key nesting, brood-rearing and wintering habitats, addressing 68 percent of the conifer threat to Oregon's sage-grouse population on priority private land. These efforts not only benefit the sage-grouse, but also improve the forage available on grazing lands.

Landowners and cattle producers who enroll will develop site-specific plans that address threats to sage-grouse and maintain or improve habitat. The major threats in Oregon are wildfire and a resulting increase of exotic grasses and juniper encroachment. All participating enrollees will agree to maintain contiguous habitat and avoid further fragmentation. Other activities that may be included in the plans include juniper removal, invasive grass and weed control, and marking fences known to be a strike hazard for sage-grouse.

Today’s announcement builds innovative partnerships upon actions across the West to conserve sage-grouse habitat. For example, in Nevada, [barrack agreement link/language]. In Wyoming [Sweetwater conservation bank link/language].

Greater sage-grouse once occupied more than 290 million acres of sagebrush in the West, but the bird, known for its flamboyant mating ritual at sites called leks, has lost more than half of its habitat due to growing threats from rangeland fire, invasive species and development.

The deteriorating health of western sagebrush landscapes has sparked an unprecedented and proactive partnership across eleven states to conserve the uniquely American habitat that supports iconic wildlife, outdoor recreation, ranching and other traditional land uses.

More information on the greater sage-grouse and the ongoing, collaborative work to conserve the sagebrush landscape is available at: http://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/

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News Release

March 27, 2015

Contact: Jessica Kershaw (Interior) Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
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