

News Release



Department of the Interior
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2 Million Acres of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Proposed for Conservation in Landmark Draft Agreement with Oregon Counties, Ranchers

Public comment period is open on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed candidate conservation agreement covering seven Oregon counties

PORTLAND, Oregon –Private landowners in all Oregon counties with greater sage-grouse will soon have the opportunity to voluntarily protect their economic livelihoods while furthering conservation for this flagship sagebrush species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today Soil and Water Conservation Districts from Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Lake, Malheur, and southern Union Counties have developed a multi-county Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) with the Service. The Notice of Availability for this agreement is being published today in the *Federal Register*, opening a 30-day public comment period.

In a CCAA, landowners voluntarily agree to manage their lands to remove or reduce threats to a species that is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In return, those landowners receive assurances that they will not face additional regulatory requirements should that species ever be listed.

“In Oregon, we are prioritizing completion of these agreements to provide private landowners with a tool to work in partnership with the government,” said Paul Henson, State Supervisor at the Service’s Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office. “Enrollment is strictly voluntary and we believe provides peace-of-mind to landowners that their lifestyle and economic livelihoods will continue without added regulation. These partnerships are the best way to provide on-the-ground conservation for the sage-grouse on private lands.”

This CCAA covers 2,312,673 acres, and at least 45 private landowners have already expressed interest in enrolling. These agreements have the potential to conserve the majority of greater sage-grouse habitat on private lands in Oregon. The Harney County Soil and Water Conservation Districts entered into a similar CCAA in May 2014, and since that time 30 landowners have enrolled more than 280,000 acres.

Similar to the Harney County CCAA, each county formed a technical steering committee comprised of local representatives from groups including private landowners, local 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 tribes.

Landowners who voluntarily enroll will develop site-specific plans that address threats to sage-grouse and maintain or improve habitat. In Oregon, the major factors causing habitat loss are wildfire in low-elevation sagebrush and a resulting increase of exotic annual grasses, and juniper encroachment in upper-elevation sagebrush. All participating landowners will agree to maintain contiguous habitat and avoid further fragmentation on enrolled lands. Additional activities included in the agreement that benefit greater sage-grouse include juniper removal, invasive annual grass and weed control, and marking fences known to be a strike hazard for sage-grouse.

Greater sage-grouse currently occur in 11 states and two Canadian provinces, and loss and fragmentation of habitat is the primary threat across its range. In Oregon, greater sage-grouse were once found in most sagebrush habitats east of the Cascades. Greater sage-grouse were listed as a candidate species in 2010. The Service is scheduled to make a final listing decision in September 2015.

Public comments will be accepted through Jan. 2, 2015. To request further information or submit written comments, please use one of the following methods and refer to “Multi-County CCAA.”

- Email: Jeff_Everett@fws.gov.
- U.S. Mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 SE 98th Ave, Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266.
- Fax: 503-231-6195.

For more information about greater sage-grouse and to view the agreement, visit <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/>.

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