



Partner Update

OREGON SAGE-GROUSE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

<https://sageconpartnership.com/lit>

Reporting Period: January – June 2023

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Local Implementation Teams, or LITs, are named in the 2015 Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan as the primary catalyst to implement actions that address threats to sage-grouse and their habitat in southeastern Oregon. Each of the five LITs utilizes local knowledge and insight to identify priorities to collaborate across interest groups and ownership boundaries. The collaborative framework of the LITs gives a diverse set of local stakeholders a platform to share information and work together to solve large-scale problems.

BAKER

Events convened

- 2 LIT quarterly meetings
- 1 Baker LIT Summit
- The Baker LIT is wrapping up the second biennium of project proposals under the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant and moving into the third, and final, biennium. In light of this, on May 31st the Baker LIT hosted a full-day Summit at Eastern Oregon University to review past and ongoing projects and revisit the FIP's Strategic Action Plan. LIT members gave presentations highlighting their respective FIP projects where partners were able to share successes, hurdles, and lessons learned. This provided the basis for focusing the LITs review of the Strategic Action Plan and allowed us to successfully outline goals/objectives for biennium 3.
- Four projects, three restoration grants and 1 stakeholder engagement grant, were selected during the Spring 2023 FIP grant application cycle. Two applications will address invasive weeds in critical nesting and brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse in the Baker Priority Area of Conservation, one will provide funding for the construction of a carcass disposal site to assist with reducing raven food subsidies in sage-grouse habitat, and one will assist in continuing to support Baker County's CCAA coordinator position.
- In an effort to secure future funding, Tri-County CWMA on behalf of the Baker LIT, submitted an America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC) Pre-proposal to continue sage-grouse conservation work. ATBC is a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) program that utilizes Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds to support cross-boundary project implementation. Conservation actions outlined in the ATBC pre-proposal are a continuation of current efforts and highly reflect goals and objectives outlined in the Baker Threat Reduction Plan and FIP Strategic Action Plan and would allow the LIT to maintain capacity and continue building strong partnerships. Unfortunately, however, the Baker LIT was not selected by NFWF to submit a full proposal; the LIT will begin to explore other potential funding options to support future sage-grouse conservation.
- The Baker LIT has held 3 planning meetings to develop a tiered process for prioritizing areas of mesic habitat for protection and restoration using both mesic habitat mapping tools and mesic ground surveys conducted during the summer of 2021. First-tier projects include ready-to-go projects that will have an almost immediate effect



on improving brood habitat (e.g., juniper cutting, fencing off springs). The second tier of projects includes larger-scale projects that the LIT will likely need additional reconnaissance and technical support to manage (Figure 1).

- Through this effort, the Baker LIT is in the process of developing a mesic restoration grant application for tier 1 projects for the Fall 2023 FIP grant application cycle. Grant applications for tier 2 projects will be submitted in the Spring/Fall 2024 FIP application cycle.
- In addition to developing mesic projects under the FIP grant, Baker LIT partners were able to submit a proposal for the USFWS Sagebrush Conservation BIL grant offering for FY24. If funded, initial efforts within our grant proposal will go towards juniper cutting in mesic areas adjacent to private lands where work is already underway to remove Phase I and II junipers.



Figure 1. Mesic site flagged for a potential tier 2 restoration project.

- In collaboration with SageCon and Oregon State University Extension Services, the LIT is hosting a field training: [Restoring Riparian Habitats](#). This event will cover the assessment, planning, and monitoring of practices meant to restore the health and function of riparian/mesic habitats. Designed for land managers, this tour will focus on using a threat-based approach to accomplishing these steps. Date: August 28th and 29th, 2023.
- The Baker LIT continues to monitor proposed and ongoing weed restoration projects using the Baker LIT FIP Monitoring Protocol and the new Rapid Ocular Assessment Monitoring (ROAM) Protocol developed in collaboration with USGS. The combined approach of the original Baker LIT FIP Monitoring Protocol and the new Rapid Ocular Assessment Monitoring (ROAM) protocol will facilitate multi-scaled analyses and allow the Baker LIT to assess whether the LIT was successful in accomplishing the overarching ecological goals as stated in our Strategic Action Plan: increase the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat, and reverse sage-grouse population declines in the Baker Planning Area. In total the LIT plans to conduct vegetation monitoring at ~40 points using the Baker LIT's Monitoring protocol and ~700 points using the new ROAM protocol (Figure 2). Thus far, LIT technicians have made remarkable progress, sampling approximately 50% of all points as of June 30th, 2023.

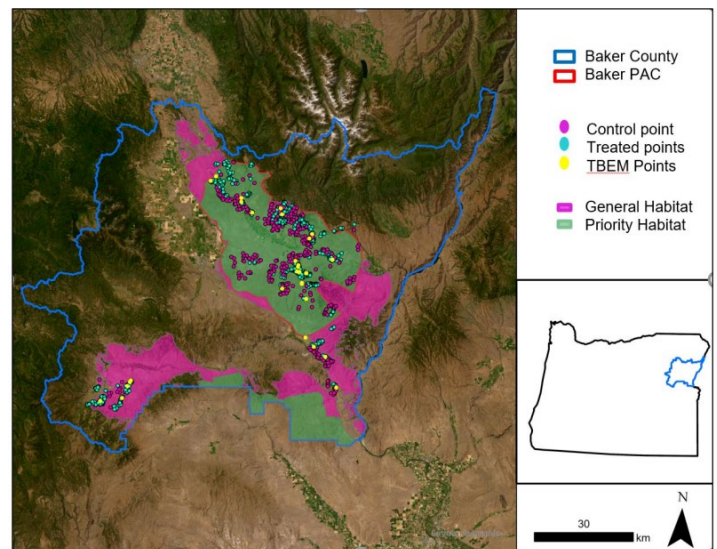


Figure 2. Map delineating control and treated monitoring points using the Rapid Ocular Assessment Monitoring (ROAM) Protocol and monitoring points using the Baker LIT Monitoring Protocol (TBEM Points).



BURNS

Events convened

- 1 meeting

The Burns LIT has steadily moved along with developing a Threats Reduction Plan for the LIT area. The group decided in January that starting on a threats reduction plan like Prineville would be helpful for partners and provide useful information for grant applications or individual organizational planning documents. With the current updates that ODFW is conducting to the sage-grouse maps, the group decision was to wait for that information to come out before updating the LIT maps. The group started to identify some of the project priorities as well. Some projects included post-fire restoration in the Miller Homestead Fire scar, water availability in western and southern Harney County, and ramping up native seed production and accessibility.

For the next meeting, the group's role or vision is the focus of the meeting. The group has not had many discussions on what type of collaborative the LIT space will be. By working on their own plan, the group has yet to determine the collaborative's purpose. Many of the partners are working together in various collaborations established across Harney County. With this meeting, other LIT visions and directions will be the subject of discussion to help guide the Burns LIT. This will help determine what other organizations should be at the table and who has not been involved with some of the LIT processes. For current membership, there is a low representation of environmental groups such as ONDA, East Cascades Audubon, and private landowners. Currently, the main core group of the LIT is governmental agencies (BLM, USFWS, ODFW, SWCD, Harney County, DSL), the Burns Paiute Tribe, the High Desert Partnership, and a couple of landowners. Only one conservation group has begun attending meetings, Oregon Desert Land Trust.

During the month of June, the High Desert Partnership (HDP), and the Southeast Oregon Wildfire Resiliency (SOWR) Project are applying for funding for the Oregon Dept. of Forestry Senate Bill 762 Landscape Resiliency Program. As part of the wildfire collaborative is working on applying for funds to help support the expansion of the Southeast Oregon Wildfire Resiliency (SOWR) Project. Work for this collaborative is looking to expand areas across Harney County and Malheur County. Proposals for SB762 are due July 21. Time over the month of June has been spent assisting HPD with any needs to help apply for the fire resiliency funds to continue working in and around the Stinkingwater Mountains.

LAKEVIEW

Events convened

- 1 meeting

Since the last LIT report, the group agreed to start adapting Prineville's Threats Reduction Plan as a template to help create documents for Lakeview. This decision was made to help separate the LIT group from the newly formed Tri-Corners Community Collaborative (TCCC). Many of the LIT partners also participate in the TCCC, it becomes important to the group that each collaborative creates their own documents to separate the group's focus. The current actions of the group are developing their own charter before moving onto their style of a Threats Reduction Plan.

TCCC is a collaborative effort for sagebrush conservation and land use preservation in the Beatys Butte area. Time has been spent assisting as the convener of the group to help start the group get off the ground. The TCCC has met as a full group twice over this time and multiple coordinating meetings in between. These meetings were set to start with acknowledging and exploring the local, regional, and national significance of this landscape. And to provide support for the existing stewardship management efforts across private and public lands. Meetings will continue to be held monthly until the start of the summer.

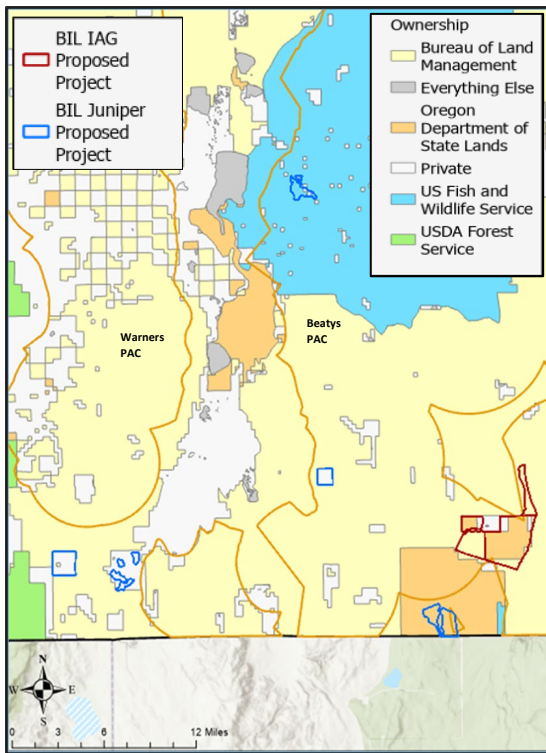


Figure 3. Map of the Lakeview BIL proposal locations.

Partners of the LIT, specifically the Department of State Lands, Lake County Weed Management Area, Lakeview Soil & Water Conservation District, and Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, developed a proposal for US Fish and Wildlife BIL funding. The proposal outlines the conservation needs of about 14,000 acres of state-administered lands, federal, and private lands addressing conifer expansion and invasive annual grasses. This was the first joint proposal under the Lakeview LIT’s collaborative platform since restarting in early 2022.

PRINEVILLE

Events convened

- 2 LIT meetings
- 1 field tour

During this reporting period, LIT partners used their [consensus process](#) and agreed to adopt the first version of [The Prineville LIT’s Sage-Grouse Threats Reduction Plan](#) (TRP, Figure 4). The purpose of Prineville TRP is to provide a framework for local partners to prioritize and coordinate sage-grouse conservation efforts across ownership and management boundaries within the Prineville LIT area. LIT partners will update this document annually according to the protocol outlined in section 4.3 of the plan. We hope to use the process Prineville LIT went through and their final product as a template to help other LITs (i.e., Burns, Lakeview, and Vale) develop similar resources, incorporating modifications as needed to ensure local relevancy and buy-in.

With the newly adopted TRP, the Prineville LIT didn’t waste any time putting it to work! This LIT decided to start meeting monthly to take advantage of the various, highly competitive federal funding opportunities. The group decided to focus their efforts on developing a proposal for the America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC) which is a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) program that utilizes Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds to support cross-boundary project implementation. In April, Crook SWCD, on behalf of the Prineville LIT, was able to submit an ATBC pre-proposal to implement project work and continue to build partnerships and programs across the Prineville LIT landscape that align with priorities identified in the TRP.

Full proposals may only be submitted by invitation. Unfortunately, the Prineville LIT was not invited to submit a full ATBC proposal this year. However, during pre-proposal development, LIT partners agreed that working together to develop the contents of this landscape-level grant proposal would be an investment in the group’s long-term ability to apply for other funding sources.



Highlights of the pre-proposal include,

- Crook SWCD, SageCon, and the LIT Coordinator worked with the LIT to develop a \$5 million pre-proposal.
- The project boundary (Figure 5) was developed with input from LIT partners during an interactive working meeting and incorporated resources including the [Sagebrush Conservation Design](#).
- 5 project categories were described within the pre-proposal.
 1. *Remove Phase 1 and 2 juniper expansion.*
 2. *Use Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) methods to locate and map invasive annual grasses and apply aerial and ground-based herbicide spray treatments in areas where invasive annual grasses have minimally to moderately invaded.*
 3. *Map wet meadow and riparian systems and apply low-tech restoration methods.*
 4. *Develop a native seed strategy for understory restoration.*
 5. *Grow the stewardship capacity of the local ranching community.*

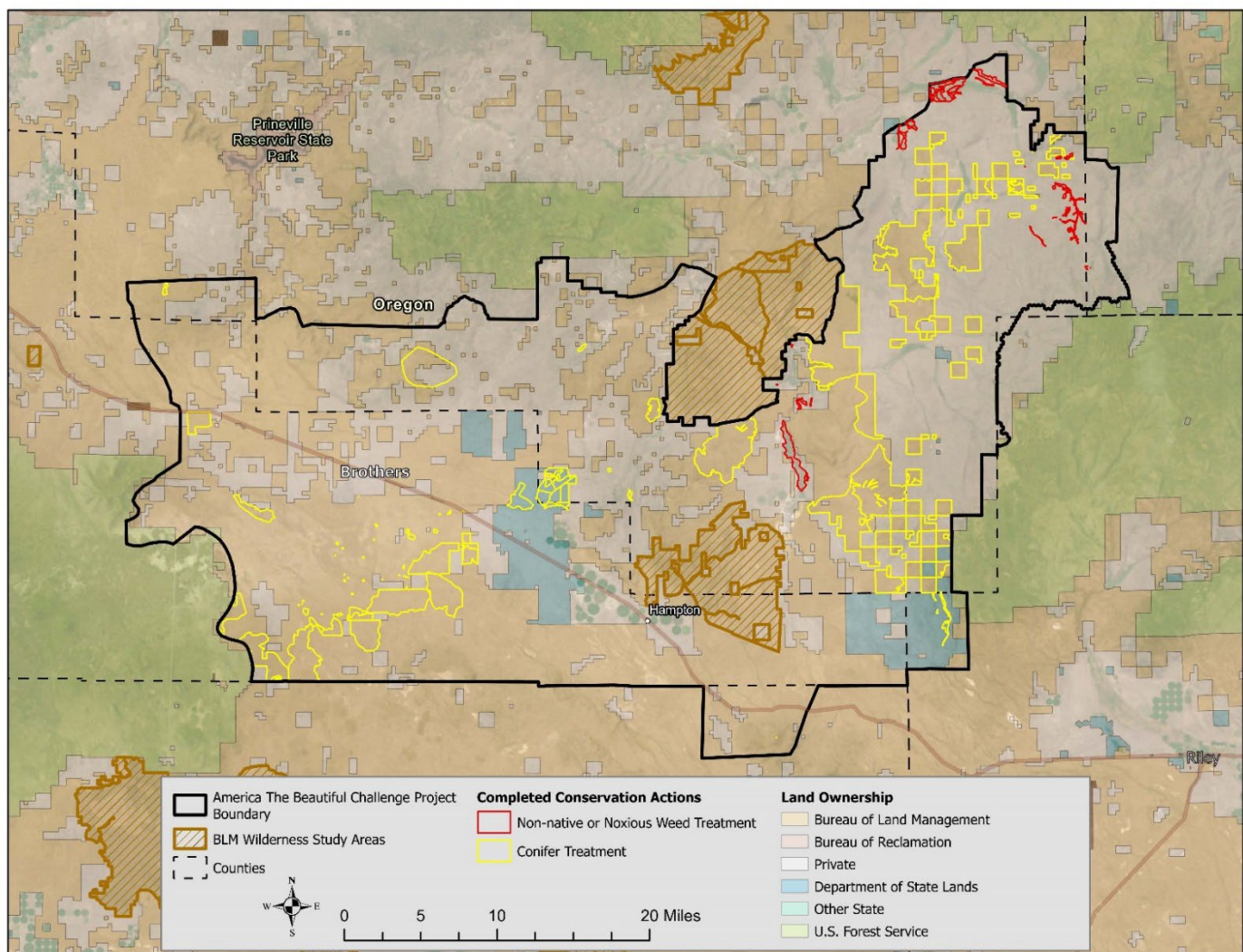


Figure 4. Members of the Prineville LIT used local knowledge and science-informed resources such as the Sagebrush Conservation Design to develop their America the Beautiful Challenge project boundary. Yellow and red polygons show where partners have already implemented project work. For privacy purposes, many private land conservation efforts are not included; however, approximately 58% of the private lands in this area is enrolled in the CCAA.



During the next reporting period, Prineville LIT partners will reconvene and identify opportunities that will allow them to utilize the information and prioritize them based on the efforts outlined above.

Hampton Buttes Field Tour

Prineville LIT partners met in the field during their June LIT meeting to learn about ongoing restoration efforts occurring across ownership boundaries. Crook SWCD, DSL, and ranch managers of the Desert Creek Ranch hosted 20 LIT participants from all interest groups for a day-long event. Partners learned about various juniper treatment efforts including plans to utilize prescribed burning techniques to mimic historic fire regimes and wet meadow restoration projects occurring on private lands. Participants engaged in great discussions around how the LIT can support more cross-boundary implementation; what's required to make project implementation successful; and how this group of diverse stakeholders can work together to identify and implement shared priorities.



Figure 5. Hampton Butte Field Tour

Other Prineville LIT Updates

FWS BIL FUNDING: BARBWIRE JUNIPER REMOVAL PROJECT

Planning efforts between DSL, Pheasants Forever, and the contractor were underway during this reporting period: funds from FY22 and 23 are scheduled for implementation during the next two reporting periods. These funds will be spent to remove approximately 1,230 acres of Phase I juniper expansion. DSL and Pheasants Forever submitted another funding proposal in April to remove an additional/adjacent 764 acres of Phase I; they hope to find out whether their proposal was accepted during the next reporting period.



VALE

No LIT events were convened during this reporting period.

December, 2022, Pheasants Forever (PF), on behalf of the Vale LIT, applied for an OWEB Partnership Technical Assistance grant to hire a Vale-specific LIT Coordinator. During this reporting period, PF and the LIT partners learned that the proposal was recommended to receive funds by the OWEB board but ranked low enough that funds ran out to support this proposal. Partners will need to go back to the drawing board to decide how to proceed but may consider applying for an OWEB Open Solicitation grant or seeking out other opportunities to secure funding for a new position. Overall, the feedback from OWEB was positive and it should be easy for the group to address OWEB's concerns and repackage this initial proposal for other funding opportunities.

Vale and Baker partners learned that the US Fish and Wildlife Service grant was awarded to the two LITs through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program. This funding will support approximately 14,400 acres of invasive annual grass and Phase I and II juniper removal treatments on private lands adjacent to state and federally administered lands. The proposal was initially outlined by the two LITs during the FY22 FWS Sagebrush Conservation BIL grant offering and then repackaged/re-submitted to the PFW program. This experience continues to serve as a concrete example demonstrating the importance and benefits of investing time upfront in developing cross-boundary, multi-stakeholder plans, and implementation strategies; the initial proposal was partially funded, then FWS biologists were able to react quickly and submit the proposal to another funding pool which allowed the LITs to acquire the remaining funds.

FWS BIL FUNDING: INVASIVE ANNUAL GRASS AERIAL SPRAY TREATMENT

Planning efforts between Malheur County Weed Department, Pheasants Forever, and the contractor were underway during this reporting period. Rejuvra spray treatments that utilized FY22 funds were implemented in April allowing us to treat approximately 1,500 acres of IAGs of private land within the Crowley sage-grouse PAC. FY23 funds to treat an additional 1,500 acres within the same area are scheduled for implementation this fall.