



Partner Update
OREGON SAGE-GROUSE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

<https://sageconpartnership.com/lit>

Reporting Period: July - September 2023

Prepared by,

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**Julie Unfried (Prineville and Vale LIT Coordinator) accepted a new position as a Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service out of the La Grande Office. Julie's last day with Pheasants Forever (and as a LIT Coordinator) will be October 27th. She is excited about her new role and especially excited that she will continue to work in collaboration with partners in SE Oregon.*

**Emmy Tyrell (CCAA Coordinator, Powder Basin Watershed Council, Baker City) accepted a new position as a Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service out of the La Grande Office. Emmy's last day will be November 17th.*

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

- The Baker LIT has entered the third and final biennium under the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Focus Investment Partnership (FIP) grant. As a result, the Baker LIT is beginning to update and revise the partnership's [Threat Reduction Plan \(TRP\)](#). On September 6th, the LIT had its first TRP Revision Subcommittee meeting. LIT members began to work through updating the structure of the TRP and Baker's Overarching Conservation Needs. In addition, members dived deep into identifying tools and new information to use when updating the partnership's strategy for prioritizing conservation actions. The next TRP Revision Subcommittee meeting will be held in November at a date TBD.
- The Baker LIT was awarded funding for two juniper cutting projects in core sage-grouse habitat; one targets mesic/brood-rearing habitat and one targets upland and mesic areas known to support birds (Fig. 1). Each project proposal is briefly described below:
 - The Baker LIT was awarded \$100,000 for the FY24 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services (FWS) Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) grant to implement mesic protection and restoration projects within the Baker Priority Area for Conservation (PAC). Initial conservation efforts will go towards juniper cutting in mesic areas important to sage-grouse during the late summer brood-



rearing period. Projects under this grant are part of a long-term effort to identify mesic resources within the Baker PAC and prioritize mesic conservation actions.

- The second juniper-cutting project proposal was co-submitted by the Vale LIT and Baker LIT. Efforts will focus on juniper removal in upland and mesic portions of high-use sage-grouse habitat. This project will assist with expanding available habitat within the Baker PAC while also improving connectivity between Baker's semi-isolated population and sage-grouse populations in the Vale District.
- On August 28th and 29th, Oregon State University Extension Services successfully hosted a Restoring Riparian Habitats Field Training in Baker City (Fig. 2). During the workshop, participants were able to use the newly published [Threat-based Management Guide for Creek, Streams and Rivers](#), to assess the health and function of riparian habitats. This provided the basis for in-depth discussions on how to plan, implement, and monitor mesic restoration projects across land types and ownerships.
- In August, LIT members from Powder Basin Watershed Council, Tri-County CWMA, and Baker County attended a Prescribed Grazing Management workshop hosted by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Redmond, Oregon. LIT members were exposed to different resources for developing grazing management plans including fencing strategies, remote-sensing tools for estimating range production, rotation methods, and more. Information learned in this workshop will support the LIT in assisting landowners enrolled in

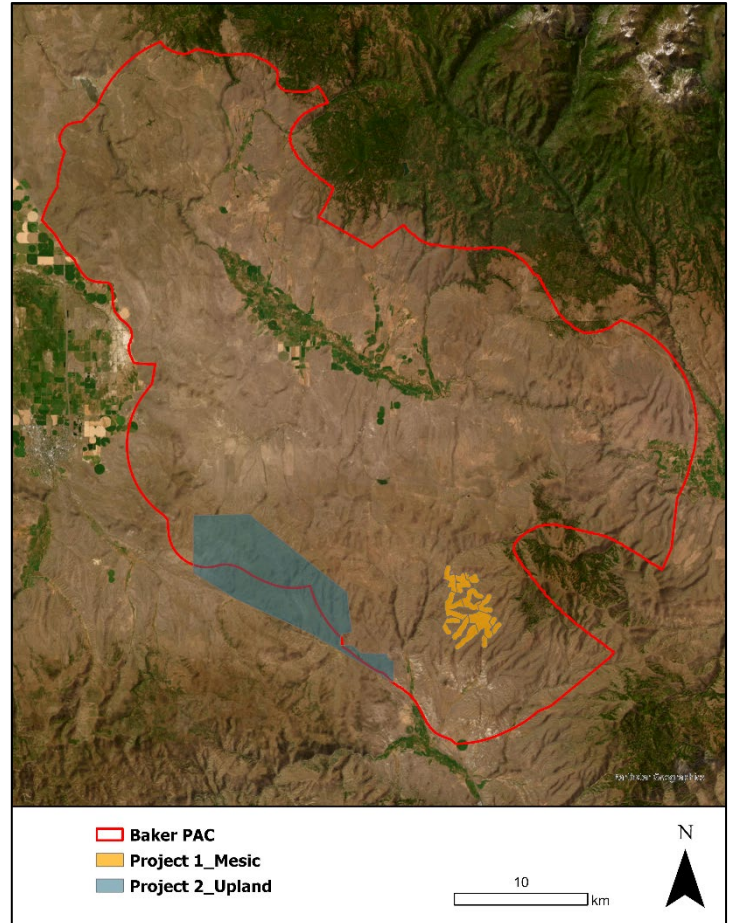


Figure 1. Map depicting two project locations for juniper removal within the Baker PAC.



Figure 2. Participants at the Restoring Riparian Habitats Field Training come together to assess stream health on Camp Creek in Baker City.



conservation programs in developing grazing management plans to promote sustainable livestock operations and healthy sagebrush habitat.

- In collaboration with Baker Sanitary Service, the LIT submitted a FIP restoration grant to fund the construction of a carcass disposal station (compost site) at Baker Sanitary Service's landfill south of Baker City. This project is part of long-term effort aimed at reducing raven depredation of sage-grouse nests by reducing raven subsidies (e.g., carcasses) in sagebrush habitat. Construction of the carcass disposal site is well underway (Fig. 3) and is slated to be finished by the end of October. In addition to constructing a compost site, the Baker LIT is partnering with the Baker County Wolf Depredation Compensation Committee, USDA Wildlife Services, and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife to remove predator/scavenger attractants (i.e., carrion) by designing and implementing a carcass pick-up program that will assist private landowners with transporting carcasses to the compost site. The pilot year for the carcass pick-up program is slated to begin in January.



Figure 3. Groundwork progress for the construction of the carcass disposal station. Next, contractors will lay an asphalt pad.

BURNS

Harney County Soil and Water Conservation District asked members of the LIT to provide feedback on their Fall 2023 OWEB FIP application. The Harney County SWCD is seeking funding to support the Oregon All Counties CCAA Steering Committee and their portion of the application seeks to involve BLM and EcoSource Native Seed to start restoration efforts in Jack Mountain and surrounding lands where the Miller Homestead fires occurred in 2012. This portion of the FIP application proposes to strategically plant sagebrush and native grasses with the goal of improving the vegetation structure of the fire scar to prevent habitat loss and coordinate cross-boundary restoration on private and federal lands. Members of the LIT were willing to help the SWCD by providing proposal reviews to provide feedback and are hopeful that reviews would help provide a supportive leg up on providing funding for work in sage grouse habitat.

The Burns LIT developing a Threats Reduction Plan is in the works and is currently being edited as the planning process is waiting for the ODFW sage grouse habitat maps to be completed and adopted in December. Currently, portions of the document have had a light review from a few LIT members and will be released for full LIT review and will continue to be worked on as the habitat maps are finished. From the LIT meeting held in August, the newly updated maps will need to be reexamined on how the LIT would need to manage work



across the vast landscape and would need to determine the scale of how LIT will try to prioritize work. The next steps will be to have partners have a full review of the LIT documents and have the group determine what will be the parameters for updating action areas, where priority work should be, and how to effectively break up the landscape to improve Burns district sage grouse collaborative work. Both Lakeview and Burns LIT with their TRPs are similar in development of the each respected TRP

LAKEVIEW

Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Department of State Lands (DSL), Hart Mountain National Antelope Range (USFWS), Lake County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), and Pheasants Forever (PF) were notified by USFWS that they will be receiving \$171,000 from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). This is the first awarded funding for LIT partners since reestablishing the LIT. BIL fund treatments include retreatment of CCAA juniper, new phase 1 juniper treatment with DSL and USWFS, and IAG treatments. The current planned treatment of projects includes areas in the South Warner project area and the Tri-Corners Community Collaborative (TCC) focal area. The group held a meeting in October to determine where the funding first round of funding will be used. The agreement was made with the partners to complete the retreatment of the Phase I juniper in the SWCD Twenty Mile and Pope Springs project areas and start working on the DSL Guano Valley Phase I juniper.

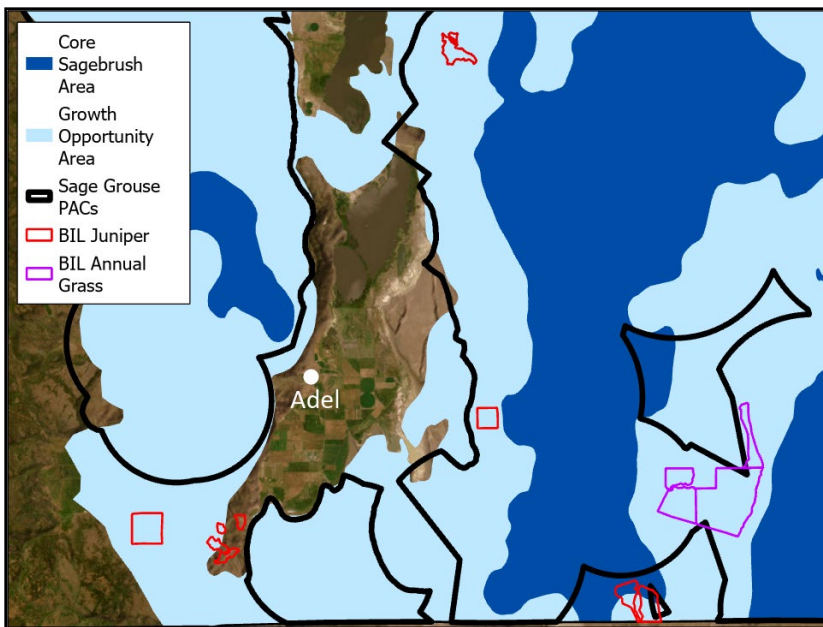


Figure 4: FY23 BIL projects across the Lakeview LIT. Juniper projects range from retreatment of CCAA projects to Phase I juniper. The range of lands includes federal, state, and private ownership.

Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge and Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge are gearing up in the next year to update both refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP). Hart Mountain CCP has not been updated since 1994 and with the new update, Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge will also be added to the new plan. As the USFWS updates its CCP, one additional need in the plan will be a completed Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) with the planning process. [LCD](#) provides the opportunity to create a national wildlife refuge -level actions contribute to a landscape-level vision. A landscape that covers a large geographic area has many habitats, conditions, and human uses. The LCD provides the opportunity to create a recipe for functional landscapes and is a long-term process in which flexibility and adaptive management are paramount. This adaptive management

approach can focus on learning and adapting, through partnerships of managers, scientists, and other stakeholders who collaborate on how to create and maintain sustainable ecosystems. Shannon Ludwig, along with the LIT and SageCon will be assisting in a community-developed LCD within the Hart Sheldon complex and lands in the Beatys Butte area.



The Tri-Corners Community Collaborative started to resume monthly meetings. The group has taken the time to develop a common ground document for the collaboration. This document was developed to create a helpful reference to guide its activities going forward with the TCC. More specifically, this document is intended to support the collaboration in efficiently identifying and pursuing mutually beneficial, high-priority actions, projects, and outcomes. Conversely, at times, this document may help the Collaborative steer away from actions, projects, and topics that are less likely to be viewed as productive or valuable by the full group. With these documented values and priorities, the group has moved reviewing the ecostate map in order for participants to provide on the ground local knowledge of potential starting areas of work.

PRINEVILLE

Pheasants Forever (PF) and Department of State Lands (DSL) [were notified by USFWS](#) that they will be awarded another \$150,000 to continue juniper treatments within the Barbwire DSL allotment. Funding will again come through the Sagebrush Conservation BIL funding pool. Treatments for current awards will begin this winter. To date, PF and DSL have been allocated \$390,078 which will allow them to treat approximately 2,000 acres of Phase I and II juniper expansion. Treating the Barbwire allotment will be an important investment for various reasons:

- The allotment is enrolled in the CCAA program and falls adjacent to similar treatments on private lands and BLM-administered lands.
- According to the Sagebrush Conservation Design and SageCon’s Ecostate Maps, the Barbwire allotment falls predominantly within a “Core Sagebrush Area” and “Good – Intermediate Condition Shrubland (A and A-C)” respectively.
- The treatment area falls within ODFW’s DRAFT 2023 Sage-Grouse Core Habitat boundary.

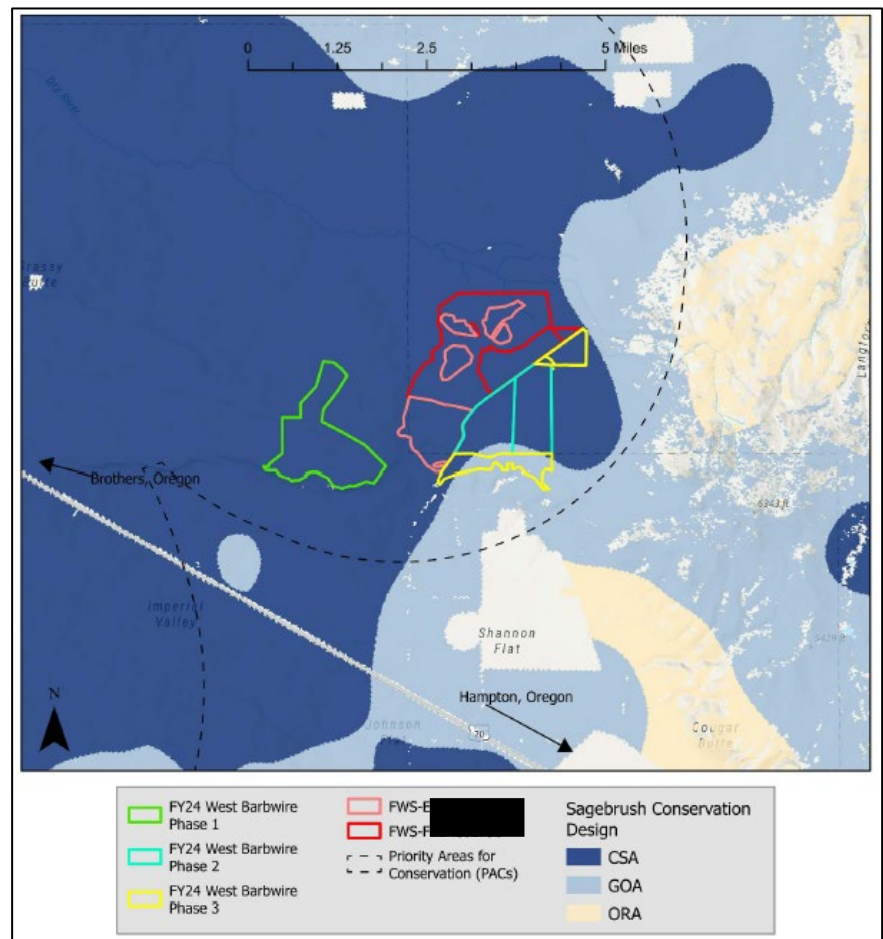


Figure 5: DSL Barbwire allotment. Pastures outlined in pink and red were funded with FY22 and FY23 monies. Pasture outlined in green will receive FY24 monies.



OSU Extension and SageCon are working with members of the Prineville LIT to develop a two-part strategic conservation workshop. Part one (December 12th) will be open to all LIT partners and will ask them to use the Prineville TRP, local knowledge, and technical/scientific resources to develop geographic priorities for cross-boundary implementation. Part two will ask implementers working on private and publicly administered lands within those priority areas to home in on those geographies to identify specific actions toward cross-boundary implementation. Similar workshops have taken place at SageCon Summit and Society for Range Management meetings.



Figure 6: Threat Based Strategic Conservation Workshop at the 2022 SageCon Summit. This example portrays the exercise we plan to replicate with the Prineville LIT this winter.

VALE

The Vale LIT convened a meeting with US Fish and Wildlife Service, Malheur Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Malheur Watershed Council, Malheur County Weed Department, and Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area to identify action items necessary to start implementing the \$1.7 million BIL funding PF was awarded by FWS in July 2023. All partners are working diligently to move projects through clearance requirements, and we hope to start implementing as soon as November 2023. This project will focus on spraying invasive annual grasses (IAGs) and removing juniper on private lands.



Figure 7: Sagebrush Conservation BIL funding was used to treat 3,176 acres of IAGs on private and state administered lands southeast of Juntura, OR.



IAG spray treatments for the FY23 Sagebrush Conservation BIL funding were implemented this fall on another 1,600 acres of private and Department of State Lands southeast of Juntura, OR. To date, the Sagebrush Conservation BIL funding allocated to PF in Malheur County has allowed us to work in partnership with the Malheur County Weed Department, Department of State Lands and one private landowner to treat 3,176 acres of invasive annual grasses.

The Malheur Rangeland Strategy (MRS) is a new locally driven work group that met for the first time in September 2023. In their first meeting, the group agreed they need to define a clear purpose and develop a mission and vision statement to establish a collective understanding among this diverse set of partners. The Malheur NRCS Field Office and the Owyhee Watershed Council (NRCS) are leading this effort and have gained formal support from the Malheur Watershed Council and Malheur SWCD, and verbal support from BLM, ODFW, OSU Extension, and Malheur County Court; private landowners who attended the meeting were also supportive of MRS. The group will meet again in early November 2023. Additionally, Nicole Sullivan (OWC) and Lynn Larsen (NRCS) presented at and participated in the 2022 and 2023 SageCon Summits and have since made plans with OSU Extension and SageCon to host a Threat-Based Strategic Conservation workshop in the MRS space. These efforts overlap well with the purpose of the Vale LIT.