



PARTNERING TO CONSERVE

# SAGEBRUSH

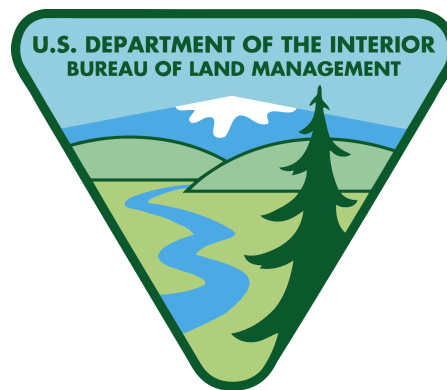
RANGELANDS

2018 Annual Report

## Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands Annual Report: October 1, 2017 - September 30, 2018

Access electronic digital copy here:  
[www.partnersinthesage.com/2018-annual-report](http://www.partnersinthesage.com/2018-annual-report)

*The purpose of this document is to provide a FY 2018 annual report on the partnership accomplishments of the intra-agency agreement between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV). The agreement was signed in June 2016 and provides up to \$5 million over five years (2016-2021) to implement proactive, targeted sagebrush rangeland conservation actions on public and private lands through voluntary collaboration and partnership.*



INTERMOUNTAIN WEST  
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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Putting Science Into Practice</b>	<b>4</b>
Joint Tracking of Conifer Removal Across the West	4
Wetland Resilience and Resistance in Sagebrush Ecosystems (Mesic)	4
Ecosystem Services: Quantifying Trends in Rangeland Health	5
Science Communications	5
<hr/>	
<b>Technical Transfer</b>	<b>6</b>
2018 Society for Range Management Conference Live Broadcast	6
NRCS SGI Strategic Watershed Action Team Annual Workshop	6
Riparian and Wet Meadow Restoration: Place-Based Technical Assistance	7
<hr/>	
<b>Restoring and Conserving Sagebrush Habitat</b>	<b>8</b>
Strategic Conservation in the Sagebrush Ecosystem	8
Summary of Field Level Capacity	8
Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance (Utah)	9
Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership	9
Bi-State Local Area Working Group (California/Nevada)	11
NRCS SGI Shared Positions (Idaho/Wyoming)	12
Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership	13
Outcome Based Grazing Demonstration Projects	14
Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network	15
Oregon’s Local Implementation Teams	16
<hr/>	
<b>Telling the Story</b>	<b>17</b>
Web Portal: PartnersInTheSage.com	17
Story Map: Partnerships in Action	18
Social Media Campaign: SageWest-People of the Sage (2018 Series)	18
Feature Stories & Fact Sheets	19
<hr/>	
<b>Partnerships &amp; Coordination</b>	<b>20</b>
Funding Accomplishments	20
Partnership Expansion	20
Continued Partnership with NRCS SGI	21
Team Support: Innovation, Flexibility, and Coordination	21
<hr/>	

## Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) entered into a formal partnership in June 2016 to improve sagebrush conservation on public and private lands. This work is being accomplished by increasing voluntary collaboration and partnerships, improving science and technology transfer, advancing communications, as well as implementing projects in the field. The partnership is based on the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI), a model for voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private lands across the west.

The link between voluntary private land conservation and successful resource management of sagebrush habitat on public lands is essential. *The BLM-IWJV partnership's aim is to coordinate cross-boundary management and restoration of sagebrush lands for people, wildlife and local economies.*

An important foundation for this partnership was the [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) between NRCS, BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that was signed in April 2016 to provide a framework for the agencies to collaborate and achieve common goals related to sagebrush habitat conservation. The MOU cited six areas of emphasis: (1) controlling invading conifers; (2) implementing practices across land ownerships to reduce the risk of fire and invasive species; (3) restoring and enhancing wet-meadow habitat; (4) developing science tools that refine delivery of conservation practices, track implementation, assess benefits, and quantify biological outcomes; (5) coordinating communications; and, (6) coordinating range structural improvements, where appropriate. In June 2016, the BLM and IWJV signed an intra-agency agreement (hereafter, BLM-IWJV partnership) designed to help meet the objectives of the MOU.

The agreement provides up to \$5 million over five years (2016-2021) to accomplish the six goals. To date, \$4.448 million has been transferred to the IWJV with partners contributing an additional \$2.908 million in funds and in-kind services, for a total \$7.356 million that is furthering collaborative sagebrush habitat conservation.

Together, the BLM-IWJV partnership accomplished the following important results in 2018:

- 102 completed projects
- 66,154 acres impacted with a diversity of conservation treatments
- \$3.226 million in project funding
- 387 partners engaged
- 116 landowner visits
- 72 forums created for public and partners to work together through meetings, field tours, outreach, and educational events

It was an important year to hit our partnership stride with accomplishments and impacts that will form the bedrock for collaboration at multiple scales across the west. The IWJV is pleased to share this second annual report with the BLM and our partners.



Funding from this agreement supports science projects coordinated by NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Science Advisor Dr. Dave Naugle with the University of Montana, a team of scientists and cooperating universities. The overall goal is to conduct science-based evaluations to spatially prioritize conservation treatments, measure the biological response of sage-grouse and sagebrush obligate species to conservation treatments, monitor collective efforts to determine outcomes and support adaptive management of conservation program and projects. Below is a summary of products and accomplishments that increased our collective scientific knowledge and ability to implement sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat conservation.

#### **Joint Tracking of Conifer Removal Across the West**

Using satellite imagery, the University of Montana worked with Colorado State University to map conifer cover over time and allows partners to visualize the extent of conifer removal on an annual basis, quantify cumulative conservation outcomes, and identify potential partnership projects for the future.

- *Decision Support Tool:* [SGI Interactive Web Application Tree Canopy Cover](#): The current digital layer includes National Agriculture Imagery Program imagery from 2011-2016.
- *Pending Manuscript:* Reinhardt, Jason R. et. al. Invasion meets innovation: Using remote-mapping to assess effectiveness of pinyon-juniper reduction in North America's sagebrush-steppe. 2019.

#### **Wetland Resilience and Resistance in Sagebrush Ecosystems (Mesic)**

In 2017, NRCS published a geospatial dataset that maps and characterizes wetland resources throughout the western U.S. identifying sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat on both private and public lands (funded in part by this partnership). In 2018, an annual update was made to this dataset and deployed on the [SGI interactive web application](#) where it can be easily accessed and used by managers to help guide conservation targeting and outcome-based evaluations of treatments. In addition, the University of Montana-NRCS-IWJV team completed analyses of: hydrologic regimes that influence mesic area function and resistance to drought; the role of hydrologic regimes in the various life stages of sage-grouse; and, riparian and wet meadow restoration outcomes. These analyses are described in detail in the publications listed below.

#### *Resulting Manuscripts:*

- Donnelly, Patrick et al. [Seasonal drought in North America's sagebrush biome structures dynamic mesic resources for sage-grouse](#). 2018.
- Silverman, Nicholas et al. [Low-tech riparian and wet meadow restoration increases vegetation productivity and resilience across semiarid rangelands](#). 2018.

### **Ecosystem Services: Quantifying Trends in Rangeland Health**

In September 2018, the University of Montana launched the [Rangeland Analysis Platform](#) (RAP). This public online application, funded by the BLM-IWJV partnership, provides simple and fast access to geospatial data characterizing western U.S. rangelands (e.g., percent shrub, tree and annual/perennial grass cover). The tool was developed to provide landowners, resource managers, conservationists and scientists access to data that can inform land management planning, decision-making and the evaluation of outcomes. The maps and data provided by the RAP are intended to be used alongside local knowledge and site-specific data to inform management actions that improve rangelands and wildlife habitat. For more information, see the [RAP Fact Sheet](#) and [User Guide](#).

#### *Resulting Manuscripts:*

- Jones, Matthew O. et al. [Innovation in rangeland monitoring: annual, 30 m, plant functional type percent cover maps for U.S. rangelands, 1984-2017](#). 2018.
- Robinson, Nathaniel P. et al. [Terrestrial primary production for the conterminous United States derived from Landsat 30 m and MODIS 250 m](#). 2018.

### **Science Communications**

*Press Release:* John Carlson, BLM Montana/Dakotas Sage-Grouse Implementation Lead, and IWJV staff collaborated this BLM-internal press release: [New Technology for Land Managers Revolutionizes Rangeland Monitoring](#).

*Presentations:* (1) NRCS presented the RAP to BLM staff via webinar on September 25, 2018. Target audiences included BLM wildlife biologists and rangeland specialists. (2) John Carlson and Colin Dovichin, Montana/Dakotas Monitoring Lead, presented the RAP to staff at all MT/DK BLM field offices. Target audiences included BLM wildlife biologists and rangeland specialists. They also demonstrated the potential use of the RAP to other resource specialists within MT/DK BLM, including Fuels and Planning staff.

#### Google Analytics: September through December 2018

- 4,298 unique users, 7,257 sessions, and 16,108 page views
- Average session duration is 2:38 min; of those that use the app, an average of 5:25 min



*From left to right: (1) The RAP app was launched in September 2018. (2) This online tool provides powerful information to help landowners and resource managers track vegetation through time and plan actions to improve sagebrush rangelands. (3) Wet meadow restoration structures are low-cost, low-maintenance, and high-benefit conservation practices.*



The actionability of science depends on how well the decision support tools and latest research are translated to managers and partners that are implementing restoration and management strategies. The BLM-IWJV partnership creates opportunities to learn and transfer knowledge and expertise through workshops, webinars and site-level field assistance.

### **2018 Society for Range Management Conference Live Broadcast**

**Event:** Live Conference Broadcast

**Date:** January 2018

**Attendees:** 80-100 in person, 400-600 via remote live stream

**Outcomes/Products:** Two online videos and one supporting webpage (links below)

Following the successful model of providing technical support at the 2017 Society for Range Management (SRM) Conference, SGI, BLM, IWJV and Utah State University collaborated for a second year to provide videography and staff support for two special sessions in January 2018:

- [Restoring and Managing the Emerald Islands of the Sagebrush Sea: New Science, Sticks and Stones and the Eager Beaver](#)
- [A Strategic, Multi-scale Approach for Managing Threats to Sagebrush Ecosystems Based on Resilience and Resistance Concepts](#)

In attendance were 80 to 100 people, with an additional 400 to 600 remote viewers of the live stream. The IWJV facilitated learning about important findings by acting as a liaison between the actual event and managers/practitioners not able to attend the SRM conference. A total of 3,000 agency partners were invited to attend (including 300 BLM staff). The conference proceedings were posted on a [webpage](#) along with other BLM science on climate adaptation strategies.

### **NRCS SGI Strategic Watershed Action Team Annual Workshop**

**Event:** Field-based Workshop

**Date:** May 2018

**Attendees:** 135 conservation partners

**Outcomes/Products:** Lessons and photos from the workshop (see link below)

More than 135 conservation partners met in Boise, Idaho, during SGI's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop, titled Combating Wildfire and Weeds, in May 2018. The workshop focused on wildfire, weeds and rangeland restoration. Over the course of two days, participants heard from ranchers, firefighters, researchers, local nonprofits and public land managers about the amazing results

that come from working together locally to achieve a shared vision: healthy sagebrush rangelands for people and wildlife. The 2015 Soda Fire was the highlight of the field tour, giving participants the opportunity to learn about recovery efforts to restore more than 280,000 acres of sagebrush in Idaho and Oregon. Funds from the partnership agreement supported the workshop in collaboration with SGI, Idaho BLM and others. Learn more here: [Lessons and Photos from SGI's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop: Combating Wildfire and Weeds.](#)

### **Riparian and Wet Meadow Restoration: Place-based Technical Assistance and Support**

**Event:** Field-based Technical Consult and Training

**Dates:** September & October 2018

**Attendees:** 30 conservation partners

**Outcomes/Products:** Technical skill transfer via hands-on training

In 2018, BIO-Logic Inc., a natural resource consulting firm, was contracted to provide technical assistance to BLM, NRCS and local partners seeking to launch local projects using Zeedyk and other restoration techniques. These services were targeted in priority landscapes where partners are working collaboratively to address mesic habitats to benefit sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems, one of the six objectives of the MOU between NRCS, BLM and USFS. Support was provided to the first of three pilot sites in Susanville, California (BLM Eagle Lake Field Office). BIO-Logic's Shawn Conner and NRCS Sagebrush Ecosystem Specialist Jeremy Maestas organized a planning team and hosted two separate site visits (September 10-14; October 15-19). The first trip involved meeting partners, understanding wet meadow restoration challenges and opportunities on private and BLM-managed lands, and preparing for the demonstration training event in October. The second trip featured a three-day training in the field with class presentations. Jeremy and Shawn presented on increasing resilience of mesic and wet meadow habitats through application of low-tech restoration structures, Zeedyk principles and restoration structure design and implementation. Nearly 30 people attended including: private landowners, California Mule Deer Association, Point Blue Conservation Science, NRCS, Nevada Department of Wildlife, BLM, Lassen Land and Trails Trust, Lassen County, Honey Lake Valley RCD/BLM permittee and UC Cooperative Extension. Of the 30 participants, 13 were BLM staff including the local BLM Field Office Manager, Brian Novosak.



*From left to right: (1) The Strategic Watershed Action Team Annual Workshop brought partners from across the country together to tour the Soda Fire and hear the lessons partners learned. (2) The presentations recorded at SRM are available on IWJV and SGI's YouTube platforms. (3) Participants attending the mesic restoration workshops were taught how to "read the landscape" and "think like water."*





A major aspect of the BLM-IWJV partnership agreement involves creating demonstration projects and providing field capacity to accelerate, coordinate and/or streamline conservation treatments in sagebrush habitats. These partnership-driven positions help address bottlenecks or hurdles identified by the BLM and its partners.

### **Strategic Conservation in the Sagebrush Ecosystem**

Investments in field capacity are helping the BLM, NRCS, USFS, USFWS, states, private landowners and other partners remove conifers, address fire and invasives, restore wet meadow habitats and implement range structural improvements, based on the latest science, research, and outcome-based monitoring. These field positions are key to ensuring that effective, efficient and resilient conservation happens in priority landscapes in the sagebrush ecosystem. The BLM and local communities are seeing tangible results.

#### **➤ *Cross-Boundary Conservation***

Conservation is happening across ownership and agency boundaries. As partner-based positions, each of these individuals brings important collaboration expertise and project coordination skills that ensure multiple stakeholders are engaged in planning, implementation, communications, outreach and monitoring.

#### **➤ *Durable, Adaptive and Lasting Partnerships at the Right Scale***

Maintaining high-functioning partnerships takes time, trust, talent and patience. These field positions, placed strategically in the right landscapes, are focused on developing durable, adaptive and lasting conservation partnerships that benefit communities and wildlife for generations to come.

### **Summary of Field Level Capacity**

Funds in this agreement are currently [supporting 9 field positions or contracts](#) in California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Utah ([see this map](#)). Each of these projects was reviewed and approved by the BLM Management Oversight Group (MOG). Following are 2018 accomplishments for each position.

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**PROJECT DELIVERY:****Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance**  
**Landscape Coordinator****Tremonton, Utah**

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**Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Increase field capacity for collaborative sagebrush conservation
- Improve cross-agency, cross-partner conservation and communication
- Increase efficiencies in managing public land uses and implementing restoration projects in sagebrush ecosystems

The Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance (SEA) was created in 2017. The BLM West Desert District Office and Salt Lake City Field Office requested funding to support a Landscape Coordinator to support the SEA. The first full year of implementation was 2018. Local, state and federal sagebrush plans and initiatives are being addressed through the SEA.

**Overview of Capacity**

Total Projects Planned: 11  
Total Projects Completed: 4  
Total Acres Impacted: 8,656  
Total Project Funding: \$2,323,860  
Partners Engaged: 12  
# of Landowner Visits: 75

**Partnership Accomplishments**

One position in Tremonton NRCS/BLM office  
Conifers Removed: 5,401 acres  
Fuels Treatment: 3,055 acres  
Veg Treatment/Enhancement: 6,442 acres  
Fence Modification: 11 miles  
Wet Meadows Restored: 200 acres

**Key Outcome: Cross-Agency Coordination & Collaboration**

Multiple local plans and initiatives are being addressed including: West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management Plan; Box Elder County Resource Management Plan, Utah State Resource Management Plan; Utah Sage-Grouse Management Plan; and Utah Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse. All plans emphasize significant need to expand and improve sage-grouse seasonal habitats. This position assists in fulfilling that need by uniquely collaborating with each partner. The SEA Coordinator attends monthly staff meetings with BLM and NRCS. If work is discussed that could be expanded by involving other agencies, the coordinator then proposes specific projects to meet those needs. Additionally, the Coordinator attends monthly Conservation District meetings to collaborate with local landowners to gauge interest and propose various projects to the landowners. Finally, the Coordinator attends the West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management Committee Meetings to propose projects, gather input and review other projects that are proposed in the area. Without the Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance Coordinator as liaison between the various stakeholders, the rate of projects proposed and implemented would be smaller in scope or not possible as a result of challenges in coordination and communication.

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**PROJECT DELIVERY:****Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership (SMSP)**  
**Sagebrush Conservation Coordinator****Dillon, Montana**

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**Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Enhance coordination among partners (e.g., schedule, organize and facilitate meetings)

- Improve project management (e.g., define priorities and implement coordinated actions across jurisdictional boundaries)
- Build strategic outreach/communications (e.g., build relationships outside southwest Montana, develop brochures for landowners and communicate success stories)

The Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership hired a Coordinator in June 2018. Despite only being on board for half of 2018, the Coordinator delivered strong progress on all these objectives, particularly in partner coordination and project management. The Coordinator helped members of the SMSP coordinate and fund projects to restore and enhance sagebrush habitat, and enhanced field delivery of conservation actions across southwest Montana. Partner coordination and project management primarily focused on three types of projects: conifer treatment, wetland/wet meadow restoration and mesic habitat restoration.

#### **Overview of Capacity**

Total Projects Planned: 11  
 Total Projects Completed: 9  
 Total Acres Impacted: 3,248  
 Total Project Funding: \$259,053  
 Partners Engaged: 14  
 Partnership Meetings/Field Tours: 7  
 # of Landowner Visits: 1

#### **Partnership Accomplishments**

One position in Dillon BLM office  
 Conifers Removed: 3,207 acres  
 Wet Meadows: 41 acres  
 Mesic Structures Installed: 347  
 Mesic Habitat Preserved/Restored: 2 miles

#### **Key Outcome: Bringing Partners Together with Responsive, Efficient Plan for Conifer Treatment**

The SMSP Coordinator played a crucial role in restoring thousands of acres of sagebrush steppe habitat. In mid-June 2018, a gathering of the SMSP core advisory team organized by the Coordinator revealed an immediate opportunity for this new position to assist agency partners. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the BLM had identified nearly 700 acres of conifer expansion creeping into a sage-grouse Priority Habitat Management Area (PHMA) on BLM managed lands near Badger Pass, outside of Dillon. The NEPA was complete but funding had not come through. Aware of another contract scheduled for cutting within the next two weeks, the possibility for cost efficiencies, and a source of funding through another member of SMSP, the Coordinator acted quickly. By early July, the Coordinator had facilitated 805 acres of conifer removal on BLM and private lands. During that same period, the Coordinator helped to facilitate an additional 2,400 acres of conifer expansion treatments in the Medicine Lodge drainage. The SMSP relied on the Coordinator for contract administration and inspection. More information can be found in the [2018 SMSP Accomplishments and Impacts Report](#).

*“As the SMSP Coordinator, Sean Claffey facilitated several important projects that we would not have been able to complete without his assistance. Projects include conifer removal in priority sage-grouse habitat, as well as mesic restoration that will enhance and expand sage-grouse nesting and brood rearing habitat. In addition, through Sean's coordination, we have been able to save a significant amount of money per acre by having a contractor work on several projects across boundaries with several different funding sources.”*

- Pat Fosse, BLM Dillon, Montana Field Office

*“The momentum for conservation across the sagebrush landscape in the High Divide region of southwest Montana has been building for years and Sean Claffey has not only kept the*

*momentum going, but he has elevated it to an astonishing level. The BLM/IWJV partnership has been the key ingredient to getting this partnership off the ground and catalyzing a local partnership that is focused on cross boundary conservation efforts. These are exciting times for landscape conservation in southwest Montana and I look forward to what Sean and the partnership will accomplish in the upcoming years.”*

- Kyle Tackett, MT NRCS Resource Conservationist for Initiatives

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**PROJECT DELIVERY:**

**Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG)**  
**Data & Communication Coordinator**

**Bishop, California**

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**Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Increase effectiveness and efficiency in meeting reporting and accountability requirements
- Broaden outreach to more of the Bi-State community
- Free up precious time for agency staff to focus on their primary job of getting conservation done on the ground
- Coordinate actions across ownership boundaries for seamless conservation

The Bi-State Sage-Grouse Data and Communication Coordinator position was created to build upon the platform of success established by the [Local Area Working Group \(LAWG\)](#) and to facilitate the coordination of partners across the Bi-State area to implement habitat preservation, restoration and monitoring of sage-grouse habitat and populations. Because this work is carried out by a network of federal, state, local and private stakeholders, the Bi-State Coordinator serves as a point of contact for all partners and manages a Bi-State specific database to improve data consistency, quality and ease of annual reporting. In this capacity, the Bi-State Coordinator is able to facilitate the work of the stakeholders, grow partnerships and champion sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystem conservation through public education and outreach.

**Overview of Capacity**

Total Projects Planned: \*  
Total Projects Completed: 68  
Total Acres Impacted: 13,402  
Total Project Funding: n/a  
Partners Engaged: 302+  
Partnership Meetings/Field Tours: 26  
Outreach/Educational/Volunteer Events: 17

**Partnership Accomplishments**

One position in Bishop BLM office  
Conservation Easements: 4,155 acres  
Conifers Removed: 3,131 acres  
Annual/Noxious Weeds Treated: 55 acres  
Fence Marking: 14.6 miles  
Wet Meadows: 688 acres  
Wildlife Escape Ramps Installed: 6  
Population Monitoring (PMUs): 5

\*Meeting scheduled April 2019 to review 2018 progress and plan for field season.

**Key Outcome: Bi-State Collaborative Demonstrates Continued Success**

In 2018, members of the Bi-State LAWG completed 68 projects involving 302+ partners across the Bi-State region. These projects were carried out by the Inyo and Humboldt Toiyabe National Forests, California and Nevada BLM, US Geological Survey, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife, National Resources Conservation Service, Nevada State

Parks, Mono County, local land trusts, nonprofit agencies and private landowners. After seven years of implementation, much has been accomplished but there is still work to be done. Partnerships remain strong and active, and the Bi-State Action Plan, while flexible, remains the guiding framework for continuing Bi-State LAWG efforts. More information can be found in the [2018 Accomplishment Report](#).

*“The Bi-State Local Area Working Group has diligently worked across jurisdictional boundaries to conserve Bi-State sage-grouse habitat for many years, and has been touted nationally as a model for conservation success.”*

- Sherri Lisius-BLM Bishop, California Field Office

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#### **PROJECT DELIVERY:**

**NRCS SGI Shared Positions  
Range and Wildlife Conservationists**

**Burley, Idaho; Lander, Wyoming**

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#### **Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Support shared positions that fulfill the intent of the [NRCS-BLM-USFS MOU](#)
- Help provide stop-gap funding for positions in priority landscapes through September 2019

SGI, IWJV and BLM have been partnering for almost a decade to help ensure western rangelands stay productive and sustainable for local landowners and communities and also for the wildlife that depend on them. Two locations in the west have not only accomplished landscape level conservation and habitat enhancement but they have also improved the relationships between private landowners and lessees with state and federal partners. The positions responsible for this are located in Burley, Idaho (BLM Burley Field Office) and Lander, Wyoming (BLM Lander Field Office).

#### **Overview of Capacity**

Total Projects Planned: 34  
Total Projects Completed: 21  
Total Acres Impacted: 38,173  
Total Project Funding: \$643,277  
# of Meetings Facilitated/Field Tours: 2  
Partners Engaged: 10  
# of Landowner Visits: 40

#### **Partnership Accomplishments**

One position in BLM Burley Office  
One position in BLM Lander Office  
Conifers Removed: 4,221 acres  
Veg Management/Enhancement: 109 acres  
Seedlings Planted: 147,500  
Fence Removal/Installation: 5,500/8,155 feet  
Annual/Noxious Weeds Treated: 1,858 acres

#### **Key Outcomes: Landscape Sage-Grouse Habitat Restoration EA Enters Phase II**

Large-scale juniper removal efforts were continued in the Burley area in 2018. With completion of the work associated with the Burley Landscape Sage-Grouse Habitat Restoration Environmental Assessment (EA) in 2017, the following year was a transition for the partnership. BLM signed the Burley Landscape Sage-Grouse Habitat Restoration II EA in 2018. This EA identifies over 50,000 additional acres for treatment in the next 15 years. A planning meeting was hosted at the Burley NRCS office in early May 2018 to discuss project implementation in the fall. Due to being between EAs, work completed on BLM land was a maintenance cut for a previous treatment, and juniper skeleton mastication work on an early season fire.

These two projects were funded by BLM using Pheasants Forever contracting services. Most of the additional work in 2018 was completed on private and state land. A \$145,000 grant from the Idaho Department of Lands (funded through the State and Private Forestry branch of the U.S. Forest Service) was expended on project work in the Almo and Elba, Idaho areas.

In Minidoka County, Idaho, Pheasants Forever also completed a sagebrush planting project with BLM. In the third year of this effort, 125,000 Wyoming Big Sagebrush seedlings were hand planted in the Laidlaw Park area of Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve via Pheasants Forever-contracted labor. An additional 22,500 plants were planted on adjacent state land, bringing the total project to 147,500 plants. The SGI position in Burley is critical to ensuring projects are cross-boundary in nature and facilitating communication between the agencies and landowners.

### **Working Across Fence Lines**

This SGI Wildlife and Range Conservationist worked on two SGI-Environmental Quality Incentive Program projects in the Lander, Wyoming region. One of these projects was for a ranch that operates on approximately 33,591 acres of mixed ownership rangelands. The current operator and BLM wanted to join into a partnership with NRCS to cooperatively write a rotational prescribed grazing plan that would benefit the rangelands, wildlife and livestock as there has been little done in terms of knowing available animal unit months (AUMs) and monitoring. Cooperatively, they wrote a 3-year rotational grazing plan based on available AUMs, goals of the producer and BLM and the SGI program.

This contract assisted the producer and BLM in getting a rotational grazing plan in place that will provide periods of deferment, increase distribution across the rangelands and decrease over-utilization in certain areas of the pastures. The second project was also a collaborative, multi-ownership grazing project on a 16,980-acre ranch occupying important elk and mule deer wintering habitat and big game migratory routes as well as sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat. Partners include: The Nature Conservancy, Lander BLM, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming State Lands and Investments, NRCS and two ranching families that operate the ranch. The SGI shared position plays a critical role in working with numerous partners on landscape-scale projects that require shared vision, funding, communication and cooperation.

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### **PARTNERSHIP FACILITATION:**

**Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership (IRCP)**  
*IRCP Coordinator*

**Statewide**

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### **Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Create overarching entity that works across agencies and organizations with vision and focus
- Build consensus around needed rangeland management practices, research and policies
- Leverage resources (e.g., ideas, knowledge, and fiscal capital) to implement conservation practices in sagebrush ecosystems

In 2018, an 11-member Steering Committee was formed to create the IRCP, establish priorities and work together to request funding from the BLM-IWJV agreement and partners to hire an

IRCP Coordinator. The Coordinator was hired in September 2018. IRCP priorities include: (1) communications, (2) organization building, (3) outcome based land management and (4) building a learning network.

**Key Outcome: Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership Formalized**

The IRCP was formalized with the development of a charter and is composed of a diversity of groups, agencies and individuals participating in the partnership. Many of these partners have a history of working together across Idaho on collaborative, innovative and productive solutions to rangelands and rangeland issues. The IRCP is already providing greater coordination and collaboration through a central group. A unique aspect IRCP brings to the table is the desire to work on landscapes across ownership boundaries of private, state and federal rangelands. IRCP also brings a commitment to look for new projects in rangelands while supporting and enhancing current and ongoing projects and collaborations. For more information, see the [IRCP Charter](#).

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**PARTNERSHIP FACILITATION:**

**Outcome Based Grazing Demonstration (OBGA) Projects**  
*Outcome Based Grazing Coordinator*

**Regional**

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**Bottlenecks Identified:**

- Internal BLM request to hire a new OBGA Grazing Coordinator

In 2018, BLM Washington Office (WO) requested that the IWJV support 11 [Outcome Based Grazing Authorization \(OBGA\) demonstration projects](#) through providing technical expertise. A position was created to facilitate enhanced communications between the permittees, the BLM and partners. This position was created in October 2018.

**Key Outcome: Early Conversations & Networking Set the Stage for OBGA Success**

In late 2018, the Coordinator met with most of the permittees and field staff involved in the demonstration projects. These meetings included five Nevada projects in Reno with BLM WO leadership, as well as visits to the Lewistown Field Office in Montana and a site visit with the permittee to the Fitzgerald Ranch in Plush, Oregon (BLM Lakeview Field Office). Multiple conversations were held related to the purpose, need and goals of the OBGA demonstration projects. This included formal and informal meetings and presentations at venues such as Nevada Cattlemen’s Association Convention, Oregon SageCon partnership meeting, Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission meeting and the National Grazing Lands Conference. Additionally, the Coordinator traveled to the Western Governors’ Association Working Lands Roundtable inaugural event in Cheyenne, Wyoming in October 2018, and had multiple conversations with participants about ways to include Good Neighbor Authority, local governments and local knowledge into the grazing permit renewal process. Lastly, the Coordinator worked closely with the Fitzgerald Ranch and Smith Creek Ranch to review drafts of decision documents.

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**PARTNERSHIP FACILITATION:****Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NVCCN)  
Facilitation Assistance****Statewide****Bottleneck Identified:**

- Engage all individuals active in the NVCCN in a two-day meeting in March 2018 to further develop/refine the mission, operating norms, organizational structure and develop a strategic framework/action plan

In 2016, the NVCCN concept originated with a statewide kick-off meeting with more than 80 diverse participants and a series of organizational development meetings. The NVCCN encountered some hurdles in coordinating, ensuring inclusivity with multiple partners and focusing their objectives after the initial meeting. Core partners requested funding from the BLM-IWJV agreement to provide facilitation assistance to help lead a second formative meeting of the NVCCN in March 2018. At this meeting, they developed a strategic document, and a Coordinating Group. With partners clear on objectives and engaged, they followed up with two consecutive meetings in May (Elko, Nevada) and December (Reno, Nevada), and conducted two-hour coordination conference calls monthly. BLM has been a foundational partner of effort and provided additional support through its National Operating Center personnel and Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution Program funding. For more information, visit the website at [www.nvccn.org](http://www.nvccn.org).

**Key Outcome: NVCCN Formalized with Strategic Document**

The NVCCN is a statewide network that serves to promote, coordinate and support locally-led conservation efforts. The primary objective of the network is to promote effective conservation of Nevada's ecosystems and economic viability of Nevada's communities through grassroots conservation. The NVCCN provides structure to support local, diverse stakeholder groups working to achieve conservation by incorporating best science and local knowledge through a collaborative planning and implementation approach. The network serves as a bridge between local, state and federal groups seeking to enhance and expand locally-led conservation. For more information, see [fact sheet](#) and [strategic document](#).





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**PARTNERSHIP FACILITATION:**  
**Oregon Local Implementation Team**  
*Local Implementation Team Coordinator*

**Deschutes, Crook, and Malheur Counties**

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This position was proposed in 2018 by the BLM, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Pheasants Forever, USFWS, NRCS, and multiple partners to promote working land conservation and restore sage grouse habitat and populations in Deschutes, Crook, and Malheur Counties. The position will facilitate the Prineville and Vale Sage-Grouse Local Implementation Teams, and serve as a liaison between federal, state, and local governments and stakeholders, including landowners and landowner groups, in matters regarding conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems at the local scale. A position announcement for the Coordinator in February 2019. The Coordinator will be based in Hines, Oregon.



*From left to right: (1) In multiple landscapes, our field coordinators and their partners are removing thousands of conifers across ownership boundaries. (2) These positions are key to facilitating communications between agencies and landowners. (3) Wet meadow habitat restoration and the installation of structures create important brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse.*



An important goal of the BLM-IWJV partnership is to increase strategic communications related to BLM and partner accomplishments and success stories of sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation, especially stories associated with this agreement. The overall communications goal is to advance proactive, collaborative conservation of the sagebrush ecosystem by: 1) increasing awareness about the BLM-IWJV partnership to facilitate collaborative conservation; 2) engaging partners in specific conservation actions identified in the MOU; and 3) showcasing proven models and other BLM-led innovations to transfer success. Primary target audiences include BLM staff across multiple levels of the agency, NRCS, USFWS, USFS, state fish and wildlife agencies, agricultural landowners and organizations, non-governmental organizations and funders. Below is a list of our most significant accomplishments and products in 2018.

**Web Portal: [PartnersInTheSage.com](http://PartnersInTheSage.com)**

The purpose of [PartnersInTheSage.com](http://PartnersInTheSage.com) is to communicate about the BLM-IWJV partnership and help catalyze proactive, voluntary and community-led sagebrush rangeland conservation. This is accomplished by showcasing and promoting healthy working lands in the American West for the benefit of people and wildlife. By bringing a diversity of perspectives, values and resources together on this platform, we advance our shared purpose of durable sagebrush conservation through partnerships. Content posted on the website's news feed is then compiled every other month in a newsletter and emailed to a database of 4,000 contacts. The following website metrics are for October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018, which was the inaugural year for this site.

**Total website page views:** 22,144

**Average newsletter open rate:** 37% (average rate for governmental programs is 27%). Our newsletter content drives 60% of our website's visits, followed by social media (20%), direct referral from a partner's website (15%), and organic searches (5%).

**Most popular stories:**

- [Society for Range Management](#) broadcast: 2,112 views
- [Partnerships in Action](#) story map: 1,743 views (includes all stories)
- [Ugly for a Reason - Breaking Up Cheatgrass](#) article: 1,009 views
- [Working with Water](#) article: 787 views
- [Wyoming Juniper Removal](#) article: 489 views

### **Story Map: Partnerships in Action**

In its debut release, this story map highlighted sagebrush partnerships that are building conservation bridges between the science and the people that spark change for their communities. The first five stories showcased where public and private partners are collaborating on voluntary, proactive and highly organized conservation projects that have an impact across large areas, including the CA/NV Border: A Bi-State Collaboration; West Box Elder, UT: Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance; Warners and Vya, CA/NV/OR: Cutting for Conservation; Gunnison Basin, CO: Wet Meadow Restoration; and Soda Fire, ID/OR: Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation. These projects are positive examples of cross-boundary coordination on conifer removal, wet meadow restoration, and fire and invasive treatments.

[Landing page](#) created (June 2018)

5 stories completed to showcase proven models

1,743 views of these stories from June 1 to December 31, 2018

5 more stories in process for 2019

### **Social Media Campaign: SageWest—People of the Sage (2018 Series)**

SageWest is a network of 333 professionals focused on advancing communications around the sagebrush ecosystem. By amplifying existing work across currently siloed audiences and strengthening relationships amongst stakeholders, SageWest aims to heighten enthusiasm and renewed commitment by the American public to conserve the sagebrush ecosystem, not only for its ecological values but also for the cultural and economic connection to western communities.

Throughout August 2018, partners across the American West shared stories of incredible people working to combat the twin threats of wildfire and invasive species in sagebrush country. Called "People of the Sage: Fire & Invasives," this social media-based campaign was driven by compelling feature stories, first-person essays, videos and portraits. Members of SageWest, a diverse sagebrush communications network, produced this series with 15 original stories about scientists, ranchers, biologists, young professionals, conservation teams, firefighters, range specialists, birders and teachers. These individuals represent a sampling of the many people and organizations working on the formidable challenge of the wildfire and invasive annual grasses cycle. SageWest members utilized #sagebrushcountry and #fireandinvasives to track the content from this series being shared across online platforms. [Click here to view the full report and quantitative metrics for the 2018 series.](#)

15 original stories on fire and invasives in sagebrush country

26,745 engagements on Facebook

738 #sagebrushcountry tags

[Summary of the series](#)

[Ugly for a Reason](#) by Don Smurthwaite, BLM

[Combatting Cheatgrass On Private Ranch Lands In Wyoming](#) by Brianna Randall, SGI

[After the Smoke Clears](#) by Evan Barrientos, Audubon Rockies

[Smoke season: teaching about the sage-steppe](#) by Micah Lauer, Idaho school teacher

[Words from a Botany Intern in Sagebrush Country](#) by Britney Zell, university student

[Post-fire Restoration in the Great Basin Webinar](#) by Great Basin Fire Science Exchange

[Leah Mori, NRCS Soil Tech](#) by Heather Emmons, NRCS

- [5 Fire Tips for Birding in Sage Country](#) by Washington Audubon
- [Restoring Sagebrush on a Conservation Ranch](#) by Evan Barrientos, Audubon Rockies
- [Building a Framework for the Sage](#) by Jeanne Chambers, USFS
- [We Have Cancer and It's Called Cheatgrass](#) by Ken Mayer, WAFWA
- [The Fire in the Sea](#) by Jennifer Strickland, USFWS
- [Sage-Grouse SWAT Teams Look Out for the Bird—and the Herds](#) by Judi Kohler, National Wildlife Federation
- [Teamwork & Partnerships Enhance Sage-grouse Habitat in Eastern Wyoming](#) by Trihydro

**Feature Stories & Fact Sheets**

By connecting our content to a variety of media outlets and platforms, we reach new and broader audiences.

- **Pheasants Forever Journal**, [Making Room Out West](#), by Hannah Nikonow (February 2018). This story highlighted BLM conifer removal projects in Idaho.
- **Audubon**, [Celebrating Sagebrush: The West's Most Important Native Plant](#), by Hannah Nikonow and Daly Edmunds (April 2018). This was part of the Year of the Bird series and highlighted the importance of sagebrush to birds as well people and how range-wide collaborative conservation is taking place for this habitat.
- **Progressive Rancher**, [Building Capacity for Healthier Landscapes and Communities](#), by Sarah Keller (July/August 2018) and [Ugly for a Reason: Breaking Up Cheatgrass in the Jarbidge](#) by Don Smurthwaite (November/December 2018). This magazine is distributed to all brand owners in Nevada and southern Idaho.
- **BLM Daily**, [Dancing Again—Sage Grouse Returns to Old Haunts](#), by Hannah Nikonow and submitted by Don Smurthwaite (May 2018) and [So Little Time, So Much To Do: Partnership Extends BLM Capacity](#) (no link available due to partner preference), by Don Smurthwaite (August 2018).
- **BLM Fact Sheet**, [Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands: Creating Cross-Boundary Collaboration](#), by Hannah Nikonow (July 2018). This fact sheet was created to share highlights of this partnership’s success and ways for partners to engage.

*From left to right: (1) The Partnership in Action story map features regional partnerships and will be updated with new stories in 2019. (2) Making Room Out West features a handful of North American grouse species and the woodland encroachment impacting the birds. (3) The People of the Sage campaign run by SageWest showcases people who work to some significant degree in their professional and personal lives on combating fire and invasives in sagebrush country.*





The mission of the IWJV is to conserve priority bird habitats through partnership-driven, science-based projects and programs. The IWJV is uniquely positioned to oversee, deliver, and support implementation of the intra-agency agreement. We are governed by a highly diverse executive-level Management Board comprised of state fish and wildlife agencies, federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, corporate members representing the energy sector and private landowners including public lands ranchers. With this diversity, our Board bridges multiple perspectives and has been very effective over the last decade in finding common ground for sagebrush habitat conservation.

### **Funding Accomplishments**

Continuous pursuit of new partners has played a critical role in creating a diverse funding portfolio in this partnership. Fundraising efforts will continue to be critical into the future. Accomplishments include:

- Total fund leverage and in-kind services is \$2.908 million, an increase of \$1.1 million since 2017.
- Current leverage ratio is 65:35 (BLM:partner), well beyond our goal of 75:25 (BLM:partner).
- Nearly 89% of funds in the agreement have been programmed for project work and tasks to support the intra-agency agreement.
- Continued corporate investments from ConocoPhillips and Rocky Mountain Power/PacifiCorp have been critical to BLM-IWJV partnership success.
- Investments by partnering agencies and organizations to support field delivery capacity positions have created important shared vision and buy-in. Financial contributions have been made by: USFWS Region 6 Mountain Prairie Region, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Mule Deer Foundation, NRCS, Pheasants Forever, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and more.

### **Partnership Expansion**

The IWJV brings important expertise in developing public-private partnerships and working at multiple scales to advance sagebrush habitat conservation. Our partnership accomplishments include:

- 387+ (and growing) partners representing federal agencies, state fish and wildlife agencies, local government and non-governmental organizations, tribes and universities

- 14+ state fish and wildlife and agriculture agencies engaged through direct funding, guidance/oversight or collaboration on projects
- 400+ BLM contacts in the IWJV partnership database
- 2 statewide collaboratives - The Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network and Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership - that are networking >53 partners
- A legacy approach to cross-state collaboration in the Bi-State with 302+ partners
- The IWJV and Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are lock-step in a long-run effort to conserve the sagebrush ecosystem and proactively supporting wildlife populations and communities for future generations.
- In the upcoming year, this partnership will also seek to engage the Western Governor's Association via actions associated with the sagebrush-relevant Secretarial Orders.

### **Continued Partnership with NRCS SGI**

The IWJV coordinated two meetings, one in December 2016 and another in August 2017, bringing together leadership of NRCS, BLM, USFWS, Pheasants Forever and IWJV to coordinate on cross-agency and collaborative work. IWJV staff continue to support SGI through event management, SWAT coordination, and mission-critical administrative responsibilities, logistics and other related tasks.

### **Team Support: Innovation, Flexibility, and Coordination**

The IWJV utilizes ten percent of the BLM funds annually to support the following important services: oversight/management, team coordination, executive-level briefings and communication with leadership of BLM and key partners, partnership development and expansion, facilitating partner contributions to agreement projects, financial tracking and budget oversight, accomplishment reports, events and meeting coordination, meeting facilitation, partnership database support, recognition and celebration of partners, etc.



*From left to right: Conservation takes a village. From traveling into the field with partners to sharing lessons learned, to getting into the nitty gritty with projects, to pushing a field tour bus out of the mud, this partnership takes an all-hands-on-deck approach.*