

Oregon Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI)



WHO:

- Launched in 2010, the NRCS-led Sage Grouse Initiative is a partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, and nonprofit groups working together with a shared vision of achieving wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching. SGI works with willing ranchers who are voluntarily stepping up to improve sage grouse habitat on their lands.

WHAT:

- SGI is a science-based, partnership-driven effort that is reducing threats to sage grouse and improving sustainability of working ranches. While efforts target sage grouse strongholds, SGI is not just about a single species but about restoring the health of the sagebrush ecosystem.

WHEN:

- In 2010, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service determined the sage grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act, but other declining species ranked higher in priority – making sage grouse a candidate for future consideration. A final listing decision is expected in September 2015. The Sage Grouse Initiative has accelerated proactive efforts since 2010 to implement targeted conservation to significantly reduce threats to sage grouse and their habitats.
- Regardless of the listing decision, NRCS is committed to assisting ranchers with enhancing working lands to achieve long-term conservation of the sagebrush ecosystem for all the wildlife, watershed, and rural economic benefits it provides.

WHERE:

- The Initiative covers 11 western states, targeting 78 million acres of intact sagebrush harboring the highest number of birds. We're working to conserve one of the largest ecosystems in North America. In Oregon, efforts focus in and around core habitats that support 90% of bird populations on 38% of the occupied range.
- Private lands are the primary focus, but we work in collaboration with public land managers to implement conservation across ownership boundaries.
- While BLM is the majority landowner throughout sage-grouse range in Oregon, private lands are extremely important for late brood-rearing habitat. More than 80 percent of upland breeding habitat is on public lands, however greater than 80 percent of the critical wet, summer habitats are on private lands. A holistic conservation strategy across public and private lands is needed to conserve this species.

HOW:

- SGI applies the power of the Farm Bill to help fund voluntary conservation projects in sage grouse strongholds across the west. NRCS and its partners provide technical and financial assistance to ranchers who carry out projects on the ground. Strategic conservation delivery ensures limited resources are focused to maximize environmental benefits.

- Oregon SGI priorities for 2014-2019:

1. **Strategically reduce primary threats:**

- *Conifer encroachment*—Continue scaling up juniper removal and support partnerships to treat adjacent public lands to achieve landscape-scale effects. Programs: EQIP
- *Exotic annual grasses*—Prevent the spread of invasive annual grasses through early detection and eradication of small infestations in otherwise healthy rangelands. Addressing annual grasses also helps reduce negative impacts of wildfire. Programs: EQIP
- Conifers and annuals represent two of the most significant threats to sagebrush ecosystems in Oregon. Our overarching goal is to increase ecosystem resilience. Although not targeted specifically, other threats may be addressed to a lesser extent as needed in conjunction with efforts to reduce priority threats.

2. **Facilitate implementation of CCAA's:** We're working with SWCDs, FWS, and other partners to assist ranchers who make long-term commitments to sage-grouse conservation with implementation of site-specific plans to reduce threats. This compliments and enhances SGI's efforts to provide ESA predictability for ranchers. Programs: RCPP, EQIP, CSP, ACEP

3. **Protect what's already good:** Utilize long-term agreements and easements to provide incentives for ranchers to continue protecting and enhancing high-functioning core habitats. Programs: CSP, ACEP

- SGI works with state and federal public land managers to promote conservation efforts across ownership boundaries to achieve whole watershed benefits.
- In 5 years (2010-2014), SGI in Oregon has helped over 100 ranchers remove conifers from **206,110 acres (322 mi²)** of key nesting, brood-rearing and wintering habitats. This action has addressed over half of the estimated early phase encroachment problem on private lands and is expected to functionally maintain suitable habitat for at least 50 years. A long term study is underway in the Warner Mountains to document biological outcomes for birds.

WHY:

- SGI is about more than just a bird. It represents a new paradigm of strategic and proactive at-risk species conservation that succeeds through partnerships, voluntary incentives, and community support. Sage grouse are just the canary in the coal mine for sagebrush ecosystems. We are working to conserve an iconic western landscape and rural ways of life.

SGI website: <http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/>

SGI YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMKe6XEERmsumkbMFe6kCg>

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