



# Baker Sage-grouse

## Local Implementation Team

Baker Comprehensive Sage-grouse Threat Reduction

SAGEBRUSH/SAGE-STEPPE HABITAT

### The Baker Local Implementation

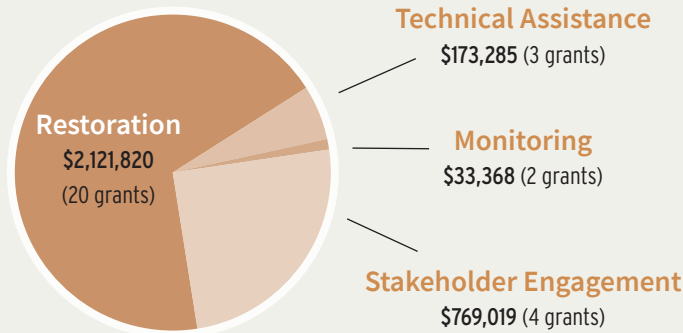
**Team (LIT)** is working collaboratively with private landowners and managers to enhance sage-grouse habitat within Baker and Union Counties to reverse local sage-grouse population declines.



The Baker Priority Area of Conservation is considered to be the most strategically important area for sage-grouse conservation in Baker and Union Counties and is the primary location of restoration efforts. Efforts also expand into general sage-grouse habitat throughout Baker County where restoration can help support thriving leks and habitat corridors.

### Funding

OWEB awarded \$3,097,492 in funding that leveraged \$3,678,169 in matching funds.



### Benefits

- Improvement to sage-grouse habitat quality and quantity
- Promoting wildfire prevention and restoration activities
- Improved understanding of sage-grouse threats including West Nile virus, raven predation, and more
- Grazing and land management to promote healthy sage-brush ecosystems

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant program supports high-performing partnerships to implement strategic restoration actions and measure ecological outcomes through coordinated monitoring. In January 2019, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) awarded a FIP grant to the Baker Sage-grouse Local Implementation Team (LIT). This report documents cumulative progress since the FIP was initiated in 2019. Work completed under the FIP grant program is part of a much larger on-going collaborative effort of federal, state and local agencies, tribes, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations in Baker LIT Planning Area. Accomplishments included in the report only reflect actions completed with OWEB FIP funding, with some additional information described on page 3.

### PARTNERS

**Core Partners:** Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Baker County, Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, Bureau of Land Management, Powder Basin Watershed Council, Private Landowners

**Supporting Partners:** Oregon State University Extension, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, The Nature Conservancy, Baker Valley Vector Control, Institute for Natural Resources, Agricultural Research Service, Rural Landowners, United States Geological Survey

## GOAL

Increase the quality and quantity of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately increase the Baker sage-grouse population.



- Promote awareness and enrollment in voluntary habitat conservation programs
- Prevent, treat, and adaptively manage invasive annual grasses and other noxious weeds

## STRATEGIES

- Protect, enhance, and expand extent and connectivity of areas with adequate sagebrush cover
- Address key information gaps



## IMPLEMENTATION

### Program Enrollment

**51**

LAND OWNERS ENROLLED IN HABITAT PROGRAMS

**2**

LANDOWNERS ENROLLED IN THE BAKER SAGE-GROUSE PROGRAMMATIC CCAA PROGRAM

### Weed Treatment & Prevention

**1**

OHV WASH STATION PRELIMINARY PLAN COMPLETED + PORTABLE OHV WASH STATION OBTAINED

### Fill Information Gaps

**2**

YEARS OF RAVEN NEST REMOVAL COMPLETED

**1**

MESIC HABITAT MAP DEVELOPED SHOWING SAGE-GROUSE BROOD HABITAT

**7**

ALTERNATIVE FORAGE OPTION ANALYSIS MEETINGS HELD

### Restoration & Planning

**3**

STRATEGIC FUEL BREAK PLANNING MEETINGS

**1**

COOPERATIVELY SHARED SEED DRILL + OHV HERBICIDE SPRAYER OBTAINED

**1**

UNDERSTORY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT UNDERWAY

**4**

LETTERS OF INTENT FOR CCAA ENROLLMENT

**1**

SAGE-GROUSE COMPATIBLE GRAZING ANALYSIS COMPLETED

**17**

WEST NILE VIRUS SITES SAMPLED ACROSS 3 YEARS



## OUTCOMES

### Near Term 0-5 YEARS

- Extent and abundance of invasive annual grasses and other noxious weeds is reduced
- Sagebrush/sage steppe plant communities including native bunchgrass and forb diversity and abundance are suitable to support all life history stages of sage-grouse

### Mid-Term 5-10 YEARS

- Sage-grouse nest success increases

### Long Term 10+ YEARS

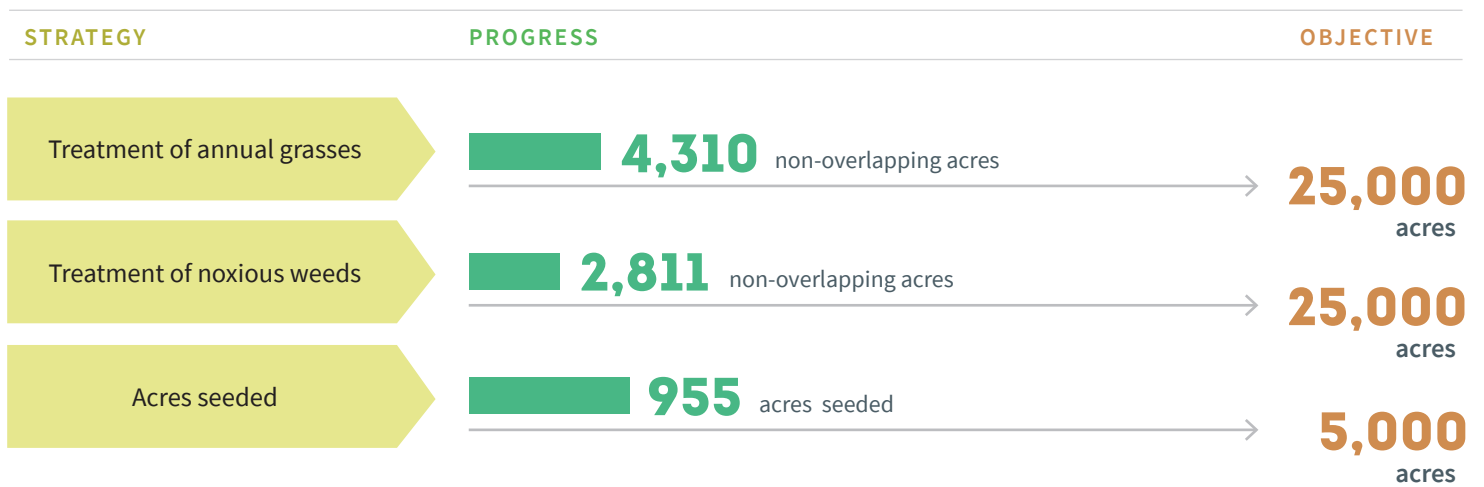
- Sage-grouse population is stable or increases





## FIP Initiative Progress, Biennia 1-2

Progress on metrics shown below represents actions completed through OWEB grants.



The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is a key organization contributing to this restoration work, and has provided significant in-kind contributions towards the restoration strategies:

### ESTIMATED NRCS IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION

Treatment of annual grasses and noxious weeds **2,420** acres  
 Seeding **1,870** acres



### Monitoring Approach

Baker LIT is using standard sage-grouse habitat monitoring methods to ensure consistency with ongoing data collection efforts already underway in Oregon. Baker LIT is proposing to work with Oregon State University, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the United States Geological Survey to evaluate biological and habitat datasets along with tracking sagebrush restoration. The project would help track restoration, including pre- and post- treatment data, in a manner that is compatible with Oregon's Threat-based Ecostate Models and the Bureau of Land Management monitoring so that metrics can be integrated at a landscape scale and inform Oregon's Sage-grouse Action Plan. In addition, the Baker LIT has incorporated a new Rapid Ocular Photo Assessment field protocol to provide supplemental data and increase overall rigor of the data collected.

# Adaptive Management

## Restoration

### CHALLENGES

Implementing restoration actions required adaptations to shifting climate impacts under drought conditions, and local contractor capacity constraints.

Establishing a permanent Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Wash Station included some unforeseen challenges in navigating the environmental review process on federal lands.



### LESSONS LEARNED

Baker LIT partners remained flexible to plan and adapt to challenges under drought conditions and limited local contractor capacity.

Baker LIT learned about the federal permitting process and implications for the location and logistics for establishing an OHV Wash Station. These lessons will help if future objectives require federal permitting.



### ADAPTATIONS

Recalibrating project deadlines and exploring potential budget modifications helps maintain project deliverables and goals.

Baker LIT has included more adaptive management strategies in each restoration grant.

## Monitoring

### CHALLENGES

Although the Baker LIT collects quantitative pre and post-treatment data, it has been challenging to analyze these data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the progress of the LIT towards achieving its overarching ecological goal.



### LESSONS LEARNED

The Baker LIT learned that supplemental data and additional expertise and capacity was necessary to comprehensively evaluate its effectiveness in improving sagebrush habitat and increasing sage-grouse populations.



### ADAPTATIONS

The Baker LIT is collaborating with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop and implement a rapid visual ocular assessment. The USGS will also assisting in analyzing all monitoring data collected pre/post restoration treatments.

## Engagement

### CHALLENGES

The Baker LIT experienced turnover in the coordinator role, as well as in some of its member organizations. This delayed some FIP projects.

Some private landowners were hesitant to work with the entire Baker LIT partnership.



### LESSONS LEARNED

A thoughtful approach to maintain and delegate tasks among members maintained stakeholder participation and continue progress on key projects.

Hesitant landowners will benefit from clearer information about the purpose, goals, and collaborative nature of the Baker LIT and the role of each member organization.



### ADAPTATIONS

The Baker LIT re-hired a coordinator to manage FIP projects, maintain working relationships, and increase collaboration. The partnership has worked hard to maintain structure and function to facilitate the transition of leadership roles.

The Baker LIT is revising its landowner agreement to better explain the role and contribution of each member organizations. This, along with continued landowner meetings, will be extremely valuable in overcoming landowner hesitation to engage in restoration.