



SAGE NEWS

Baker Sage-grouse LIT Newsletter

Welcome! This is the 1st edition of the Baker Sage-grouse Local Implementation Team (LIT) quarterly newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to act as a resource for landowners, update readers on current LIT happenings, educate about sagebrush and sage-grouse habitats, & provide other relevant information.



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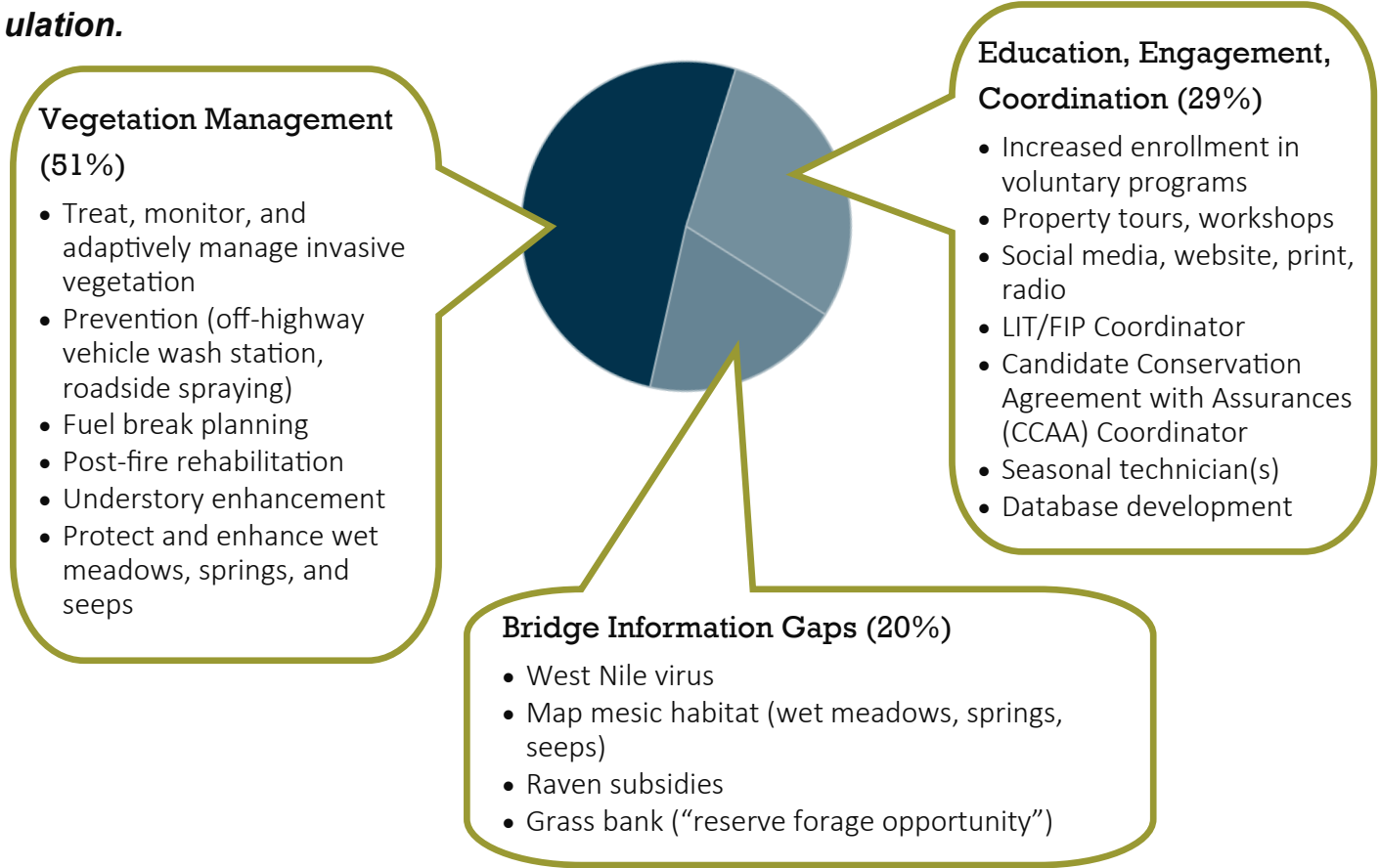
The greater sage-grouse was once commonly found across 16 states and three Canadian provinces, today they occur in 11 states and two provinces and in much smaller numbers— estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000 individuals.

Important Dates:

- ◆ **January 23rd:** Landowner meeting at the Baker County Event Center small meeting room from 4:30-6:30pm.
- ◆ **January 28:** Technical Review Team meeting for fall 2019 selected FIP projects.
- ◆ **February:** Applications for NRCS EQIP are due mid-February. An exact date has not been selected. Contact your local NRCS office for more details.
- ◆ **March 15:** Deadline for submission of spring 2020 FIP project applications.

WHAT IS THE LIT?

Local Implementation Teams (LIT). In 2011 the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife established regional LITs throughout Oregon. In 2016 the Baker LIT reconvened with partners from local, state, and federal agencies along with private landowners. In 2017 the Baker LIT created the *Baker Priority Area of Conservation (PAC) Comprehensive Sage-grouse Threat Reduction Plan*. This plan outlines priority actions for sage-grouse conservation within the Baker Planning Area. In 2019 the Baker LIT gained funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Focused Investment Partnership (FIP). This grant provides \$6.1 million over the next 6 years. OWEB FIP funding will be used to address three categories of actions needed to achieve the targeted ecological outcome: **increase the quantity and quality of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately the sage-grouse population.**



Partners



LIT ENGAGEMENT

BE INVOLVED. The Baker LIT has identified several goals as part of their *Strategic Action Plan* that include opportunities for stakeholder engagement. Over the next few months the Baker LIT will work to establish stakeholder groups to address these objectives:

Grass Banks

Establish “grass banks” or reserve forage areas in order to provide alternative grazing opportunities to be utilized when grazing rest is required to promote the success of vegetation treatments and/or during drought conditions.

***If you are interested in participating in stakeholder engagement opportunities please contact the Baker LIT Coordinator:
(541) 239-7016***

Understory Enhancement

Pursue opportunities to improve understory conditions by reducing invasive annual grasses and other weed species, increase perennial grass and sage-grouse preferred forb abundance, and diversify the understory vegetation in historic crested wheatgrass pastures. Depleted understory vegetation can occur in rangelands, which may be limiting sage-grouse populations.

Fuel Breaks

Develop potential fuel break placement options and strategies to reduce wildfire response time that balances wildfire prevention/response while maintaining maximum sagebrush cover.



Meet your LIT Coordinator



In fall of 2019 Dallas Hall Defrees was hired as the Baker sage-grouse LIT Coordinator. Dallas was raised on a cattle ranch in Sumpter Valley. She brings passion for ecosystem health, especially on working rangelands. Dallas looks forward to collaborating with landowners and striving to improve sage-grouse habitat and rangeland condition.

LIT UPDATES



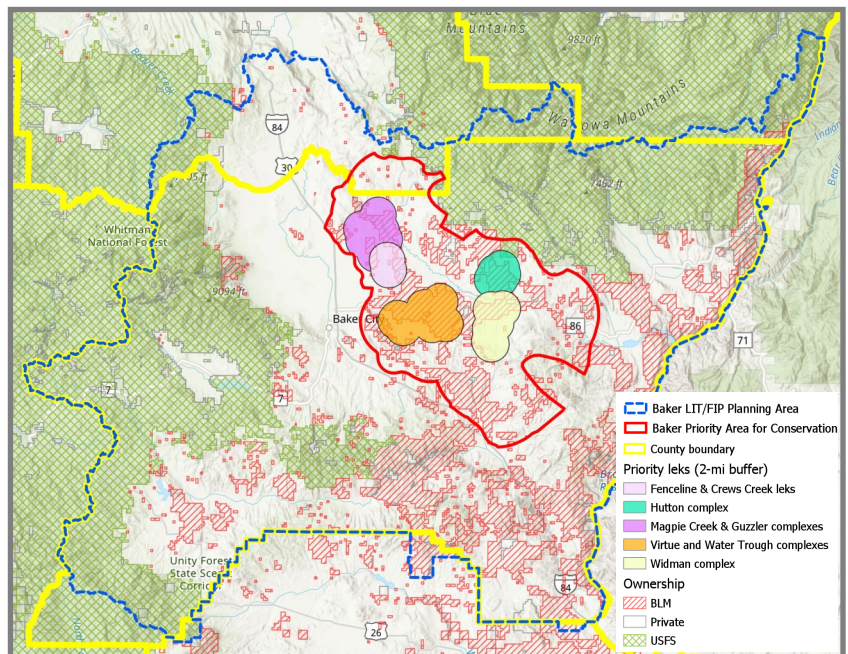
West Nile Virus Directorate Fellows Program:

Sage-grouse are highly susceptible to West Nile Virus (WNV) and WNV-related die-offs can be population-limiting. However, the degree to which WNV may be impacting the local sage-grouse population is largely unknown because current disease surveillance efforts are focused in agriculture-dominated areas of the county that are not utilized by sage-grouse. In summer of 2019 research efforts began to investigate the extent to which WNV may be limiting the local sage-grouse population. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was approved for a Directorate Fellowship position to implement further WNV surveillance in summer of 2020.

March 2020 Project Proposals:

Project proposals will be accepted by March 15. Private landowners are encouraged to contact any FIP partner agency (Baker County, Tri-County Weed CWMA, or Powder Basin Watershed Council) to initiate a project on their property. Projects must be located in the FIP geography (blue outline on map below) and promote sage-grouse habitat. **Projects may include: invasive annual grass or noxious weed treatments, seedings, riparian, spring or wet meadow protection/restoration, and wildfire risk reduction.** Projects will be ranked based on proximity to priority sage-grouse lek complexes and the extent to which they expand previous treatment areas and ultimately suitable habitat for sage-grouse. Necessary follow-up treatments to promote the success and/or adaptive management of previously implemented projects will also be strongly supported. View the [FIP Strategic Action Plan](https://www.bakercounty.org/commissioners/pdfs/FIP_Strategic_Action_Plan_FINAL.pdf) online: https://www.bakercounty.org/commissioners/pdfs/FIP_Strategic_Action_Plan_FINAL.pdf

Lek, from the Swedish word for "play," is an aggregation of male animals who gather to compete for a mate using grand dances or displays.



FALL 2020 PROJECTS

Five projects were selected during the fall 2019 application period. Each project addresses invasive annual grasses and/or other noxious weed control. Landowner workshops and pre /post treatment monitoring will occur for each project to assess the effectiveness of treatment. Below is a short description of each project:



Unity Whitetop Containment & Control Phase I:

This project includes treating 700 acres of whitetop and other broadleaf noxious weeds in steep canyon areas. This project capitalizes on previous noxious weed control efforts but focuses on difficult terrain that requires aerial application. In the winters of 2020 and 2021 approximately 50 acres will be seeded with a broadcast seeder on previously treated upland areas.

Love Reservoir Sage-grouse Habitat Enhancement Phase I: The Love Reservoir Project is located in the greater Love Reservoir area and includes seeding 500 acres of rangeland that has been previously treated for invasive annual grasses. An additional 300 acres will be treated for invasive annual grasses and 500 acres will be treated for whitetop and other broadleaf noxious weeds. A 250 acre plot will be part of a pilot project that will be studying the effectiveness of a new herbicide on invasive annual grasses.

Keating Sage-grouse Broadleaf Weed Control Phase I: Approximately 50% of the project area is located within a 2-mile Lek Complex Buffer. 400 acres of whitetop, 125 acres of invasive annual grasses, 100 acres of yellow starthistle, and 25 acres of skeleton weed will be treated in 2020 and 2021. 26,000 additional acres will be inventoried and mapped for invasive annual grasses and other noxious weeds. These efforts will inform the LIT of the extent of current weed populations and allow for prioritization of treatment areas in the coming years.

Medical Springs Whitetop Control: Located in northern Baker County and a portion of Union County, this project will inventory approximately 30,000 acres for outlying infestations of whitetop and other noxious weeds in spring of 2020. 610 acres of whitetop and other broadleaf noxious weeds will be sprayed, prioritizing areas by their location to other projects, riparian areas, and landscape with low weed density. Herbicide will also be provided to landowners to treat weeds on their properties and increase weed prevention efforts.

Lawrence Sardine Sage-grouse Habitat Restoration: Located around Lawrence and Sardine Creeks this project will treat 785 acres of annual grasses and broadleaf noxious weeds. Additionally approximately 160 miles of roads will be sprayed in the greater Keating Valley for annual grasses in spring of 2020.