

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Vale Sage-grouse Local Implementation Team (LIT)**  
**11 August 2020 from 1:00 – 2:30pm**

**Attendance:** Julie Unfried (Vale LIT Coordinator), Lynn Larsen (NRCS), Todd Bowen (BLM), Skyler Vold (ODFW), Zack Dufurrena (operator), Alexis Baker (Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation), Linda Rowe (Malheur SWCD), Marisa Meyer (USFWS), Randy Weist (DSL), Trevor Watson (ODFW), Pat Ryan (BLM), Brandon Palmer (Burns-Paiute Tribe), Sheriff Brian Wolfe (Malheur County), Carter Crouch (Burns-Paiute Tribe), Curtis Martin (operator), Jon Dinkins (OSU), Dawn Davis (USFWS), Eric Morrison (JVCWMA), Eric Evans (Malheur County), Jonathan Dunbar (BLM), Jeremy Austin (Oregon Natural Desert Association), Jake Ferguson (BLM), Jon Westfall (BLM), Ken Diebel (Malheur Watershed Council), Megan McGuire (BLM), Michael O'Casey (Theodor Roosevelt Conservation Partnership), Nicole Sullivan (Trout Unlimited, Owyhee Watershed Council, Malheur Watershed Council), Scott Torland (ODFW), Sergio Arispe (OSU), Megan Cruetzburg (OSU/SageCon Partnership), **others?**

**Meeting Objectives:** Discuss an opportunity for LIT participants to engage in the development of a proposal for NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

**Vale LIT Resources**

Opportunity for feedback on the spreadsheet. Updated document will be shared via email and through the LIT website (link below). A PDF flier will be created to share in local field offices. Please contact Julie Unfried whenever updates to the documents are necessary (e.g., change point of contact, introduce a new program).

**BLM presentation on Tri-state Fuel Breaks Program**

Presentation slides attached. BLM was asked to present on the Tri-state program to provide context regarding planned efforts within the Vale BLM District. **The LIT will not have input on the Tri-state plan**, but may have an opportunity to engage in the development of a grant opportunity offered through NRCS – the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), that would be proposed on private and state land within the Vale LIT area (see below for more information).

**RCPP Discussion**

**Background**

- Earlier this year, NRCS and the Owyhee Watershed Council began discussing an opportunity to develop a proposal for NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). That proposal would, in part, provide a funding opportunity to extend fuel breaks from the Tri-state plan onto private and state lands; however, the opportunity to address additional resources concerns would also be available.
- The LITs were invited to provide input on the development of the RCPP proposal.
- LIT involvement would require that input align with the Sage-grouse State Action Plan (attached).
- LIT participants would have an opportunity to identify additional conservation practices (in addition to fuel breaks) that partners believe are necessary to enhance, support, improve, sagebrush landscapes within the Vale LIT area.

**About the RCPP**

- RCPP is an NRCS grant program in which NRCS agrees to match funds at a 1:1 rate. Various partners work together to develop a proposal to address resources concerns within a specific geographic area (typically a watershed or a contiguous landscape – e.g., The Great Basin). Funding for the RCPP comes through the Farm Bill and is distributed through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
- Although many partners will be involved in the development of the RCPP (regardless of LIT involvement), the Owyhee Watershed Council will be the official applicant.
- If awarded, the RCPP could provide up to \$1.5 million to private landowners and state land managers who are interested in addressing resource concerns that align with the RCPP proposal.
- Once developed, the RCPP proposal will be reviewed at the national level and, if selected for funding, individual landowners and state land managers would apply through the local NRCS office to receive a portion of those

funds to address resource concerns on their land/operation. *Note: landowner/land manager enrollment in NRCS programs is always voluntary.*

### **Questions/comments/concerns about the RCPP/LIT involvement that came up in the meeting**

- How will landowners/land managers maintain fuel break treatments over the long-term (particularly once RCPP funding has been used up)? What is involved in maintaining fuel breaks? Will there be funding for continued maintenance? If fuel breaks are utilized as a tool, an ongoing monitoring plan (monitor invasives and assess effectiveness), and a follow-up management plan should be implemented/utilized.
- Can RCPP applicants utilize practices other than fuel breaks (e.g., invasive species control)?
  - The answer is, yes. Additionally, if the LIT helps develop the RCPP proposal, participants will identify the various suite of conservation practices that should be included.
- How can we determine if this opportunity is appropriate for the LIT if we do not have a charter?
  - LIT activities should align with the state Sage-Grouse Action Plan - this provides some guidance in the absence of the charter; however, this does not preclude the opportunity to discuss developing a charter for the Vale LIT. Concerns exist over whether the group is currently ready for a formal charter – e.g., participants are still learning about the LIT purpose and how the collaborative could be value-added to them; do not want to commit participants to develop a full charter before folks are ready.
- Valuable to collect baseline data before establishing fuel breaks; tie into BLM state office, ODFW, OSU research
- Concerns from various partners exist regarding the lack of data to determine if/when fuel breaks are effective.
- Various research needs exist – LIT and OSU could identify/coordinate.
- What does NRCS need from the LIT?
  - Outreach, particularly to private landowners.
  - Thoughts and ideas from LIT participants.
  - Help developing priority maps.
  - Identify practices and make suggestions for parameters and treatments.
  - Holistic view of how to assess fuel breaks.

### **Next Steps/Action Items**

#### **Julie**

- Follow-up conversations with various LIT partners to gauge interest with regard to LIT involvement in the RCPP.
- Work with NRCS and Owyhee Watershed Council to understand RCPP timeline and action items for LIT.
- Update Vale LIT website.

#### **All**

- Contact Julie with updates to the Vale LIT Resources spreadsheet and comments on the LIT website.
- Contact Julie with inquires about the RCPP (e.g., interested in participating, questions, comments, concerns).

### **Additional Resources**

- Vale LIT Resources spreadsheet (attached in email)
- BLM presentation slides (attached in email)
- Sage-grouse State Action Plan <https://oregonexplorer.info/content/oregon-sage-grouse-action-plan?topic=203&ptopic=179>
- BLM e-planning link <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/42341/510>
- LIT website <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/sagegrouse/lit.asp>