

Prineville Sage-grouse LIT Meeting Notes

19 December 2022

ATTENDANCE:

Erin Kilcullen (Deschutes SWCD), Cari Taylor (BLM), Rachel Davee (Crook SWCD), Emily Weidner (FWS), Joanna Zheng (ONDA), Jimmy Eisner (BLM), Chris Mundy (NRCS), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Andy Gallager (Crook SWCD), Stu Garrett (Audubon), Brie Porter (BLM), Larry Ashton (BLM), Darcy Helmick (Simplot), Andrew Walch (ODFW), Jim Greer (Audubon), Tarik Rawlings (Deschutes County), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Jack Hyde (Hatfield-Hyde Land Trust), Becky Hatfield Hyde (Hatfield-Hyde Land Trust), Brian Wilk (FWS), Robin Vora (Deschutes SWCD), Anya Tyson (TNC), Debbie Wood (Crooked River WMA), Alex (Burns/Lakeview LIT Coordinator), Skyler Vold (ODFW), Julie Unfried (Prineville LIT Coordinator), **others?**

MEETING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine whether the Prineville LIT is ready to adopt the current version of the Threats Reduction Plan.
2. Establish initial priorities for the Prineville LIT.

LIT UPDATE

- Given that the LIT had not met previously since February, Julie gave an update to catch everyone up to speed on the LIT's past and ongoing progress.
 - Winter 2021 through fall 2022: various partner comments and the emergence of new data (e.g., ODFW's 2022 sage-grouse population report, and 2021 ecostate data) were incorporated into the TRP. The current draft was shared with LIT partners in the fall of 2022.
 - Winter 2022: America the Beautiful Challenge and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law bill funding announced. Mixed interest from LIT members on pursuing funding collaboratively - LIT opted to not pursue any.
 - Spring/Summer 2022: a subset of partners wanted to pursue funding and used the draft TRP to submit three proposals (two proposals were in the Paulina Action Area and were not funded; one proposal was on DSL in the Brothers Action Area and was funded). Consensus wasn't used. In the future, the group should discuss how and when to use consensus under these circumstances, particularly given that, 1) proposals were submitted by Pheasants Forever and Julie was identified as grant manager; and 2) proposals referenced the LIT's TRP.
 - a. Partners noted that this funding often comes fast, and we may not always have time to gather consensus. How can we set the LIT up so respond quickly while ensuring those decisions align with LIT goals and priorities?
 - b. LIT members used Pheasants Forever (PF) as the fiscal agent and grant manager for all three grants because PF has a robust contracting staff at their HQ office and LIT coordinators employed by PF (i.e., Julie) can fill capacity roles to act as grant manager.

THREATS REDUCTION PLAN (TRP) AND Q&A.

- Prior to the meeting, partners were asked to review the plan; therefore, we did not spend a significant amount of time reviewing the during this meeting.
- The following groups noted minor changes/updates they would like to see within the TRP before they would feel comfortable using consensus to adopt the working document,
 - **Crook SWCD**
 - a. Concern with the list of outcomes identified within the Executive Summary. The TRP only articulates how it will address the first bullet point but not the rest. We need to include specifics for the remaining eight.
 - b. Minor Crook SWCD-specific edits.
 - **BLM**
 - a. A few minor edits to get it across the line.
 - **Deschutes SWCD**
 - a. Concerns with the updated climate change section.
 - b. Incorporate information about the proposed landfill.
 - **Deschutes County**
 - a. Revise descriptions of residential development. Skyler noted that Tarik's concerns might have been regarding the OSU annual Brothers-Paulina research report rather than the LIT's TRP.
 - **Audubon**
 - a. Publish results of Brothers forb study in relevant research section of the TRP.
 - **Others?**
- The group was not ready to use consensus to consider adopting the plan at this time but agreed the next meeting will be a good time for that discussion, once these minor edits are addressed.
- Overall, partners think revisions to the TRP will be relatively minor at this time and agreed to send updates to Julie **no later than 13 January 2023**, to be incorporated into the TRP before the next LIT meeting (1 February 2023).
- During the February meeting, partners will use consensus to determine whether to adopt the TRP.
- Over the long-term, it will be important to establish a routine schedule and system to collect, compile, and incorporate updates to the TRP and get buy-in on revisions from the LIT members.

LIT PRIORITIES

- Although the group wasn't ready to adopt the plan during this meeting, folks agreed now is the appropriate time to start setting initial priorities for the LIT and getting organized so the LIT is ready to apply for the various large federal funding opportunities that are currently available in sagebrush ecosystems.
- As we're planning, the group should overlay the LIT's priorities with relevant map products to support the significance of our efforts. Example map products discussed include habitat connectivity corridors; habitat suitability models for high profile species including sage-

grouse, mule deer, elk, pronghorn; and migration corridors. The group should also consider incorporating map products provided within SageCon's Landscape Planning Tool including the ecostate map.

- The group would like to start meeting monthly again. ***In-person meetings will be scheduled from 10am – 1pm on the first Wednesday of each month*** (meetings may be cancelled during any given month if there's nothing to discuss)

PARTNER UPDATES AND PRIORITIES

- Brie Porter (BLM): Paulina PAC hit soft trigger. BLM will complete a causal factor analysis. Prioritize juniper treatment, maybe some weed/annual grass treatments, vehicle counters to quantify human activity/use.
- Carrie Taylor (BLM): Working on a Livestock Grazing EA, managing allotments
- Monty Gregg (Ochoco NF): Working on Paulina/east Mauries juniper cutting; Sunflower area on the fringe of the forest in the Paulina area.
- Stu Garrett (Audubon): Brothers forb project. Updated the group on the Moffitt Ranch sale – and suggested the LIT discuss ideas about how to engage the new landowner in the LIT.
- Erin Kilcullen (DSWCD): Hoping to focus more on eastern Deschutes County in the near future (they currently have no ongoing projects here, but it is part of their long-term plan). There are 460 private tax lots in the Brothers PAC. The SWCD's goal is to work with the Prineville LIT to help sage-grouse.
- Greg Jackle (ODFW): ODFW has Mule Deer Initiative projects on the fringe of sage-grouse habitat. ODFW hired a NRCS liaison to write wildlife considerations into NRCS plans. Working with Forest Service and BLM on Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) projects. Also have solar development applications on Millican Plateau. BLM has gotten some large applications for solar – will eventually develop in sage-grouse habitat.
- Andy Gallagher (CSWCD): focused on CCAA enrollment for landowners, which are strategic ranch-wide plans for improving range conditions. Five open grants in sage-grouse habitat that focus on juniper work, riparian work, and mesic habitat improvements.
- Chris Mundy (NRCS): NRCS is now able to work with ranchers to apply Rejuvra, which seems to work better than other chemical treatments such as Plateau. Treating IAG is now one of their main priorities, in addition to juniper removals and mesic habitat restoration.
- Becky Hatfield Hyde: Lots of energy around the good work done through the CCAA. Lots of private land out here is connected to state and federally administered land – there's also lots of interest in the area to do good work. She and other landowners are particularly concerned about the following issues, 1) the small tax lots – people trying to live where they shouldn't live and unpermitted developments; 2) predation of sage-grouse; 3) solar development over the next few years; and 4) very concerned about the landfill! Becky also noted there's lots of money coming our way for sagebrush ecosystems. We need to create a story about the importance of the Brothers area, the "wild country."
- Larry Ashton (BLM): Finalized both Habitat Assessment Framework report for sage-grouse in Brothers (at the mid-scale and fine-scale). There's a 2024 deadline for Brothers HAF. Brothers Causal Factor Analysis was updated – habitat, vehicle use, bird numbers. Shifting gears with the playa project – recontouring to make it look more natural. Jackpot and pile

burn juniper north of Pine Mountain. Going to start cutting juniper in the Brothers PAC north of the highway. 8 new vehicle counters in the Brothers/N. Wagontire area – bringing it to about 20 counters total. GNA agreement – juniper cutting. OSU data dump.

- Joanna Zheng (ONDA): Working on Owyhee Canyonlands bill – protection for sage-grouse. Working on Hart-Sheldon protections for connectivity between the refuges. Working with ECAS on the forb project.
- Andrew – GNA juniper work for sage-grouse, keeping an eye on development applications. Obsidian solar development in Fort Rock valley working its way through the process. Lava project – on BLM lands. Other species priorities – something this group should consider. If there is a grant application moving forward – use pronghorn GPS data and habitat selection/resource selection data. ODFW also has mule deer connectivity data. Oregon Connectivity Assessment Mapping Project (OCAMP) is wrapping up as well and should be available soon.
- Emily Weidner (FWS): provided a BIL funding update via Jeff Everett (FWS). Timeline is subject to change; however, under the current timeline, FY24 BIL offering will likely be announced early next year with a proposal deadline of May. Other updates, FWS recently hired Brian Wilk to work on sage-grouse conservation issues alongside Emily. Their biggest workload is CCAAs: working with Crook County SWCD, Lakeview SWCD, Harney SWCD and Malheur SWCD to coordinate current and upcoming plans and work on a database. Emily and Brian work with Prineville, Burns, and Lakeview LITs.
- Anya Tyson (TNC): Interested in supporting partners to put together collaborative funding applications for ecosystem uplift. Interested in the defend and grow the core idea – lots of core sagebrush in Brothers/Paulina. Follow the priorities of LIT partners. TNC is here to help.
- Robin Vora (DSWCD): Sitting on the Solid Waste Advisory Council and will provide updates to the LIT from these meetings. LIT members and the public can obtain updates and maps on the Deschutes County website ([Managing the Future of Solid Waste | Deschutes County Oregon](#)) and by getting on the County Solid Waste Advisory Committee public mailing list for email updates (solidwaste@deschutes.org). He also suggested small tax lots and solar installations in Deschutes County should be addressed in the TRP.
- Skyler Vold (ODFW): Oregon sage-grouse core and low-density habitat revision follows the methods outlined in the 2011 Oregon Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy. Revised boundaries will reflect updated lek data, a new sage-grouse occupied habitat spatial layer, and additional winter space use data from marked sage-grouse. ODFW has completed Phase 1 of this process (GIS-based analysis), and is working through Phase 2, using local District knowledge to refine the boundaries. Boundaries changes will likely occur in every District, including areas of removal and addition to both core and low-density habitats. ODFW will present draft core and low-density maps in early 2023. The LITs will have a chance to provide input and comments on the revised layers at that time. ODFW internal District review meetings will wrap up in January, and hopefully be able to present the draft revised maps to the LITs and partners in March.
- **Others?**

DESCHUTES COUNTY LANDFILL

- All members agreed the new landfill should be a priority topic for the LIT; a landfill will be a massive predator subsidy; attracting avian predators of sage-grouse (e.g., ravens, hawks, eagles) and will impact sage-grouse reproductive success if it is sited within or near sage-grouse habitat.
- The site near the existing Negus Transfer Station is the optimal site given the already existing infrastructure, previous history of a landfill, and distance from sage-grouse habitat.
- Metrics were established to help determine site location; wildlife is one consideration and makes up 30% of the decision process – ravens are not considered an impact, because that metric is footprint based.
- The site selection process considers sage-grouse core areas, but not low-density habitat or distance to active leks. Additionally, ODFW is currently revising the core and low-density habitat boundaries; sites that are located near boundaries of current core and low-density sage-grouse habitat may fall into these mapped habitats following the revision.
- The committee will narrow the selection to three sites in March or April.
- Emily will attend the December meeting and provide an update for the group.
- LIT members agreed a subgroup should be formed to develop a strategy for the LIT to provide input. Emily and Stu agreed to be subgroup members. Becky will support the subgroup if needed.
- LIT could submit a comment letter, even if partners within the LIT submit letters individually. The LIT will also submit a map showing the overlap of several wildlife species.
- Skyler will send Robin an email with the % decline for Brothers/Paulina.
- **Note: Robin Vora is a member of the Solid Waste Advisor Committee representing himself. He does not represent Deschutes County or any other organization.**
- [Solid Waste Advisory Committee weblink](#). Follow this link to find meeting agendas, presentations, recordings, meeting notes, etc. Their next meeting is January 17th.
- [Agenda](#) and [presentation slides](#) from the December 2022 meeting.

NEXT STEPS/ACTION ITEMS

- **James Eisner:** Reserve meeting space at the BLM office for the first Wednesday of each from 10am – 1pm.
- **All LIT partners:** Send TRP edits and updates to Julie ***no later than 13 January 2023***. See instructions below.
- **Julie:** Incorporate partner edits into TRP before next LIT meeting (1 February 2023).
- **Emily:** Will provide LIT with FY24 BIL proposal instructions as soon as they're available.
- **Emily:** Will provide rationale for why the easement proposal submitted by the SWCDs wasn't funded and whether there are other routes we can pursue.
- **Emily:** Provide LIT an update of the solid waste meeting and timeline for comment.
- **Larry:** Will share the new mid- and fine-scale HAF reports with the LIT.

PROTOCOL FOR LIT PARTNERS TO SUBMIT EDITS TO THE TRP

- If edits are relatively minor (e.g., updates to partner activities within the narrative sections), send Julie a word document with the exact wording you'd like included for each update.

Please be as specific as possible when describing the location of your edits, including page number, table of contents section, sub-sections, etc.

Made up examples,

Page 24 (27 according to the PDF), section: 5.3 Misery Flat Action Area, sub-sections: Treatment Opportunities, Crook Soil and Water Conservation District.

- Current description: *No data provided.*
- Change to: *Crook SWCD does not have project work in this area.*

Page 34 (36 according to the PDF), section: 5.5 Paulina Action Area, sub-sections: Past and Ongoing Treatments, Department of State Lands.

- Current description: *No data provided.*
- Change to: *5,000 acres of phase I juniper removed.*

- If edits are more complex and require a significant amount of time and attention, Julie will hold time on January 11 and 12 to schedule one-on-one meetings with LIT partners.
 - Please email Julie ***no later than 3 January 2023*** with the following,
 - a. Times you're available on Jan. 11 and 12.
 - b. Identify the section you'd like updated.
 - c. A rationale for the proposed updates.
 - d. Any other relevant information.