

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



PartnersInTheSage.com

PARTNERING TO CONSERVE
SAGEBRUSH
RANGELANDS



PARTNERING TO CONSERVE SAGEBRUSH RANGELANDS

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) entered into a formal partnership in June 2016 to expand successful private land conservation practices to public lands. Through this partnership, the IWJV provides support to the BLM in a variety of forms including

on-the-ground field capacity positions, technical training, science products, communications strategies, and partner coordination. All of these efforts are aimed at increasing voluntary, incentive-based collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries for people, wildlife, and local communities.

Download an electronic version of this report here: www.PartnersInTheSage.com/2019-annual-report



THE PARTNERSHIP FOCUSES ON SIX PRIORITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AND BLM:

- Reduce catastrophic rangeland wildfires
- Prevent and control noxious and invasive weeds
- Restore wet meadow and riparian habitats
- Remove conifers that have expanded into sagebrush habitat
- Implement range structural improvements
- Coordinate habitat protection and restoration associated with big game migratory corridor efforts

HIGHLIGHTS: A LOOK AT 2019

- 38 BLM field, district, or state offices supported with additional capacity
- 3 additional partner positions/contracts for a total of 12 at the end of FY 2019
- 103 field projects implemented
- 63,172 acres impacted
- \$6,358,623 in project funding
- 539 partners engaged
- 181 landowner visits



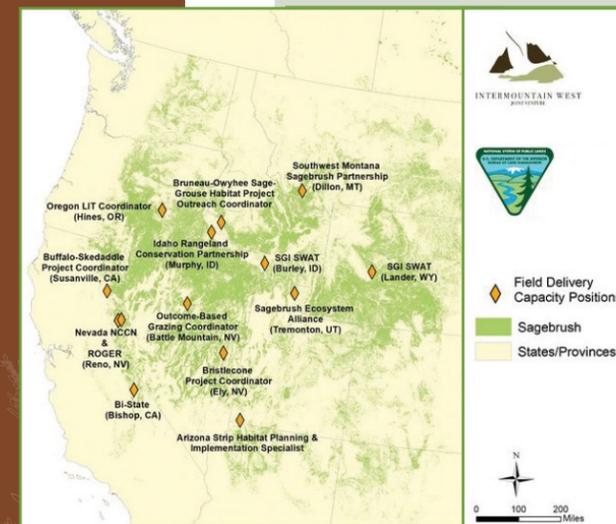
Restoring & Conserving Sagebrush Habitat FIELD DELIVERY CAPACITY

A primary aspect of the BLM-IWJV partnership agreement involves creating field capacity to accelerate, coordinate, and streamline conservation treatments in sagebrush habitats. The IWJV works closely with BLM staff to determine their needs and ensure additional support is value-added. Each non-federal partner position is leveraged with additional public and private funding to increase efficiency and outcomes. In 2019, we worked with 38 field, district, or state offices, and added three new capacity positions for a total of 12 positions located across eight western states. See the map below. We call this our Sage Capacity Team. [Learn more about these inspiring people here.](#)

“Solving the problems of the sagebrush-steppe is something that none of us can do alone. We need to blast through lines on the map and blur lines of authority. We need to look at all potential cooperators, even if we think we have little in common on the surface. Most of all, we need to step up our level of thinking, improve our creativity, and develop new approaches to old problems.”

- John Ruhs, BLM Idaho State Director

Overview of Capacity		Partnership Accomplishments	
Total Projects Planned	35	Conifers Removed (ac)	15,287
Total Projects Completed	103	Fuels Treatment (ac)	1,532
Total Acres Impacted	63,172	Fuel Breaks (ac)	71
Total Project Funding	\$6,358,623	Annual/Noxious Weeds Treated (ac)	1,120
Partners Engaged	539	Vegetation Management/Habitat Enhancement (ac)	27,794
Landowner Visits	181	Prescribed Grazing (ac)	17,346
Meetings/Field Tours	231	Fence Modification (mi)	27
Outreach/Education/Volunteer Events	27	Wet Meadows Restored (ac)	22
		Seedlings Planted	500
		Mesic Structures Installed	242
		Mesic Habitat Preserved/Restored (mi)	10



(Photo at right) Our Sage Capacity Team works ridgetop to ridgetop to address threats to maintaining healthy sagebrush rangelands and western communities in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain Regions.



Telling the BLM's Story COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH



DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS: PARTNERSINTHESAGE.COM

We utilized an advanced communications strategy to meet multiple audiences. [Our most popular stories](#) are posted on the website, compiled in an eNewsletter, and emailed to a database of approximately 4,300 contacts. On average, 34% of our database contacts open our newsletters (the average open rate for governmental programs is 27%). There are 400 BLM staff contacts in this database.

VIDEO: WELCOME TO THE PARTNERSHIP

In March 2019, the partnership released its [first video](#) entitled *Welcome to Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands*, an introductory clip establishing the basics of our collaboration with the BLM, the focus of this partnership, and an invitation for partners to engage.



(Right) Check out this story that aired on NPR's Morning Edition from the journalist workshop: [A Sea Of Sagebrush Disappears, Making Way For Fire-Prone Cheatgrass](#)

1ST MEDIA WORKSHOP: FIRE AND INVASIVES

In May 2019, we organized a workshop specifically for journalists that showcased sagebrush rangelands and invited these reporters to travel to Elko, Nevada to learn about rangeland fire and invasive annual grasses. This event resulted in over a dozen stories in outlets like the Reno Gazette-Journal, Associated Press, High Country News, Nevada Independent, National Public Radio, and Bloomberg Environment.

STORYMAP: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

The partnership [storymap](#) received a design and content "facelift" for the purpose of adapting to new technology and enabling more story content. The Sage Capacity Team members were also placed on a unique tab within the storymap that links to information about these positions and their partnerships.



Informing Strategic Conservation USING ACTIONABLE SCIENCE



CONIFER REMOVAL FOR SONGBIRDS ON PUBLIC LANDS

Our science partners — NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and University of Montana — quantified large-scale impacts of conifer removal on sagebrush birds in FY 2019. These partners [modeled occurrence and indices to abundance in relation to multi-scale habitat features for nine songbirds](#) reliant on both sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands for breeding. Access the [conifer decision support tool here](#).



(Left) Comparing predicted distributions of declining species to conifer removal targeted for sagebrush restoration under the umbrella of sage grouse revealed that management has largely aligned with distributions of declining sagebrush obligate songbirds, and avoided that of pinyon jay.

RANGELAND ANALYSIS PLATFORM (RAP)

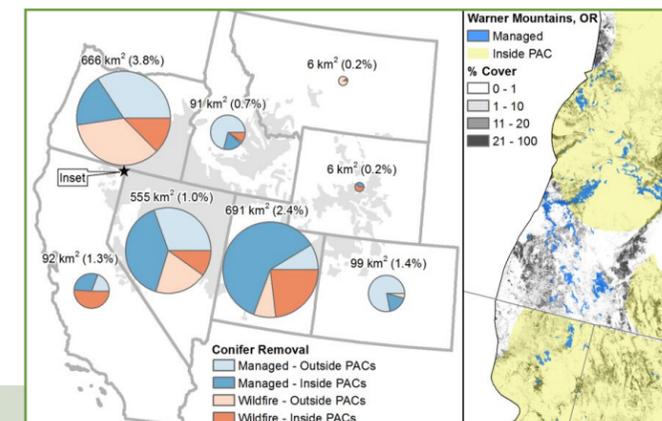
This partnership continues to support the [Rangeland Analysis Platform](#) (RAP) which was created by the University of Montana and NRCS. This public online application provides simple and fast access to geospatial data characterizing western U.S. rangelands. The tool was developed to provide landowners, resource managers, conservationists, and scientists access to data that can inform land management planning, decision making, and the evaluation of outcomes. Montana/Dakotas BLM pioneered the use of the RAP for management decisions in BLM.



(Map at right) The University of Montana, Colorado State University, and partners mapped conifer cover over time, allowing land managers to visualize the extent of conifer removal on an annual basis and quantify conservation outcomes. From 2011-2017, the extent of conifer cover in sagebrush country decreased by 1.6%. Human management efforts are responsible for 2/3 of the total reduction; the other 1/3 is due to wildfires.

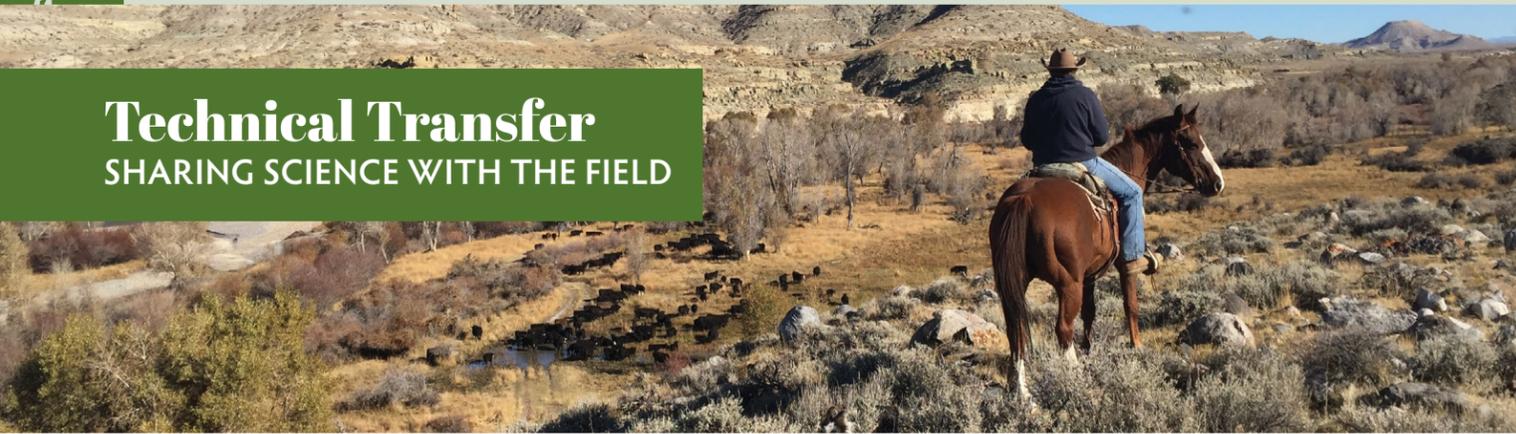
OUTCOME-BASED EVALUATION OF CONIFER REMOVAL IN LAKEVIEW, OREGON

The overall objective of this study conducted by Oregon State University and partners is to provide a longer-term assessment of the effects of juniper removal on sage grouse habitat use and demography. To date, this study has modeled: 1) sage grouse habitat selection during nesting and brood-rearing before and after juniper treatments; 2) demographic and population response of sage grouse to juniper management; and 3) landscape resistance to sage grouse movements in relation to juniper. The study area is located in the Warner Mountains in Lake County, Oregon. In 2018, the study area was expanded to include areas in Washoe County, Nevada and Modoc County, California. [To learn more about this research and associated communications, visit this link.](#)



Technical Transfer

SHARING SCIENCE WITH THE FIELD



FIELD-BASED WORKSHOP: WESTERN RANGELAND RESILIENCY

For the past several years, the BLM-IWJV partnership has supported the NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife annual workshop that brings together agricultural producers, land managers, NRCS staff, BLM, and non-governmental partners. In FY 2019, [the workshop was hosted in Twin Falls, Idaho with nearly 200 partners learning how to work across boundaries](#), both literally and figuratively, to implement conservation efforts that have improved rangeland resiliency in highly diverse landscapes.

PLACE-BASED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT:

RIPARIAN AND WET MEADOW RESTORATION

In 2018, a natural resource consulting firm was contracted to provide technical assistance to BLM, NRCS, and local partners seeking to launch projects using Zeedyk and other restoration techniques. This work continued in 2019 with multiple site visits and on-the-ground training in four new states. Piloting and scaling up low-tech riparian restoration across the region will continue to be an important emphasis of our collaborative work in sagebrush ecosystems.



FIRST ANNUAL SAGEBRUSH COLLABORATIVE FORUM

The first annual Sagebrush Collaborative Forum was sponsored by BLM and hosted in Boise, Idaho, with 50 leading conservation professionals who are teaming up to implement the BLM-IWJV partnership. The overarching purpose of this meeting was to bring the Sage Capacity Team, BLM, and other federal, state, community, and non-governmental partners together for hands-on, peer-to-peer learning to provide numerous resources and contacts, and further their efforts in the landscapes in which they work. [Read about this forum here.](#)



(Above) "Managing the health of rangelands is not just a western or even North American issue, it is a global issue. Many countries are struggling with the degradation of rangelands so we can and are learning from each other," said Gordon Toevs, BLM Division Chief Resource Services. "This first annual forum was a great opportunity to engage a group of on-the-ground rangeland professionals who are working to improve and sustain rangeland health."

(Left) Low-tech structures that mimic natural formations in creeks are a valuable tool for restoring degraded stream systems.



Conservation takes a village, from traveling in the field with partners and landowners, to sharing lessons learned, to getting into the nitty gritty with projects, to working with new and diverse entities on opportunities for the future.

Strengthening Partnerships

IWJV SUPPORT

The IWJV is uniquely positioned to oversee and implement intra-agency agreements, especially given our [highly diverse executive-level Management Board](#) composed of state fish and wildlife agencies, federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, corporate members representing the energy sector, and private landowners including public land ranchers. Here is a snapshot of our most important funding and partnership accomplishments from 2019.

FUNDING ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

POWERFUL LEVERAGING

- Total BLM funds contributed to date is **\$5.079 million**.
- Total fund leverage and in-kind services is **\$3.910 million** representing an increase of \$1.001 million from FY 2018.
- Partnership leverage ratio averages **57:43** (BLM:partners) surpassing the original goal of a 75:25 ratio.
- IWJV's long-time partner, ConocoPhillips, committed up to **\$200,000** annually for five years. This is their second such investment toward sagebrush habitat conservation since 2015.
- Approximately **88%** of the BLM funds provided have been programmed for project work.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS: STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

Building on existing relationships, we are working with more than 539 partners representing federal agencies, state fish and wildlife agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations, tribes, and universities. In 2019, we hosted a special engagement session with energy exploration and production companies to explore common ground for the future of sagebrush habitat conservation. We also took our partnership with Pheasants Forever to a new level of shared investment, as they became the leading entity to host field delivery capacity positions.





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To learn more about how to engage, join the partnership [HERE](#).

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