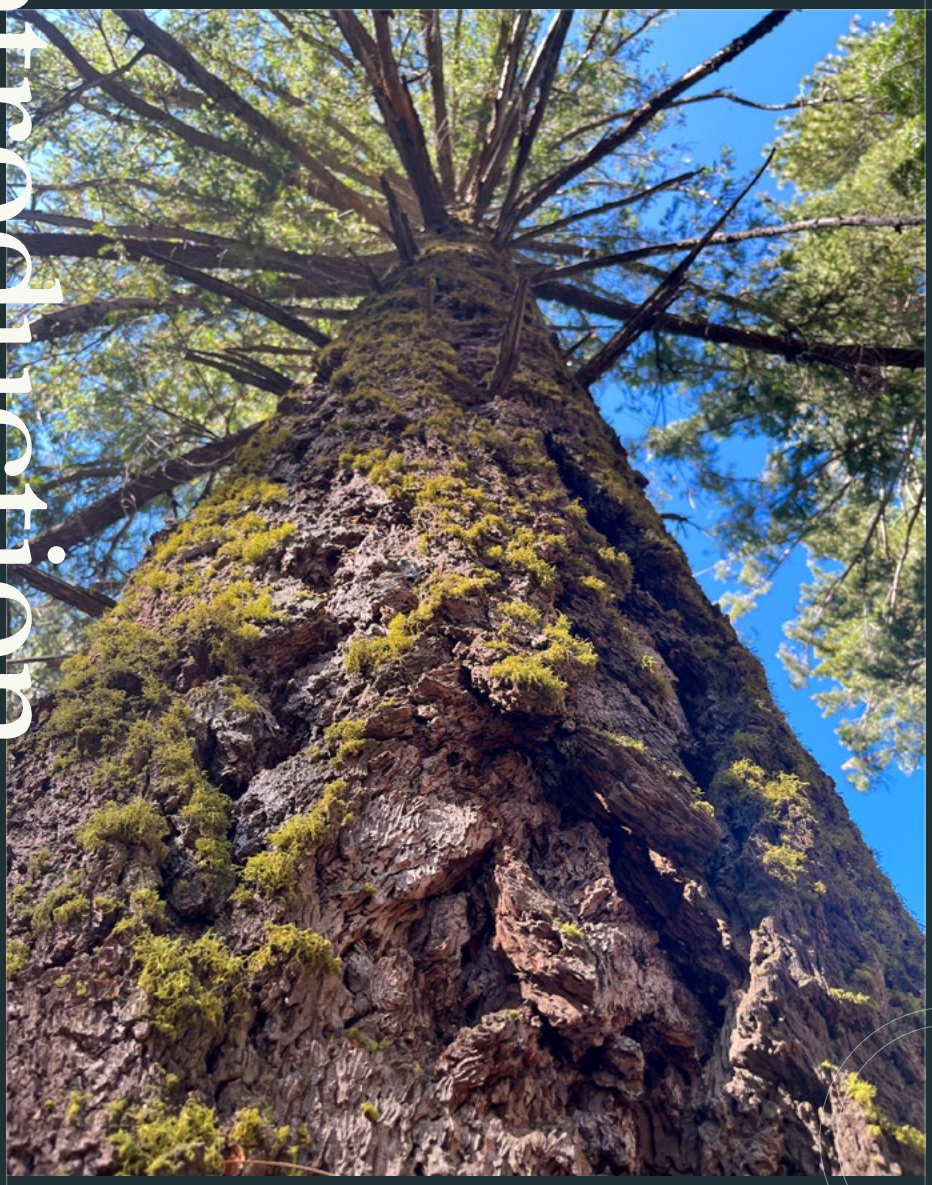
Introduction



Our Mission

Conserve and enhance bird habitats at meaningful scales through capacity building, science, communications, and strategic partnerships.

Our Vision

An Intermountain West where people, birds, and other wildlife thrive.

The Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) has evolved immensely over the last decade. While the *conserving and enhancing bird habitats* component of our mission is at the core of everything the IWJV has engaged in since its inception in 1994, the ways we support the partnership in achieving this mission include new elements that stretch the boundaries of the 30-plus-year Migratory Bird Habitat Joint Venture enterprise.

The IWJV is rooted in bird habitat conservation, and that remains central to our mission. However, to be successful, we have adapted our conservation approach over the last decade. Today, we see our work through a lens of relevance to people.

This philosophy is embedded in our vision and is reflected throughout the bird conservation community. The modern iterations of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative all speak to the importance of people. In the last two decades, the IWJV has made its mark by operationalizing people-centric conservation approaches. We have concluded that we must work in ways that can drive conservation funding and implementation at a scale that matters. For these reasons, the IWJV utilizes an approach in which multiple natural resource benefits and people are front and center in our thought process, planning, and implementation.

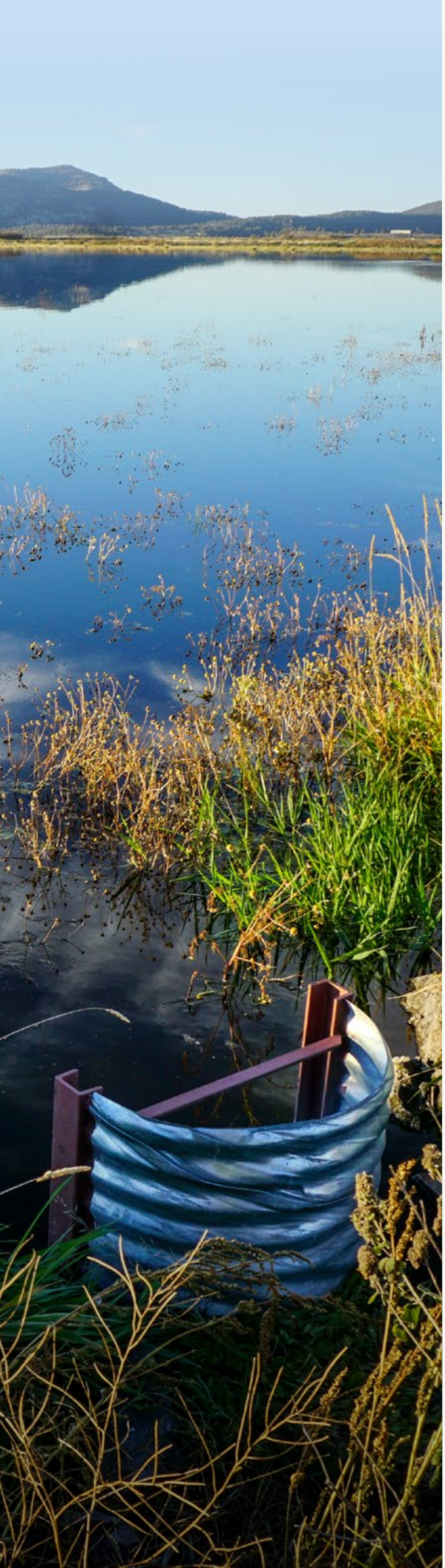
The Intermountain West includes most of North America's sagebrush ecosystem; an array of rivers, streams, and floodplains with productive wetlands; and a diversity of western forests. However, climate change and other stressors are leading to massive landscape change. This is seen when invasive annual grasses, encroaching conifers, and other threats result in the loss of 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat annually, wetlands are drying in space and time at an alarming clip, and western forests experience increasing catastrophic wildfires.

These challenges necessitate innovative and accelerated approaches to conservation delivery. We are in an era of significant conservation funding through the Farm Bill and other sources devoted to active management of rangelands, western forests, and irrigated lands. The IWJV is uniquely positioned to engage partners in conservation that can be implemented at the pace and scale of landscape threats.

IWJV Management Board & Strategic Plan

An executive-level management board governs the IWJV. This guiding body includes officials at the highest levels of western state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, Tribal partnerships, energy companies, and agricultural producers. This self-directed partnership is relentless in pursuing common ground that unites diverse perspectives.

The IWJV Management Board developed a strategic plan that guides our long-term work. The plan defines our "why" and provides a clear picture of our conservation philosophy and core values, who we are, and how we operate. One of its unifying principles is a deep commitment to working lands and the people who steward them. It also documents our support of land management practices that sustain bird habitat in a voluntary, nonregulatory manner. These pillars of the IWJV's work are grounded in science-based habitat conservation and our emphasis on collaboration, partnerships, and pragmatic conservation solutions.



Entrepreneurial Business Model

The IWJV helps partners deliver effective conservation by leveraging funding beyond the base U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) funding received through the joint venture line item in the annual Appropriations Bill.

For example, the IWJV FY 2024 budget included $1.1 million of base USFWS joint venture funding, but the total IWJV FY 2024 budget was $6.7 million. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), other programs of the USFWS, ConocoPhillips, and Rocky Mountain Power provided the remaining $5.6 million.

The IWJV core staff and 50-plus field delivery capacity partner positions supported with this funding trigger $40–50 million in on-the-ground conservation delivery investments annually through NRCS, BLM, and other funders. These project investments would likely not happen without the additional partnership capacity created through the IWJV.

Catalyzing tens of millions of dollars in federal conservation funding brings a high level of relevancy to the IWJV's work, which spurs interest in joining the IWJV Management Board among leaders in the West. This feedback loop results in the IWJV continually strengthening its operation with new funding sources, visionary board members, and innovative approaches. The IWJV Management Board has supported this business model for 17 years. The IWJV annual budget and the amount of conservation funding catalyzed will vary, but this approach will be the foundation of our work for the life of this plan.

PLAN APPROACH:

Why This Plan Matters

The IWJV partnership often must secure funding for on-the-ground habitat conservation from programs and sources in which wildlife habitat is not a primary objective. This reality requires emphasizing the multiple benefits of conservation practices; e.g., wildfire risk reduction, water quantity and quality improvement, soil health enhancement, and rural economy sustainability.

Birds and bird habitat needs seldom drive landscape-scale conservation in the Intermountain West, but there are many ways to incorporate migratory bird habitat conservation into programs with much broader natural resource objectives. For example, large federal funding packages often include very little specific focus on bird conservation but provide funding at levels in which millions of acres of key bird habitat can be proactively protected, restored, or enhanced per year.

These funds are driven by people's desires to improve ecosystem function toward greater resiliency; i.e., fewer catastrophic forest fires destroying communities, new ways of managing water resources sustainably, fewer rangeland fires that result in the type conversion of sagebrush to invasive annual grasses, better soil health, healthy rivers that support native fish, improved habitat connectivity for big game, and stronger rural economies that help keep working lands intact.

This plan lays out key concepts, approaches, and ideas for partners to strategically conserve wetlands/water, sagebrush, and western forests to provide habitat that supports bird populations to the greatest degree possible. This plan leans into *ways that partners can innovatively address* the daunting challenges of wetlands drying, degradation of sagebrush ecosystems, and loss of resiliency in western forests.

Looking to the Future

The Intermountain West is a region with incredibly intact and highly functional landscapes supporting some of North America's most impressive wildlife populations. Cutting-edge science tells us that these landscapes are functionally changing from threats—wetland drying, rangeland fires converting sagebrush habitat to invasive annual grasses, conifer encroachment in the sage, and heavy fuel loads in forested habitats—that are not prominently featured in the wildlife management textbooks of the past.

Today's challenges require innovation. The "Defend the Core, Grow the Core" sagebrush conservation strategy is a good example of the innovation the IWJV immediately incorporated into our operations. Likewise, our wetland habitat modeling—depicting surface water in space and time—has driven new approaches to conserving wetland habitat. We can't predict when these scientific breakthroughs will occur, but this much is clear: new approaches can and will be developed each year that improve the IWJV's ability to sustain and improve key habitats. To stay relevant, we need to be able to vet new information and incorporate it efficiently.

The IWJV Staff, Management Board, and Partnership recognize the need for adaptability in our operations and will treat this plan as a "living, breathing" document. We refine our operations through an annual operational plan that describes the coming year's specific work and serves as the IWJV's annual budget justification. This implementation plan will live in the space between our "evergreen" strategic plan and each year's Annual Operational Plan. We will update and refine this plan with new information and conservation advancements. This approach will support our partners who are working in an era of dynamic landscape change, meeting a growing need for real-time innovation in conservation.