

IWJV

INTERMOUNTAIN WEST JOINT VENTURE

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Focusing time, energy, and
resources in the right places
with the right people and
actions.



FY2027 ANNUAL OPERATIONAL PLAN

RELATIONSHIPS

Meeting people
where they are to
achieve strategic
habitat conservation.

INNOVATION

Exploring and
developing new ways to
address complex
conservation challenges.

GETTING IT DONE

Pursuing tangible,
on-the-ground
habitat conservation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Intermountain West Joint Venture's (IWJV) Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Annual Operational Plan (AOP) provides the proposed actions that will be implemented in the federal fiscal year (October 1, 2026–September 30, 2027). The IWJV Management Board's approval of the AOP enables the IWJV Coordinator to direct the IWJV's staff time and resources throughout the fiscal year.

The 2027 AOP is streamlined to provide the IWJV Management Board with a summary of our planned operations for the upcoming fiscal year. This AOP describes our planned approach. We highlight the following as three areas of emphasis that are interwoven into the specific body of work described herein.

FY 2027 Areas of Emphasis

The IWJV Management Board executed an Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) analysis this spring that assessed risks to the IWJV through a lens of likelihood and effect. The analysis provided some valuable insight into both near-term and long-run operations. The ERM identified some risks that warrant the following actions in FY 2027: diversifying of our revenue streams; supporting efforts to improve the flow of federal funding and agreements; providing field delivery capacity to federal natural resources conservation agencies given federal workforce reductions; and strengthening and refining our conservation delivery and partnership work to tackle pressing natural resources issues such as water scarcity, wildfire risk, and the loss of valuable agricultural lands. In FY 2027, we will place special emphasis on the following three areas:

Next Level on Non-Federal Funding: The IWJV Management Board has reaffirmed that our niche is and will be in the federal conservation program space, non-federal funds are a key part of that equation, and that we need to diversify our funding portfolio. We dedicated substantial time and energy over the last year to building new streams of non-federal funding. We received some great advice from a three-year individual donor, tapped the expertise of a JV Coordinator with experience in private sector engagement, executed a private funding session at our annual staff retreat, explored opportunities with several potential donors, and developed the beginnings of a private funding strategy. These efforts helped us understand our strategic advantage in tapping the unique funding opportunities that would strengthen our work and best support our partnership. Foremost, we are uniquely positioned to connect funders directly with opportunities to grow field delivery capacity that delivers landscape scale conservation, effectively leveraging millions in federal funding. This year we will take that effort to the next level by building relationships with funders, exploring different models for receiving non-federal funds, and refining our niche in this new space with guidance from the Funding & Nonprofit Exploration Ad Hoc Committee.

Fresh Look at Field Delivery Capacity: The IWJV has built a solid set of conservation strategies for addressing modern-day landscape threats – invasive annual grasses, encroaching conifers, aging irrigation infrastructure, wetland drying, and declining forest health – and essentially all these strategies require *active land management*. The work is highly supported across a broad cross-section of perspectives in the West because it improves agricultural productivity and profitability, enhances wildlife and fisheries habitat, reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and supports rural economies. Funding for on-the-ground conservation is currently strong through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act/Farm Bill and various lines of appropriated conservation funding, but the key federal agencies – Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – all need capacity to implement projects at a pace and scale that matches the challenges. A cornerstone of the IWJV's work over the last decade has been building field delivery capacity (up to 40 partner positions), and we've generally done that with an agency/program alignment – BLM (sagebrush rangelands), NRCS (water and wetlands), and USFS (western

forests). In 2027, we will take a fresh look at field delivery capacity with our federal agency partners to identify the best locations and work focus to support our partners with their vision –e.g., NRCS with Farmer First, keeping working lands in working hands – and implement conservation at scale. This will likely result in new or re-crafted positions efficiently working across our sagebrush rangelands, water and wetlands, and western forests on public, private, and/or Tribal lands. A major focus this year will be to establish new three- to five-year agreements with the federal agencies for field delivery capacity that leverages funds and sustains high-level impact in delivering conservation projects.

Strategic Relations: Pressures are increasing on agriculture, our conservation work, and landscape resiliency in the West, impacting private landowners and the large swath of society that utilizes public lands. The current-day IWJV partnership is heralded as a national leader for the wide array of perspectives represented on the IWJV Management Board and connection with agriculture and the timber and energy industries. We are highly focused on working lands since agricultural producers, particularly ranchers on sagebrush rangelands and irrigated wet meadows, provide much of the region’s migratory bird habitat through land management practices implemented for many generations. Likewise, we are heavily invested in supporting active management of sagebrush rangelands, wetlands and aquatic habitats, and western forests on public lands. Stressors to this system include the *demonizing of western agriculture* (e.g., cattle industry, irrigation) and *lack of capacity and funding for active management* at the scale needed to address modern-day landscape threats. We need an expanded support base for this work because the loss of agricultural production on private lands and habitat quality on public lands has far-reaching implications to our Nation’s food supply, wildlife populations, and quality of life in the West. Our conservation work is well-aligned with many organizations, coalitions, and sectors in which we haven’t yet built relationships or fully explored collaboration. New strategic relationships could open doors for increased support for both agricultural producers and our vast array of partners engaged in active land management. For these reasons, we will work closely with the new Strategic Relations Ad Hoc Committee to identify and build new partnerships that advance our mission. Our work in this space could lead to a much larger tent of conservation supporters and funding streams for working lands and active land management in the West.

SAGEBRUSH RANGELANDS

The Sagebrush Rangelands Program works across local and landscape scales to promote resilient sagebrush rangelands through proactive, voluntary, science-based management and restoration with diverse partners.

In FY 2027, we will help the BLM and other partners deliver proactive conservation in the sagebrush biome to address the following areas of emphasis: reducing the risk of wildfire and invasive weeds, restoring wet meadows, removing expanding conifers, supporting outcome-based grazing, and coordinating on big game corridor conservation. The [Sage Capacity Team](#) (SCT) will remain a critical component of our work as this team is the primary implementation arm of the *Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands* effort and provides collaborative infrastructure—increasing efficiency and maximizing impacts in the sagebrush. We will oversee, coordinate, and support between 25-30 positions, collectively enabling the BLM and partners to implement landscape level conservation and expand stewardship across jurisdictional boundaries. This field-level workforce catalyzes landscape-scale conservation, while the IWJV sagebrush staff is crucial in managing the field delivery capacity positions, providing science-to-implementation support, and executing a dynamic array of communications projects. The IWJV Sagebrush Rangeland Program supports the larger sagebrush biome conservation and stewardship effort across the West via technical transfer, communications services and partnership facilitation in collaboration with Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations as well as a host of other partnerships and working land managers. The operational work is outlined below:

Programmatic Work

- Provide field-level capacity and oversight for habitat projects to address implementation bottlenecks and increase targeted outcomes across public and private lands. Maintain existing SCT positions established through this partnership, modify existing ones if necessary to deliver current and new objectives, and add new positions in priority landscapes.
- Provide and enhance communication and outreach strategies to share successes of conservation efforts, highlight the places and people making a difference in the sagebrush rangelands, and increase buy-in to strategic and focused implementation.
- Strengthen the engagement and collaboration of partners in cross-boundary collaborative sagebrush habitat conservation by integrating financial, technical, and other resources for long-term biological and social outcomes.
- Identify and explore opportunities to support state-identified priorities and program activities with federal partner engagement to foster cross-agency collaboration, coordination of resources, technical assistance, and expertise to support shared goals and improve outcomes at landscape levels.
- Support partnership-led efforts and expand IWJV's roles targeting current administrative priorities including big game migration corridors and habitat improvements and rangeland health initiatives.
- Engage the IWJV Sagebrush Rangelands Committee, comprising board members and other decision-makers, to guide the IWJV's sagebrush conservation efforts, address relevant threats and issues, and advance voluntary, incentive-based conservation of the sagebrush ecosystem through collaboration.
- Explore new funding avenues to increase longevity and program resilience.
- Identify new opportunities to engage in to provide added support to private landowners and agricultural practices that will further build the working landscape approach to stewardship and conservation via partnerships with NRCS, Public Lands Council, and others.
- Produce a "Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands" annual report that summarizes annual and cumulative impacts of funding, including projects implemented, number of acres impacted, communications and technical transfer products created, and other relevant metrics.

Field Delivery Capacity

- Oversee, coordinate, and support SCT positions; work with SCT position-hosting entities and BLM to continue position funding and work, recruit employees for positions and onboard new hires; compile position sustainability assessment proposals to assess the efficacy of the positions for renewal.
- Identify geographies needing capacity with an emphasis on combining NRCS and BLM capacity and conservation priorities to increase on-the-ground project implementation and planning for working lands.
- Coordinate and implement sagebrush conservation across land ownership boundaries.
- Track projects and outcomes.
- Collaborate with partners to leverage and scale up management and restoration actions within strategic landscapes in the sagebrush biome.
- Leverage federal funding allocations with other agencies, collaboratives, and partners to secure substantial grant-based funds.
- Build locally based, effective collaboration that promotes landscape-scale conservation planning and enhances partnerships.
- Provide rangeland, fire and fuels, and wildlife technical assistance targeting public and private lands conservation efforts to assist with overall project coordination, management, and success.

Science and Technical Transfer

- Provide strategic science-to-implementation support and mentorship to the SCT and their partners to further implement conservation and restoration efforts.
- Host monthly topic-based Community of Practice sessions tailored to the SCT to support their continued education, facilitate engagement within the team and with external experts, and promote engagement and discussion.
- Expand science partnerships with the U.S. Geological Survey and other agency and university researchers to facilitate coproduction of actionable science and link science to implementation.
- Lead and grow the [Sagebrush Technical Transfer Network](#) (STTN), which aims to equip sagebrush partners to do effective technical transfer by strengthening and supporting capacity- and skill-building through guidelines, resources, processes, and direct support. Offer customized training opportunities for scientists, technical transfer professionals, and more.
- Support and collaborate with State Conservation Partners to maximize science, technical transfer, communications, and partnership development targeting sagebrush conservation efforts.
- Support the [Invasive Annual Grass Tech Transfer Partnership](#), hosted by the University of Wyoming's Institute for Managing Annual Grasses Invading Natural Ecosystems (IMAGINE). Engage in educational content development, workshops, and other technical transfer efforts. Co-lead with IMAGINE the development of fact sheets that support landowners and managers in a decision-making process for planning and implementing invasive annual grass treatments.
- Assist partners with accessing, interpreting, and applying technical products focused on pinyon-juniper woodlands developed under the IWJV Western Forests Program (e.g., spatial tools for prioritizing pinyon-juniper woodland conservation while maintaining sagebrush habitats).
- Assist the BLM National Operations Center Sage Grouse Team with efforts to support BLM offices in completing multi-scale Sage Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework assessments.

Communications

- Develop stories about conservation partners and SCT members that inform and inspire partnership and conservation practices. These stories will feature how land management that benefits wildlife and local communities in the sagebrush biome can support rural economic functions and prosperity. This will include multimedia articles, videos, Q&As, photo essays, social media spotlights, updates to the SCT map, journalist engagement/workshops, and more as needed.
- Create new communication products about sagebrush rangeland conservation projects, exploring new tactics and tools such as developing films, social media, and audio productions to 1) address range health needs and opportunities; 2) share conservation successes and lessons learned; and 3) engage partners.
- Support communications content drafted by SCT members with our Field Notes series.
- Create communication products that clarify the importance of working lands to habitat conservation for a variety of partners, particularly including an increased investment in video and social media content production. Grow our collective audience by championing the impacts of locally led conservation through public-facing content to grow awareness of BLM-IWJV joint accomplishments.
- Leverage communications support with the IWJV Science to Implementation Team and partners to advance the technical transfer of knowledge and data relevant to sagebrush habitat conservation using a variety of communications approaches detailed in the implementation plan.

Meetings, Events, Support

- Reinforce and grow the sagebrush partnership by maintaining solid relationships, hosting intentional meetings and forums, and innovating ways to support a growing and robust network of practitioners.
- Convene in-person meetings with the SCT, IWJV staff, and representatives of BLM leadership to strengthen relationships, engage in team-building, share knowledge, and build technical skills.
- Collaborate with the BLM Management Oversight Group and BLM Division Chiefs to expand awareness of our partnership within BLM offices at all levels (national, state, and local). This will entail regular meetings with the BLM Division Chiefs, members of the BLM Management Oversight Group, and the IWJV core team (with at least one of these meetings taking place in person) to discuss recommendations on program implementation, including approval on funding recommendations, budget oversight, and priority areas of work. These meetings are crucial to maintaining and strengthening relationships with leadership across multiple BLM divisions and offices.
- Engage with the BLM State Directors, District Managers, and others through various meetings and other opportunities (i.e., Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meetings, etc.).
- Expand BLM field office awareness and support of the BLM and IWJV partnership through continued outreach and meetings that bridge the gap between science and implementation, explore new capacity opportunities, strengthen collaboration and coordination, etc.
- Engage with the Wildland Fire Service leadership to expand understanding and partnership opportunities that address fire and fuels threats.
- Act as a convening arm to 1) increase coordination of capacity building within the sagebrush biome; 2) build efficiency coordination for projects and funding with other partners; and 3) increase coordination and collaboration of cross jurisdictional efforts with federal and state partners.



WATER 4 - WATER AND WETLANDS

Water 4 accelerates the conservation of wetlands and flood-irrigated agriculture to benefit people and wildlife through collaborative, science-driven partnerships and programs.

In FY 2027, we will support multi-benefit wetland habitat conservation by bolstering locally driven efforts to sustain resilient watersheds across the Intermountain West. Drought in the West is a long-term, landscape-scale challenge with implications for food security, human health and communities, the economy, and fish and wildlife. The high stakes and complex nature of Western water management require unprecedented collaboration. Because the success of wetlands conservation is directly intertwined with human water use, key opportunities for conservation exist in places where people actively manage water resources that sustain wetland habitats, including flood-irrigated grass hay agriculture and managed wetlands. Further, upper watershed health has direct implications for downstream wetlands and local communities. The IWJV's water and wetlands work centers on helping partners address on-the-ground challenges through capacity, communications, science, and partnership coordination. Investments by partners in field delivery capacity – including the NRCS in California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah, and the USFWS Region 8 in the Klamath Basin – have established and annually support the IWJV's Water & Wetlands Capacity Team. These locally based positions fill crucial implementation needs in key landscapes. IWJV staff provide a supporting framework for these capacity efforts, laying the groundwork for strategic conservation by integrating new research into on-the-ground program delivery and developing innovative messaging to communicate the challenges and opportunities in wetlands conservation to expanded audiences. The operational work is outlined below:

Programmatic Work

- Advance cross-boundary, collaborative wetland conservation activities in key habitats, as outlined in the implementation plan.
- Provide field-level capacity and oversight for habitat projects to address implementation bottlenecks and increase targeted outcomes in wetland landscapes across the West. Maintain existing capacity positions, modify existing ones as necessary to deliver current and new objectives, and add new positions in priority landscapes.
- Work closely with agency, state, NGO, and private lands partners to identify opportunities to integrate IWJV and partner science products into conservation programs, planning, and processes.
- Support communication and outreach strategies to elevate narratives supporting flood-irrigated agriculture, managed wetlands, and other innovative approaches and partnerships. Share successful conservation efforts and increase public awareness of threats to wetlands in the Intermountain West.
- Engage the IWJV Water 4 Committee to leverage the expertise of board members and other decision-makers to guide the IWJV's wetland conservation efforts, address relevant threats and issues, and advance voluntary, incentive-based, and collaborative water and wetlands conservation in the Intermountain West.
- Expand partnerships and explore opportunities to advance the multi-benefit approach of the program, such as:
 - Partner with the fisheries community on projects that support aquatic habitats, adjacent wetlands, and irrigated agriculture in riparian corridors.
 - Develop opportunities to support and coordinate with public wetland managers within state and federal agencies, which may include networking opportunities, communities of practice, science and technical transfer support, and capacity development.
 - Partner with agencies, watershed groups, and other stakeholders on projects that support watershed health in priority geographies.

- Continue the strong history of collaborative conservation in the Southern Oregon-Northeastern California (SONEC) region through the work of the SONEC Conservation Delivery Coordinator. Key roles include:
 - Wrap up following the final year of the Klamath Basin Farming and Wetland Collaborative Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Work with S2I and Communications staff to produce communications products highlighting the successes of this innovative program.
 - Participation in local and regional stakeholder groups, providing technical expertise to inform wetland conservation efforts.
 - Participation in stakeholder groups that are planning and implementing collaborative projects to support agriculture and wetlands in the Klamath Basin, such as engagement in the development of a new RCPP and restoration efforts along the Sprague River.
 - Oversight and support of field delivery capacity within the SONEC region; facilitation of connections between regional conservation practitioners and field delivery capacity staff; construction of linkages between capacity work and NRCS programs.
 - Storytelling support for partnerships in the Klamath Basin and larger SONEC region in collaboration with the IWJV Communications Team, highlighting critical issues facing the region while featuring successful projects and partnerships. This may include products celebrating the successes of the Klamath RCPP and other projects highlighting NRCS programs and/or innovative wetland management techniques and approaches.
- Identify opportunities to align the work of the Water 4 Program with the newly released NRCS National Priorities.
- Produce an annual report that summarizes the cumulative impacts of funding, including projects supported, the status of new and continued capacity investments, and resulting quantitative (acres and dollars) and qualitative (social, relationships, community) outcomes, communications and technical transfer products, and other relevant metrics.

Field Delivery Capacity

- The Field Delivery Capacity Coordinator will oversee, coordinate, and support field delivery capacity positions and investments; work with host entities to recruit employees for new and existing positions; track implementation successes to report to funding partners and ensure continued alignment between on-the-ground work, partner goals, and program priorities.
- Conduct prioritization assessments to determine overlap between partner needs, funding opportunities, and wetland priorities in key geographies to determine potential areas of work in the future.
- Collaborate across IWJV Programs to identify opportunities to develop positions working in multiple habitat types.
- Given the unique context for water and wetland conservation in different regions across the West, position priorities vary widely but include:
 - Fill capacity gaps and alleviate implementation bottlenecks to accelerate delivery of Farm Bill conservation programs.
 - Address landscape-scale threats and advance cross-boundary conservation in key habitats to support wetland-dependent migratory birds.
 - Support the protection, restoration, and/or enhancement of agricultural working lands that provide habitat for migratory birds and other terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.
 - Identify multi-benefit project opportunities that align the conservation of essential wetland habitats with the priorities of other stakeholders, such as local communities, fisheries groups, agricultural producers, and other conservation and land management entities.
 - Document and report on-the-ground successes such as habitat improvements, private landowners supported, and partnerships built or sustained.

Science and Technical Transfer

- Provide strategic science-to-implementation support and mentorship to Water & Wetlands field delivery capacity positions and their partners to further implement conservation and restoration efforts.
- Provide technical transfer support for the [Wetland Evaluation Tool \(WET\)](#) by working with end users to provide training and demonstrations, supply data for in-house analysis, and aid in interpreting results.
- Collaborate with IWJV partners in custom analyses using IWJV data products and other relevant sources to support outcome evaluation for water- and wetlands-related conservation projects.
- Engage in speaking and presentation opportunities to share IWJV-produced science, including research on [flood-irrigated grass hay](#), [sandhill cranes](#), and other forthcoming research focused on white-faced ibis.
- Work in collaboration with scientists at Ducks Unlimited to develop a science-based strategic approach to improving habitat quality (food production) on managed public seasonal wetlands.
- Support the integration of the IWJV's wetland science tools into partner conservation planning frameworks and ranking criteria.
- Support and collaborate with State Conservation Partners to maximize science, technical transfer, communications, and partnership development targeting wetland conservation efforts.
- Develop and release Regional Wetland Profiles to support the wetland conservation strategies outlined in the implementation plan, translating IWJV science, priorities, and tools into locally relevant documents that can be used to prioritize and inform conservation activities.
- Conduct literature reviews and scoping to identify additional multi-benefit outcomes and opportunities related to water management that align with program priorities.
- Collaborate with communications staff to develop science-driven educational materials highlighting threats and opportunities in wetland conservation for various audiences, from traditional conservation practitioners to policymakers, water management staff, and the general public.

Communications

- Develop stories highlighting collaborative conservation efforts that support wetlands and watershed health, featuring the Water & Wetlands capacity team and other partners. These stories will focus on the power of partnerships to overcome conservation challenges, innovative funding mechanisms, projects in priority wetland habitats, and landscape resiliency tied to watershed function.
- Create compelling communication products using engaging tactics and tools to share Water & Wetlands priority messaging with new and expanded audiences. These may include:
 - Articles, videos, and other media featuring Water & Wetlands capacity team members, as well as outreach materials to support their work.
 - Communications (including articles, scientist Q&As, summaries, and fact sheets) detailing key takeaways from recent wetland science, targeted toward decision-makers at the local, state, and national levels.
 - Collaboration with groups outside the traditional conservation community to grow the reach of Water & Wetlands messaging.
 - Workshops (in-person and online) and field tours that coordinate with journalists and other communications professionals.
- Lead outreach efforts for new IWJV science and research products. Collaborate with IWJV Science to Implementation staff to develop outreach materials, science communication products, and presentations to highlight new IWJV or relevant partner research as it is released.
- Manage and design landing pages for web-based tools, IWJV science papers and reports, and IWJV Wetland Landscape Profiles to ensure streamlined access for partners and other stakeholders.
- Elevate the importance of NRCS conservation programs in supporting the conservation of wetlands and water resources on working lands across the Intermountain West, integrating a landscape-scale perspective into features of locally driven project implementation.

- Produce outreach materials in collaboration with agency staff and/or capacity team members, to expand the reach of funding sources and project opportunities supporting agricultural conservation easements, flood-irrigated grass hay agriculture, and wetland and riparian restoration on private lands.



Meetings, Events, Support

- Support place-based watershed health efforts with a focus on multi-benefit, collaborative work and partners that are implementing new or innovative strategies that support crucial wetland habitats and/or irrigated agriculture. This may include field tours to highlight connections between waterbirds and irrigated agriculture or other partner-driven outreach.
- Continue virtual gatherings of the entire Water & Wetlands field delivery capacity position team, enabling networking, knowledge sharing, and team building with a network of practitioners focused on water-related challenges across different geographies in the West.
- Implement in-person gatherings of the Water & Wetlands Team to facilitate networking, partnership connections, and professional development.
- Facilitate virtual workshops and webinars highlighting IWJV science, linking recently released research with conservation practitioners and land and water resource management professionals.
- Explore the need for networking, knowledge sharing, and/or training opportunities for regional groups of wetland managers.
- Maintain clear, consistent communication and hold regular meetings with funders to ensure alignment between their funding goals and the IWJV priorities and programs.
- Support partners developing North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant proposals and projects in the Intermountain West through technical assistance and proposal review.

WESTERN FORESTS

Western Forests focuses on partnership development, capacity building, and science-to-implementation efforts in dry, frequent-fire forests and pinyon-juniper woodlands.

In FY 2027, we will continue to advance active management in dry, frequent-fire conifer forests and pinyon-juniper woodlands in a way that benefits wildlife, creates resilient forests and communities and reduces threats from catastrophic forest fires, invasive species spread and insect outbreaks. This year's work will be highlighted by implementation of the IWJV's recently approved \$5.225 million agreement with the USFS to expand Tribal forestry capacity for active forest management. This project involves the IWJV working with the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kalispel Tribe, and Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation to build Tribal forestry capacity to implement collaborative projects on National Forests through Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and other projects. We are excited about this capacity growth and what it means to the Tribal Nations, USFS partners, and the health of our western forests.

Pinyon-juniper woodlands are poorly understood, with gaps in the fundamental and foundational science needed to inform management. A biome-wide understanding of what constitutes a healthy woodland and practical science-informed management tools are still needed. There are considerable opportunities to consider management strategies to benefit multiple values, including wildlife habitat, pinyon-juniper bird populations, woodland health, and watershed protection. The IWJV's niche in pinyon-juniper woodlands continues to grow. With the [Pinyon-Juniper Mapping Project \(PJMap\)](#), we continue to work to provide west-wide information on species extent, ecological integrity, vulnerability and risk. A series of maps and analysis will help managers as they prioritize resource allocation within the woodlands and ecotones adjacent to sagebrush rangelands. Complementing this spatial effort, the [Pinyon-Juniper Management Network \(PJMNet\)](#) facilitates discussions between managers, scientists and decision makers in topics related to woodland management and is driven by the interests and information needs of the management community.

Within the 55 million acres of dry, frequent-fire conifer forests in our region, we continue to focus on identifying and supporting partners that are actively engaged in on-the-ground forest management and restoration to pre-fire suppression conditions. We were successful in working with the USFS to support Tribal capacity and enhance their ability to engage in Shared Stewardship agreements and GNA projects on adjoining National Forests. We will transition into the implementation stage this year with the four Tribes in Oregon and Washington. We will also work on expanding this capacity model to other groups, especially state forestry and fish and game departments who are also gearing up their involvement in Shared Stewardship and GNA in dry, frequent-fire forests but need some up-front investment in personnel to get started. In the last year, a new need has also emerged that the IWJV is uniquely positioned to assist with; technological transfer of innovative ideas such as the integration of Light Detection and Ranging and other remotely sensed imagery into forestry practices and the creation of digital silvicultural prescriptions to a broader base of potential users.

Across both priority forest types, we will continue to integrate our work with the Water & Wetlands and Sagebrush Rangelands programs, monitor legislation that may impact fuels and forest management, participate in local, regional and national meetings in forestry and support innovative ideas that will enhance forest product development and woody biomass utilization that will increase the pace and scale of needed active forest management. The operational work is outlined below:

Programmatic Work

- Identify groups working on active forest management in dry, frequent-fire and pinyon-juniper woodland systems within the Intermountain West and strengthen existing relationships while building new ones. Partners will include federal agencies such as the BLM, USFWS, USFS, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and NRCS, Tribal Nations, state fish and wildlife agencies, non-profit and private forest management entities, researchers, and others.
- Further develop and strengthen science support and a community of practice in pinyon-juniper woodlands. Specifically, facilitate the Pinyon-Juniper Mapping Project and the Pinyon-Juniper Management Network.
- Utilize the capacity building model by seeking funding, especially from USFS, and potentially NRCS and BLM, to support partner-led active forest management on, and adjacent to, federal lands while pursuing contributions from foundations, NGOs, water and power utilities and others that increase the return on investment of federal partners.
- Participate in national discussions surrounding the importance of active forest management, track and adapt to changes in federal land management agencies, and seek opportunities to support these agencies in carrying out their mission as their capacity and structure change.
- Participate in regional and local discussions concerning the need for markets and mills for ponderosa pine and other low-value forest management products.
- Develop a strategy to support the use of “good fire” (including prescribed fire and Indigenous burning) by our partners, facilitate new and broader partnerships, help identify science delivery needs, and work to remove obstacles to implementation.
- Monitor and, as possible, inform potential legislation regarding active forest management, shared stewardship and fuels management.
- Engage the IWJV Western Forests Committee to leverage the expertise of board members and other decision-makers to guide the IWJV's western forests conservation efforts, address relevant threats and issues, and advance voluntary, incentive-based, and collaborative forest conservation in the Intermountain West.

Field Delivery Capacity

- Finalize and implement the agreement with the USFS Region 6 to support 7-9 Tribal forestry positions among the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians (Oregon), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Washington), the Kalispel Tribe (Washington) and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Washington). Support the scoping, hiring, and coordination of positions. Report the outcomes of the work of the positions to the USFS.
- Continue to build relationships with the USFS at all levels (National Forest, Region, Headquarters) to leverage the above agreement to garner additional support for field delivery capacity beyond Oregon and Washington with other Tribal and non-Tribal partners, including state forestry and wildlife agencies.
- Explore the development of NRCS-funded field delivery capacity positions focused on cross-boundary collaboration, especially in areas where USFS-funded capacity positions already exist.
- Engage with Water and Power utilities as well as Foundations and NGOs to leverage support for partner led active forest management. In FY2027, we hope to implement an agreement with The Nature Conservancy's Dry Western Forests Program that will provide additional support for one or more of the Tribal capacity positions.



Science and Technical Transfer

- We will continue to support and promote the [Fuels Reduction Evaluation Tool](#) for Montana. This NRCS-funded Bird Conservancy of the Rockies project focuses on assessing wildfire risk reduction and forest bird outcomes of fuels management in Montana as well as assisting NRCS and other Montana partners with accessing, interpreting, and applying this information. We will also explore the possibility of applying this model to other states where there is interest from NRCS and other partners.
- Continue to facilitate the PJMap. This USFWS-funded project seeks to develop a science-based spatial strategy for managing and conserving pinyon-juniper woodlands. Initial map products have been created, and in FY 2027, we will seek feedback from managers and create additional layers and products that aid decision making of federal and non-federal land managers working in woodlands.
- Continue to support and expand the PJMN, a community of practice for pinyon-juniper woodland managers that currently averages over 70 attendees per session. We will continue to facilitate manager-focused, engaging virtual sessions across topics such as fire and fuels reduction, wildlife habitat improvement, community safety, woodland and watershed health, and more. We will seek additional partner support for both meeting facilitation and overall guidance and strategic alignment.
- Identify science, data, and knowledge gaps relating to forest management, watershed health, restoration, and the impact of forest management in our priority forest types on water quantity and quality. Support forest managers in accessing, interpreting, and applying existing information.
- Identify science, data, and knowledge gaps relating to forest management and forest birds. Work with funders and researchers to catalyze, support, and communicate priority science development in these areas.
- Assist The Nature Conservancy is designing materials and developing “train the trainer” sessions to support technical transfer of the digital marking technique developed by Arizona TNC and the Coconino National Forest.
- Support and collaborate with State Conservation Partners to maximize science, technical transfer, communications, and partnership development targeting western forests conservation efforts.

Communications

- Continue to support the distribution and use of the Montana Fuels Reductions Evaluation Tool.
- Begin collaborating with the participating Tribal Nations as they establish field delivery capacity positions to accomplish projects on federal lands as part of our agreement with the U.S. Forest Service.
- Develop a series of pieces that help communicate the importance not only of active management but also of mills and forest products infrastructure and the role of markets, especially in small-diameter and low-value timber, to accelerate the pace and scale of forest management.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND OPERATIONS

Effective and efficiently run operations are the foundation for advancing the IWJV's mission and habitat conservation work. The IWJV's government relations efforts build relationships and trust, deliver conservation messages and increase awareness of the IWJV's work, and capitalize on opportunities to maximize the availability and impact of conservation funding to achieve on-the-ground results.

The IWJV's approach to strengthening conservation funding and capacity, and the relationships we have established with partners, will guide our government relations and operations efforts. Several former IWJV Management Board members and other individuals with ties to the West are in high level positions at federal agencies with which the IWJV partners work closely. Further, the 2026 midterm elections will bring well over 70 new members of Congress; we will meet with relevant members from the West and ensure they are aware of the IWJV and our conservation efforts. The operational work for FY 2027 is outlined below:

Programmatic Work

- *Government Relations:*
 - Utilize the IWJV's powerful Government Relations Committee's collective set of relationships to facilitate meaningful conversations and actions at the departmental and agency level, and with congressional members and staff. The committee's work is driven by our collaborative spirit and extensive relationships forged over many years.
 - Communicate the imperative need for federal agreement mechanisms to function efficiently. Stress that JVs efficiently achieve the proactive conservation goals of FWS and other federal agencies through partnerships that leverage federal funds. However, because we operate with very few federal employees, we must have the ability to predictably move funds through proven financial assistance actions. Promote the use of inter/intra-agency and cooperative agreements as essential tools for conservation funding implementation, particularly in light of a reduced federal workforce.
 - Continue to emphasize the importance of conservation funding in the West and grow our impact by sustaining relationships with decision-makers and cultivating dynamic partnerships.
 - Expand representation at D.C. Hill Visits and elsewhere to elevate voices, messages, and the people critical to conservation in the West. Specifically, our messaging will emphasize:
 - Our proven model as a trusted public-private partnership with a track record of success in cost-efficiently achieving on-the-ground projects to improve wildlife habitat and support local, rural communities.
 - We help federal agencies accomplish work on the ground at scale. This is especially important with reductions in federal funding and staffing.
 - Our ability to leverage funding and opportunities through partnerships.

- How our unique capacity model enables dollars to be spent in a very cost-effective manner.
- How the IWJV's priorities align with bipartisan priorities that benefit working lands in the West (e.g., active forest management, irrigation modernization, treatment of invasive annual grasses, wildfire prevention, proactive habitat projects that benefit wildlife, etc.).
- How the IWJV model and proven track record for cost-efficient and effective on-the-ground habitat conservation has attracted non-federal funding (e.g., from industry/corporations and private donors).
- Hiring local citizens from rural communities helps federal agencies enhance their land management activities and provides economic support to local communities.
- Apply the new strategy – established by the Government Relations Committee in FY 2026 – to engage the “core team” (IWJV Management Board members and D.C.-based partners) via monthly meetings and the larger committee (broader partnership policy team) via quarterly meetings to achieve tangible outcomes.
- *IWJV Management Board, Staff & State Conservation Partners:*
 - Engage with the IWJV Management Board for ongoing critical analysis of board membership composition and recruitment. Build on the great work of the IWJV Management Board Membership Committee and IWJV Management Board over the last year with next steps that can lead to tangible actions.
 - Continue to grow staff skills, support areas identified as growth opportunities, and provide access to training and events that fit each individual's unique priorities and needs.
 - Host an in-person meeting and field tour with State Conservation Partners.
 - Conduct an informal needs assessment with State Conservation Partners focused on increasing recruitment and filling gaps to ensure we are staying connected across geographies, partners, etc.
- *Operations & Communications:*
 - Continue to link science-informed decision-making to conservation implementation. We strive for strategic, large-scale impacts tailored to the unique circumstances of landscapes and partnerships.
 - Maintain current and develop new inter/intra-agency and cooperative agreements for conservation funding implementation.
 - Produce materials and messaging for board members, staff, and partners to share with decision-makers on conservation successes and ways to overcome conservation challenges.
 - Collaborate with the IWJV Communications Team to:
 - Maintain www.IWJV.org, specifically with job postings, updating staff/State Conservation Partner/management board pages, awards program information, and other relevant pages.
 - Implement database management and growth strategies.
 - Produce social media content to elevate and support existing stories, videos, and other outreach products.

Events

- Host a fall and spring management board meeting.
- Conduct an annual fly-in to Washington, D.C. as well as one or more small group D.C. trips.
- Convene an in-person meeting and field tour with State Conservation Partners.
- Sponsor a Directors' luncheon at the summer Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting.



APPENDIX: LIST OF ACRONYMS

AOP: Annual Operational Plan

BLM: Bureau of Land Management

ERM: Enterprise Risk Management

FY: Fiscal Year

GNA: Good Neighbor Authority

IMAGINE: Invasive Annual Grasses Invading Natural Ecosystems

IWJV: Intermountain West Joint Venture

JV: Joint Venture

NRCS: Natural Resources Conservation Service

PJMap: Pinyon-Juniper Mapping Project

PJMN: Pinyon-Juniper Management Network

RCPP: Regional Conservation Partnership Program

SCT: Sage Capacity Team

SONEC: primarily southern Oregon and northeastern California, plus a slice of northwestern Nevada

STTN: Sagebrush Technical Transfer Network

USFS: U.S. Forest Service

USFWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

WET: Wetland Evaluation Tool