



# Baker Sage-grouse

## Local Implementation Team

Baker Comprehensive Sage-grouse Threat Reduction

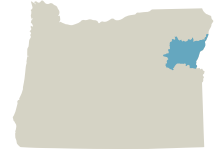


Sage-grouse hen.

### SAGEBRUSH/SAGE-STEPPE HABITAT

#### The Baker Local Implementation

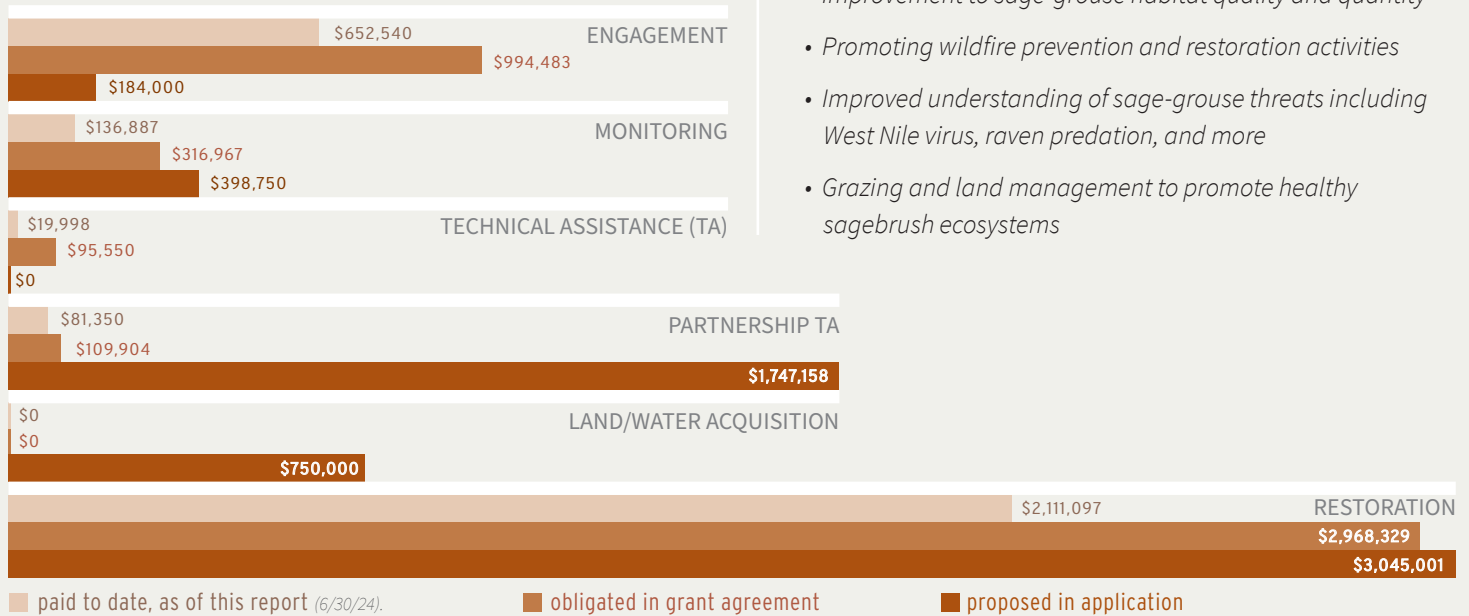
**Team (LIT)** is working collaboratively with private landowners and managers to enhance sage-grouse habitat within Baker and Union Counties to reverse local sage-grouse population declines.



The Baker Priority Area of Conservation is considered to be the most strategically important area for sage-grouse conservation in Baker and Union Counties and is the primary location of restoration efforts. Efforts also expand into general sage-grouse habitat throughout Baker County where restoration can help support thriving leks and habitat corridors.

### Funding

OWEB awarded \$6,124,910 in funding.  
At the time of application, the FIP anticipated leveraging an additional \$8,568,924 throughout the life of the initiative.



### Benefits

- Improvement to sage-grouse habitat quality and quantity
- Promoting wildfire prevention and restoration activities
- Improved understanding of sage-grouse threats including West Nile virus, raven predation, and more
- Grazing and land management to promote healthy sagebrush ecosystems

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) grant program supports high-performing partnerships to implement strategic restoration actions and measure ecological outcomes through coordinated monitoring. In July 2019, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) awarded a FIP grant to the Baker Sage-grouse Local Implementation Team (LIT). This report documents cumulative progress since the FIP was initiated in 2019. Work completed under the FIP grant program is part of a much larger on-going collaborative effort of federal, state and local agencies, tribes, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations in Baker LIT Planning Area. Accomplishments included in the report only reflect actions completed with OWEB FIP funding, with some additional information described on page 3.

### PARTNERS

**Core Partners:** Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Baker County, Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, Bureau of Land Management, Powder Basin Watershed Council, Private Landowners

**Supporting Partners:** Oregon State University Extension, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, The Nature Conservancy, Baker Valley Vector Control, Institute for Natural Resources, Agricultural Research Service, Rural Landowners, United States Geological Survey

## GOAL

Increase the quality and quantity of sage-grouse habitat and ultimately increase the Baker sage-grouse population.

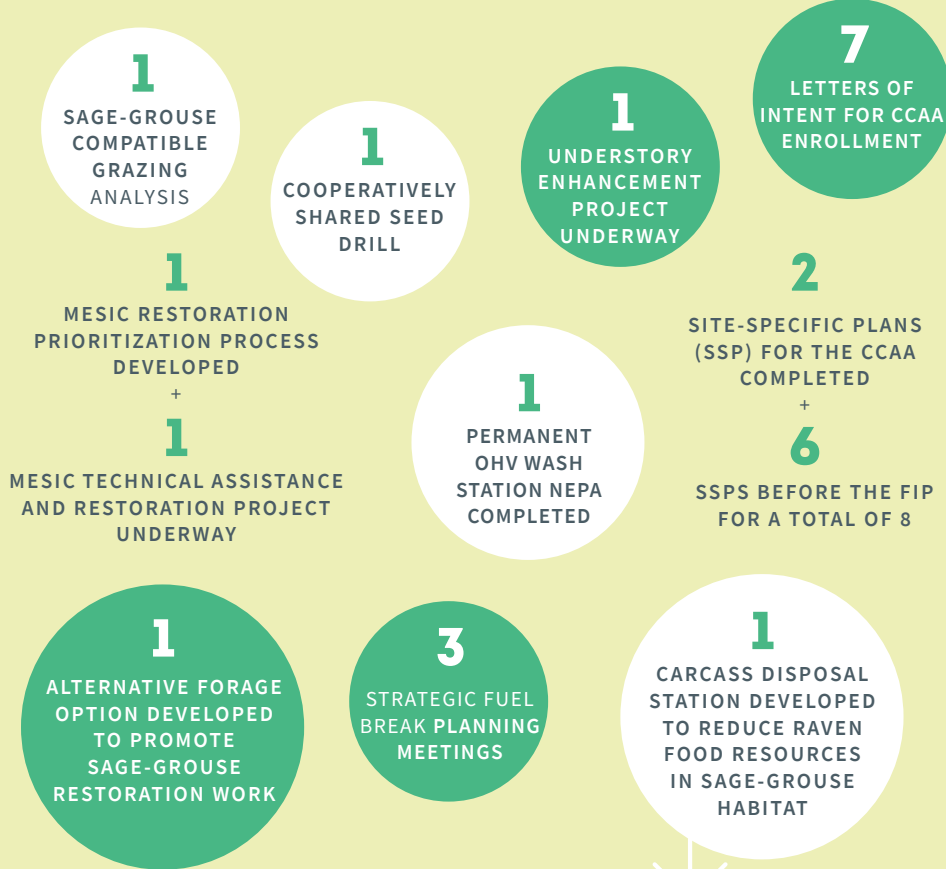
## STRATEGIES

- Promote awareness and enrollment in voluntary habitat conservation programs
- Prevent, treat, and adaptively manage invasive annual grasses and other noxious weeds

- Protect, enhance, and expand extent and connectivity of areas with adequate sagebrush cover
- Address key information gaps

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Restoration & Planning



### Fill Information Gaps

### Program Enrollment

**56**  
LAND OWNERS ENROLLED IN HABITAT PROGRAMS

## OUTCOMES

### Near Term 0-5 YEARS

- Extent and abundance of invasive annual grasses and other noxious weeds is reduced
- Sagebrush/sage steppe plant communities including native bunchgrass and forb diversity and abundance are suitable to support all life history stages of sage-grouse

### Mid-Term 5-10 YEARS

- Sage-grouse nest success increases

### Long Term 10+ YEARS

- Sage-grouse population is stable or increases

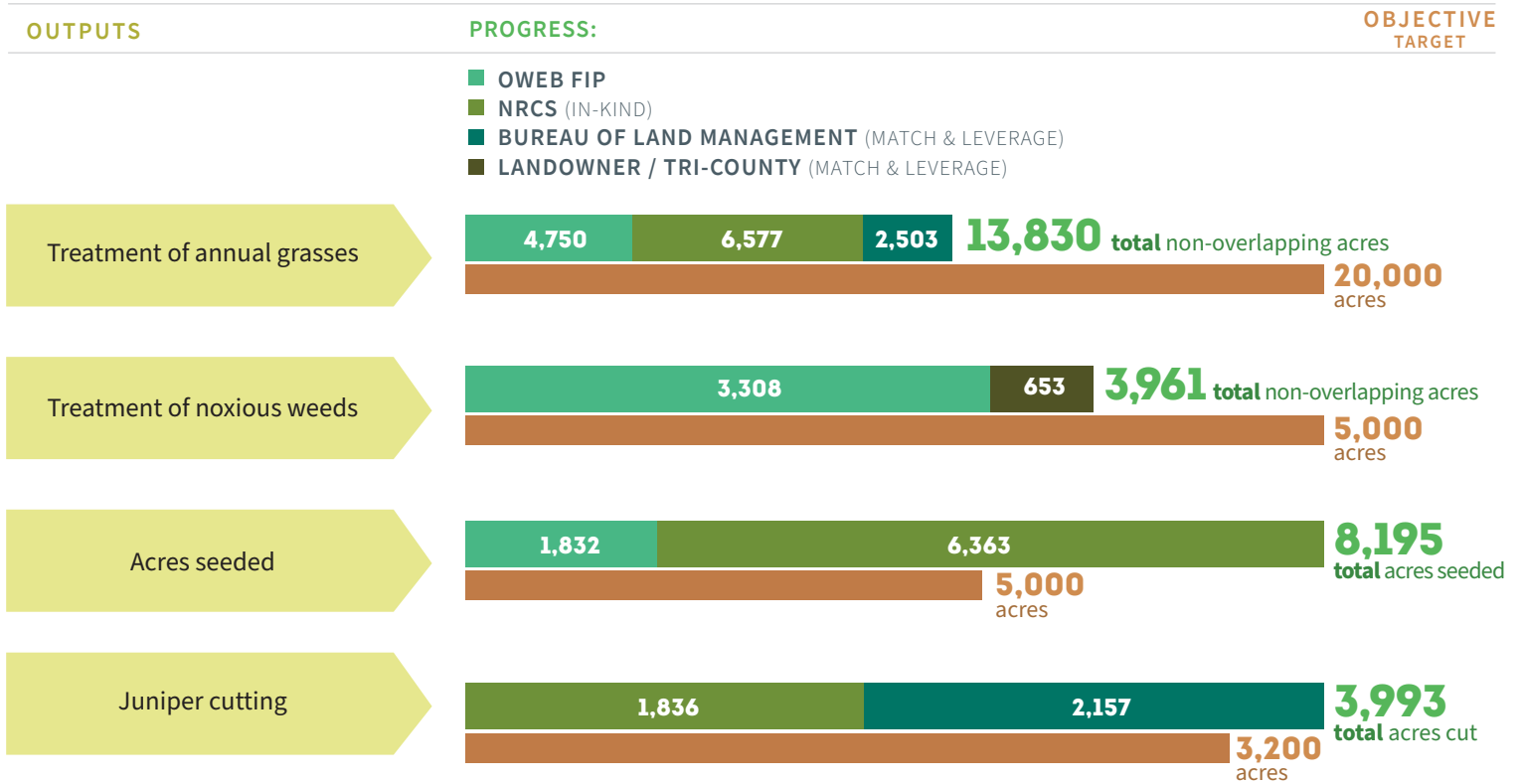


Sagebrush habitat (credit: Morgan Solomon)

## FIP Initiative Progress, Biennia 1-3

Progress on outputs shown below represents actions completed through OWEB grants.

Partner organizations accomplished additional acres of treatment in the same project area that contributed to landscape resiliency. These partners include: NRCS, BLM, and Tri-county landowners.



Sage-grouse with VHF collar (credit: Richard Rich, Oregon State University)

### Monitoring Approach

Baker LIT is using standard sage-grouse habitat monitoring methods to ensure consistency with ongoing data collection efforts already underway in Oregon. Baker LIT is working with Oregon State University, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the United States Geological Survey to evaluate biological and habitat datasets along with tracking sagebrush restoration. Established monitoring will help track restoration, including pre- and post-treatment data, in a manner that is compatible with Oregon's Threat-based Ecostate Models and the Bureau of Land Management monitoring so that metrics can be integrated at a landscape scale and inform Oregon's Sage-grouse Action Plan. In addition, the Baker LIT has incorporated a new Rapid Ocular Photo Assessment field protocol to provide supplemental data and increase overall rigor of the data collected.

# Adaptive Management

## Restoration

### CHALLENGES

Addressing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for ground-disturbing restoration projects (e.g., mesic restoration projects).

Underestimating the monetary needs to successfully restore areas affected by invasive annual grass and noxious weeds.



### LESSONS LEARNED

Always include a buffered budget for cultural surveys for any ground-disturbing work.

Outsourcing restoration projects to local partners and maintaining flexibility in the obligation of funds can assist in ensuring restoration projects continue to be implemented.



### ADAPTATIONS

Partners have adjusted project goals (e.g., # of acres treated) and budgets to include contracted services for cultural surveys for restoration grants.

The LIT has increased coordination with partners (e.g., NRCS) and adjusted budgets to continue efforts and ensure an upward trend in restoring sage-grouse habitat.

## Monitoring

### CHALLENGES

Greater number of restoration projects and a more thorough monitoring protocol required increased survey effort.

Elevated wildfire risk throughout the Baker PAC limits the monitoring window during which technicians can safely access property.

Recruiting monitoring technicians is challenging due to the seasonal work, limited housing options and need for employees to use personal vehicles.



### LESSONS LEARNED

Increased landowner participation combined with additional monitoring protocols inherently increases the need for greater capacity and survey efforts.

Elevated wildfire activity increased the need for even better communication with landowners and monitoring technicians and required us to stay flexible on where and how we would monitor on a daily basis.

Recruiting efforts are most successful when targeting regional applicants.



### ADAPTATIONS

The partnership hired 2 additional technicians to be able to successfully monitor the effects of multiple invasive weed restoration projects across the Baker FIP planning area.

The elevated wildfire risk across the Baker PAC required us to be aware of any active fires or evacuation zones in our monitoring area and adapt our schedule accordingly. Each landowner has a different sensitivity level to the fire risk on their property and we must be prepared to adjust our schedule and travel (hiking/ATV) accordingly. Clear communication with technicians is important during increased wildfire activity to ensure proper navigation and safety.

Crews were employed from region workforce; Tri-County CWMA's board approved purchase of an additional vehicle.

# Adaptive Management

## Engagement

### CHALLENGES

Low landowner attendance at some workshop and informational events.



### LESSONS LEARNED

Tailor your outreach to match your community's communication style. Schedule events to match the community's needs.



### ADAPTATIONS

Partnership has shifted communication styles to better reach community members (e.g., word of mouth). Focus on hosting events outside of busy months (e.g., calving season for ranchers) to increase landowner attendance.

## Partnership Capacity

### CHALLENGES

Experiencing turnover in the coordinator roles within the LIT as well as in some partnership organizations postponed some FIP objectives.



### LESSONS LEARNED

Increased commitment and internal delegation of tasks and obligations among FIP partners while positions are filled maintains engagement and successful implementation of restoration projects.



### ADAPTATIONS

The FIP has re-hired a CCAA Coordinator to manage CCAA site-specific plans and maintain landowner relationships. The FIP partnership has delegated LIT coordinator tasks while still in search of an LIT coordinator to maintain LIT functionality.



Tour during OWEB Board Meeting in Baker City, April 2024 (credit: OWEB)