

Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee

February 12, 2019

HB 5027 – Department of Land Conservation and Development

Testimony of Bruce Taylor, Intermountain West Joint Venture

My name is Bruce Taylor. I work with the Intermountain West Joint Venture, a regional bird habitat conservation partnership. I've been involved with the state's sage grouse conservation partnership, SageCon, since its inception and serve as the conservation organization representative on the SageCon Coordinating Council.

Oregon's sage grouse action plan, and the legislature's support for a robust package of funding for implementation, was a key factor in the 2015 federal decision not to list sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

Although Oregon has been doing well in implementing its plan, sage grouse will be up for its five-year ESA review in little more than a year. The state's continued commitment to its plan, and the funding needed to support it, will again be a major factor.

Unfortunately, not all of the western states have been as effective in their conservation efforts as Oregon, and the impending rollback of sage grouse protections on federal lands in other states is likely to further undermine the legal basis for a no-listing determination in 2020.

Although the current administration may not be inclined to pursue a listing in any case, the ultimate review will almost certainly occur in the courts.

So to reduce the risks of a listing, and insulate Oregon against the negative impacts if a listing does ultimately occur, we need to maintain our commitment to a strong conservation program.

Our SageCon partners, including the counties, Cattlemen's Association, Farm Bureau, Oregon Business Council and the conservation organizations I work with, have identified three priorities for state funding in the 2019 biennium, which we will be talking to you about as you work through natural resource agency budgets.

One of our priorities, funding for coordination and other support for the SageCon partnership, is included in the Governor's Recommended Budget for the Department of Land Conservation and Development. The governor included \$500,000 for contracts to support this work, as noted on p. 264 of the Governor's Budget, under "090 analyst adjustments" to the planning program policy packages:

- Increase of \$500,000 General Fund for contract work related to sage grouse implementation.

DLCD funding would be used to cover the state's share of the costs of supporting the SageCon Partnership, a national model for successful collaboration. The Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions programs, part of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University, have been the primary vehicle for SageCon coordination and support. Several federal agencies also contribute funding for this work. A budget note that eliminates or reduces the overhead charged by Portland State would ensure that the full amount is available for SageCon purposes, which include coordination, technical support, and facilitation for the SageCon Coordinating Council, Staff Implementation Team, and the All-County/SWCD CCAA coordinating committee.

A half-million dollars may sound like a lot of money for that kind of work, but this is an enterprise that has leveraged more than \$60 million of investment by federal, state, and private partners since 2015.

With partners spending \$15 million a year or more on sage grouse conservation here in Oregon, an investment \$250,000 a year to ensure that state and federal agencies and private partners are aligned and coordinated in implementing their conservation strategies is just good business practice.

We hope you and your colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee will join us in supporting the governor's request for \$500,000 for SageCon facilitation and support.

2019-21 Funding Needs

For Sage Grouse, Fire Protection, and Rangeland Health

AN INTEGRATED INVESTMENT STRATEGY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN OREGON

Oregon narrowly averted a collision with the Endangered Species Act in 2015 when the federal government opted not to list sage grouse as a threatened species.

The state earned the reprieve from new federal regulations with a comprehensive plan to reverse the bird's decline and a robust package of initial funding approved by the 2015 Legislature.

But the impact of Oregon's conservation investments goes well beyond sage grouse.

The biggest threats to sage grouse – increasingly large wildfires and invasion of rangelands by juniper and non-native annual grasses – also pose threats to the livestock industry and rural communities. Cattle ranchers have a saying these days: “What’s good for the bird is good for the herd,” and by extension, the social and economic health of communities across a wide swath of rural Oregon.

With the ESA status of sage grouse up for federal review again in 2020, Oregon's conservation commitments will face renewed scrutiny.

Funding for the state's Sage Grouse Action Plan will be an important factor in evaluation of the Oregon's conservation efforts. The 2019 Legislature's budget decisions could have profound implications for the economy and ecological health of southeastern Oregon.



How the State's Action Plan is Funded

State, federal, and private partners have all provided funding for implementation of the state's sage grouse action plan, including millions of dollars for on-the-ground work to improve habitat for sage grouse and substantial federal contributions to the costs of the SageCon partnership.

Although the state's funding for implementation of the sage grouse plan is spread across more than a half-dozen agency budgets, a 2015 executive order requires development of a coordinated package of spending requests. Because issues around sage grouse and rangeland health are often deeply inter-related and span multiple jurisdictions, these budget requests need to be viewed as an investment package, rather than a menu of spending options.

Association of Oregon Counties
Audubon Society of Portland
Intermountain West Joint Venture
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Oregon Business Council
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Farm Bureau
Oregon Hunters Association
Oregon Natural Desert Association
The Nature Conservancy
Willamette Partnership
... on behalf of

SageCon



Oregon's sage grouse conservation partnership

SAGECON FUNDING PRIORITIES

Top priorities for additional General Fund support in the 2019-21 biennium include:



DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Rangeland fire protection associations

RFPA firefighter training and equipment (including personal protection equipment, radios); equipment maintenance; state match (\$50,000) to leverage federal funds for State-Federal-RFPA liaison position.

Volunteers organized by local RFPAs provide the first line of defense against wildfires in many areas. Fires, and the weeds that invade rangelands after a fire, are the two biggest threats to sage grouse and rangeland health. Improved equipment, training and coordination with BLM have dramatically improved initial response to fires in recent years.

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Sage grouse local implementation teams

Coordinator position (1 FTE) for Burns/Lakeview LITs.

Local Implementation Teams (LITs) are the primary vehicle for implementing the Oregon Sage Grouse Action Plan at the local level. Most of these groups have been moribund since 2012, primarily due to lack of ODFW field-based capacity for coordination and facilitation. SageCon partners have secured funding to support coordinators for the Baker, Prineville and Vale LITs in 2019; an additional position is needed for the Burns and Lakeview groups.



DEPARTMENT OF LAND CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

SageCon facilitation and support

(In Governor's Recommended Budget)

State's share of costs for Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions programs' support for collaborative sage grouse conservation through the SageCon Partnership.

Oregon and its federal partners share the costs of supporting the SageCon Partnership, a national model for successful collaboration. Funding includes coordination, technical support, and facilitation for SageCon Coordinating Council, Staff Implementation Team, All-County / SWCD CCAA Coordinating Committee. Effective coordination among SageCon's large and diverse set of stakeholders allows partners to align their efforts for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.