

**HARNEY COUNTY
WILDFIRE
COLLABORATIVE**

Senate Wildfire Reduction and Recovery Committee

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Intermountain West Joint Venture



INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
JOINT VENTURE
conserving habitat through partnerships



HARNEY COUNTY WILDFIRE COLLABORATIVE

A Collaborative Conservation Partnership

PURPOSE

Reducing the potential for
and the impact of
mega-fires in Harney County.

FOCUS

Prevention of mega-fires and
restoration of sagebrush rangeland
in Southeastern Oregon.

PARTNERS

Rangeland Fire Protection Associations,
federal, tribal, state, county, conservation,
scientific and the ranching community
collaborating together toward
consensus.

SUCCESS

Strong, trusting relationships among
partners and closing in on a first ever
agreement in a Wilderness Study
Area to alter fuel structure.

OUR FUTURE

In this era of mega-fires we are committed to preventing wildfires whenever possible and restoring the land when they do occur. Our collaborative body with a diverse body of knowledge, skills and abilities makes this possible.

HIGH DESERT PARTNERSHIP

supports with collaborative problem solving

highdesertpartnership.org/our-initiatives/harney-county-wildfire-collaborative/

BE INVOLVED

Attend a meeting and share your voice: highdesertpartnership.org/news-events/event-calendar.html.
Donate to High Desert Partnership: highdesertpartnership.org/presencehost.net/how-to-help/donate.html.

About the collaborative

- Organized late 2014
- Focus on preventing mega-fires
- Convened and supported by the High Desert Partnership
- Facilitated by Oregon Consensus
- Operating principles: all stakeholders welcome



Livestock industry



Recreation and wildlife

The collaborative

- Coordinating committee
- Independent facilitator
- 20-25 regular participants

Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (6)

Bureau of Land Management

Private landowners

Burns Paiute Tribe

Harney County

OSU Extension

USDA Agricultural Research Service

Oregon Department of Forestry

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

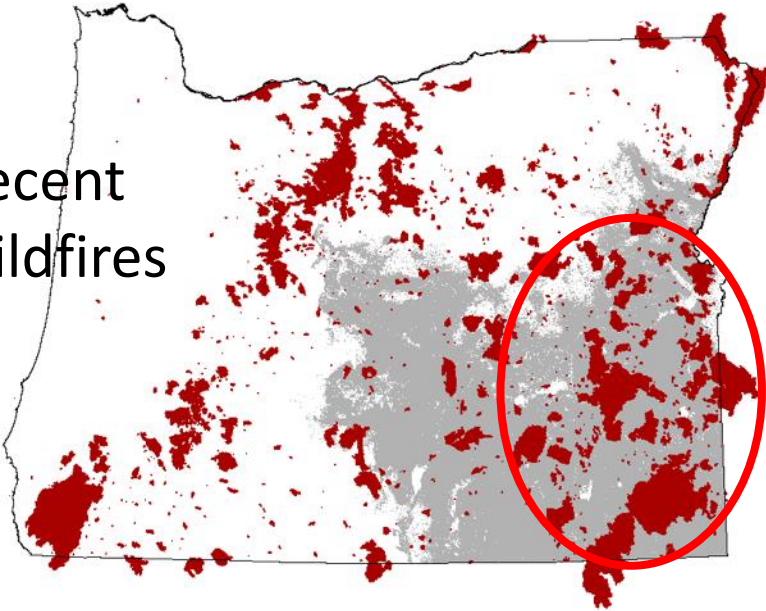
The Nature Conservancy

Oregon Natural Desert Association

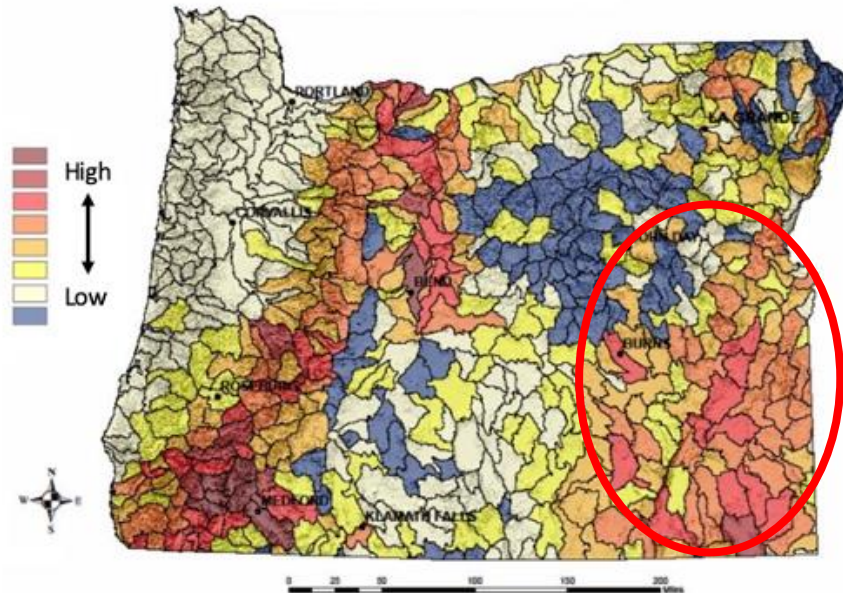
Intermountain West Joint Venture

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Recent
wildfires



Overall Wildfire Risk by Watershed



Wildfire and sagebrush rangelands

- Historically less frequent, smaller fires
- Recent trend toward “megafires” (>100,000 acres)
- 2012: 3 fires burned > 1.1 million acres
- SE Oregon rangelands now among highest priorities for treatment to reduce wildfire risks



Cheatgrass (pre-fire)



Cheatgrass (post-fire)

Spurred by invasives

- Wildfires spur the growth and spread of invasive, non-native annual grasses
- Cheatgrass and other annual grasses dry out early and burn easily
- Invasives fuel a continuing cycle of more frequent, larger and more intense fires
- Fuels treatments = control invasives, reestablish more fire-resistant perennial grasses

Wildfire collaborative: suppression

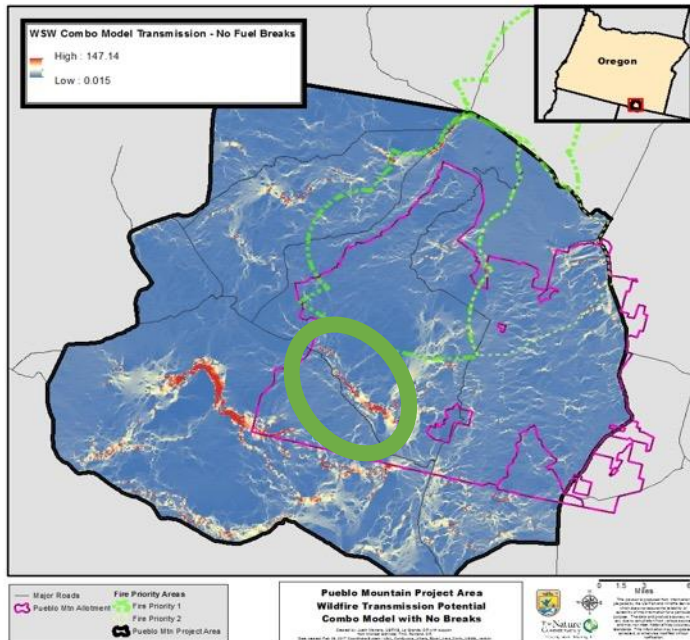


- Rangeland Fire Protection Associations are often first line of defense
- All-volunteer, low budget
- Historic tension, conflicts between RFPAs and federal agencies
- 2015: facilitated dialogue improved communication, relationships
- New liaison position funded by BLM, USFWS
- Dramatic improvement in working relationships
- More effective suppression



Pueblo Mountains pilot project

- Largest block of intact sagebrush habitat on Burns BLM District
- High wildfire risk
- Middle of nowhere
- Rx: treat road corridor to create fuel break
- Burn, spray, seed native grasses
- Reduce shrub cover
- Manage livestock grazing to maintain
- Monitor and adapt





Stinkingwaters pilot project

- Large landscape (300,000 ac) restoration for resistance and resilience
- Mix of public and private ownership
- History of repeated fires
- Low elevations dominated by cheatgrass, higher elevations invaded by juniper
- Rx: restore perennial bunchgrasses, reduce juniper, create fuel breaks, manage livestock grazing
- Monitor and adapt





Successes and challenges

- Improved RFLPA-federal relationships, better suppression
- Pueblo pilot approved without appeals or litigation
- Increasing landowner interest
- Collaborative is solid, functional
- Complex ecological and policy issues
- Large scale problems, limited resources
- Time-consuming processes
- No silver bullets



Final thoughts

- Harney Wildfire Collaborative is one model, but not the only one
- Upfront investment in collaboration, resistance and resilience is more cost-effective than post-fire restoration
- Collaboration requires organizational infrastructure, ongoing support
- No state agency or program to address wildfire risk reduction on rangelands
- Need for planning and better science (including social science)
- Requires sustained, long-term investment