

# SAGEBRUSH BIOME PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT



National Center for  
Environmental Conflict Resolution  

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Udall Foundation



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) is coordinating the development of a Sagebrush Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) with Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and other key conservation partners. As part of these efforts, the National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center) was asked to identify potential models for a partnership governance strategy to improve coordination of conservation efforts in the sagebrush biome. To support this objective, the National Center conducted a neutral situation assessment identifying the needs, issues, priorities, and obstacles associated with sagebrush biome partnership governance. The assessment also helps identify what's working well with existing sagebrush biome partnership governance, identifies recommendations and opportunities for sagebrush biome partnership governance strategies, assesses support for anticipated workshop panel (Panel) member composition—those who will tailor and refine a sagebrush biome partnership governance structure—and identifies any additional members who should serve on the Panel.

The finding in this report include general themes that were identified from the assessment interviews. These themes summarize the diverse perspectives of the interviewees and may be used to better understand what is needed to build a successful collaborative governance structure going forward. The findings are categorized and summarized below:

## *Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee:*

- There is disagreement as to whether the current composition of the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) needs to change.
- Major challenges of the EOC are consistent prioritization from its members and connection to work on the ground.
- Most stated that there are limitations to how much the EOC can accomplish with its current structure.

## *Support for a Sagebrush Partnership Governance Entity:*

- There were a range of views from supportive, supportive with caveats, feeling the status quo was sufficient, and unsupportive.

## *What Has Worked Well in Sagebrush Biome Conservation:*

- Specific, positive actions from BLM, EOC, Intermountain West Joint Venture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rangeland Fire Protection Associations, State of Oregon, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, and Western Governors' Association were mentioned by interviewees.

## *Barriers to Effective Sagebrush Biome Conservation:*

- Insufficient funding and staffing
- Communication silos and jurisdictional boundaries
- Data and monitoring limitations
- Wasteland perception
- Funding structures
- Inconsistent and insufficient priority
- Threats to the biome (Fires, invasive plants, etc.)

*Learning from Other Collaborative Efforts:*

- Broad partnerships
- Ecosystem focus
- Storytelling
- Dedicated staffing
- Core area planning
- Bottom-up efforts
- Inclusion of local people
- Attention to incentives to participate
- Sufficient time and resources
- Collaborative efforts lead to better outcomes

*Critical Actions for Successful Coordinated Actions of Sagebrush Conservation Efforts at the Landscape-Level:*

- Federal agencies – leadership and priority setting
- Tribal agencies – Tribes should be included and are likely interested to participate
- States and State agencies – increase and facilitate coordination
- Private sector and landowners – willing to represent issues in a common venue

*Interviewee Recommendations for Sagebrush Conservation Governance:*

- Landscape prioritization
- Inclusive representation
- Dedicated staffing
- Recognize and highlight successes
- Connecting landscape-level coordination to local work on the ground
- Data and monitoring
- On the ground empowerment and incentives
- Sagebrush conservation leadership – who should lead this effort
- Sagebrush Workshop Panel member suggestions

*Recommendations for Next Steps*

In order to develop and refine a governance model or models for sagebrush, it's critical that a diverse, inclusive, and broad cross section of private landowners, Tribes or inter-Tribal organizations, industry and user groups (oil, gas, solar, mining, etc.), Governor's office representatives, NGOs, representation from those with fire and invasive plants responsibilities (State departments of agriculture and forestry, County weed districts, etc.), State wildlife agencies and Federal land management agencies, partnership organizations (IWJV, WGA, etc.), academics from states with sagebrush habitat, and other identified stakeholders is engaged.

Building on themes heard from interviewees, key areas of focus as a governance model for sagebrush conservation is being developed and refined include:

- Building on successes and leaving room for innovation
- Continuity, dedicated resources, and staffing
- Broad participation at all levels, and coordination across scales
- Data, monitoring, and landscape prioritization considerations

# BACKGROUND

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) is coordinating the development of a Sagebrush Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) with Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and other key conservation partners. Part I of the Conservation Strategy is a contextual analysis of the human and wildlife needs from the sagebrush biome, and a scientific review of the threats and related conservation challenges (restoration, adaptive management and monitoring, communication). Part II, which will contain strategies that can be employed at biome-wide and local scales to conserve sagebrush landscapes, is in progress. BLM and WAFWA sought assistance from the John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center) in identifying potential models for a governance strategy for conservation of the sagebrush biome as a key strategic element of Part II of the Conservation Strategy. An expanded governance model is needed to ensure that all actors (State wildlife agencies, State departments of agriculture, State oil and gas conservation commissions, State land boards, Federal agencies, NGOs, industry, landowners, and others) are effectively using their authorities and resources towards a shared responsibility to conserve the sagebrush biome and the ecosystem services humans derive from it.

Throughout the literature, there are sometimes overlapping definitions for terms such as “network,” “partnership,” and “collaborative.” For the purposes of this report, we chose the term “partnership” to emphasize the focus on retaining existing authorities within individual member organizations, using the following definition: an informal or more formalized arrangement (e.g., based on an agreement or legislation) where two or more autonomous entities “come together to exchange ideas, build relationships, identify common interests, explore options on how to work together, share power [and/or resources], and solve problems of mutual interest.”<sup>[1]</sup> For “governance,” we use the definition put forward by Emerson and Nabatchi, “the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The National Center is an independent Federal program established by Congress to help Federal agencies build consensus and enhance collaboration in resolving environmental, natural resource, and public lands issues. The National Center serves as an impartial, non-partisan third-party institution providing professional expertise and services to all involved, including facilitation, situation assessment, mediation, collaborative process design, capacity-building, and project management.

To support the development of Part B of the Conservation Strategy, the National Center conducted a neutral situation assessment identifying the needs, issues, priorities, and obstacles associated with sagebrush biome partnership governance. The assessment also helps identify what’s working well with existing sagebrush biome partnership governance, identifies recommendations and opportunities for sagebrush biome partnership governance strategies, assesses support for anticipated workshop panel

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<sup>[1]</sup> Scarlett and McKinney, “Connecting people and places,” 116. Our definition is adapted from this network governance definition.

<sup>[2]</sup> Emerson and Nabatchi, Collaborative Governance Regimes, 18.

(Panel) member composition—those who will tailor and refine a sagebrush biome partnership governance structure—and identifies any additional members who should serve on the Panel.

This report is a neutral, third-party assessment and reflects the perceptions, concerns, and suggestions heard from those interviewed. The National Center strove to reflect the perspectives and concerns of all parties equally and as neutrally as possible.

## ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The National Center worked with the Core Team, Pat Deibert, USFWS; Ali Duvall, Intermountain West Joint Venture; Shawn Johnson, University of Montana; Ken Mayer, WAFWA; Karen Prentice, BLM; Tom Remington, WAFWA; and San Stiver, WAFWA, to define the approach and scope of the assessment, identify interviewees and interview questions, and determine an approach for reporting the results.

The purpose of the assessment was to help identify what is working well within sagebrush partnership governance, identify recommendations for additional sagebrush partnership governance strategies, identify barriers that exist, assess support for anticipated Panel member composition and various existing partnership governance model concepts, and identify any additional members who should serve on the Panel.

WAFWA and the National Center contacted 26 representatives from 20 organizations. One-hour phone interviews were conducted with 19 individuals representing 15 organizations between December 2020-January 2021. The Core Team developed a preamble which was read to all interviewees at the beginning of each interview. Each interviewee was then asked a standardized list of pre-determined questions, with additional follow-up questions unique to each interviewee emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee as the interview progressed.

A list of interviewees (Appendix A) and assessment interview questions (Appendix B) are included for further reference.

# FINDINGS

## SAGEBRUSH EXECUTIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

### EOC'S ROLE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The EOC was formed by WAFWA in 2008 as an outgrowth of the 2006 Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. The EOC consists of leadership of State wildlife agencies and Federal agencies with responsibilities and authority for management of sagebrush dependent wildlife or their habitat.

Most people stated that there are limitations to how much is possible in the current structure of the EOC. Some noted that they were not sure how the EOC could do more than it's already doing given the challenges of coordinating work across a wide range of organizations with different authorities and across states with different politics.

Speaking to the goal of implementing the Comprehensive Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy, one person reflected that they have never heard reference to the Strategy helping shape anyone's work in anything other than in a very broad sense. One person also mentioned the EOC is mostly focused on sage-grouse populations and the science and technical side of the work without playing a role in coordinating, mobilizing, communicating, building capacity, or leveraging funding. Another interviewee noted that the EOC has been a good forum for discussion and relationship-building but has not been effective in prioritizing and implementing work.

Challenges with the current structure of the EOC are consistent participation, continuity of effort, resources, inclusive representation, and relationships because of lack of organizational prioritization. When administrations at various levels do not prioritize sagebrush work, directors focus elsewhere because they are already overextended. This results in diminished efficacy of the EOC, with meetings not well attended, and meetings becoming forums for re-reporting rather than making progress on goals. Interviewees indicated that this challenge was particularly relevant during the last presidential administration. The challenge of connecting the work of the EOC to on-the-ground folks at the local scale was also noted by interviewees. Some noted that while the group may be visionary, if it doesn't have connections to implementers on the ground, it won't be effective.

Moving forward, it was suggested for the technical team to include a more topically based structure (for example: creating a wildlife sage-grouse tech team, and an invasive grass tech team). It was noted that they need the right expertise to be able to fill in information gaps and provide guidance on topics for those who have the purse strings.

People also stated the need for organizations in the EOC to act on sagebrush conservation, even though it may not be perfect, and to adaptively manage by hearing feedback and incorporating feedback as work moves forward. One interviewee highlighted that it could be counter-productive to give the EOC the authority to articulate to members specific actions, and that care needs to be taken to respect jurisdictional autonomy and authorities, because what works in one state will not necessarily work in another.



Specific areas of focus for the EOC that interviewees suggested would be value-added included:

- bringing a national focus to sagebrush conservation
- providing tools and science
- sharing ideas and potential actions
- carrying a unified and consistent message across agencies to Secretary of Interior about importance of sagebrush conservation, especially relevant now that there is a new presidential administration
- technical committee work on prioritizing and implementing
- developing a vision for what needs to be done that can be communicated to those who can dedicate resources to implement
- large-scale rehabilitation and support

## COMPOSITION OF THE EOC

Views on EOC representation seem to be of two minds; some think current representation has the right people at the table while others are dissatisfied with the current level of diversity. Those who think the current representation is sufficient mentioned that the EOC has never been an exclusive group and has always involved as many as want to be involved. These interviewees also indicated that all the relevant Federal and State agencies that have sage-grouse are there and in their mind that is sufficient. Some do not know who else they would broaden the group to, and some specifically think the group needs to remain a governmental body with State wildlife agencies maintaining leadership, and with non-agency organizations remaining non-voting.

Those who are dissatisfied with the lack of diversity in representation mention wanting to see on-the-ground practitioners, NGOs, energy and other industry representatives, Tribes, ranchers, State departments of agriculture, State divisions of forestry, etc., included. They see these vacancies as disrupting connectivity and reducing the ability of the EOC to coordinate sagebrush conservation across all those who are impacted and/or have management authorities. A few individuals mentioned having approached the EOC at different times to suggest broadening stakeholder representation without success. They also mentioned their understanding of the challenge of getting work done when there are too many people at the table but that nonetheless not including these others is a weakness that should be addressed. Moving forward, some suggested that a discussion of the purpose of the EOC is needed to determine what the best composition is to meet that purpose. Some suggested starting with broader representation, specifically contacts in every state and connectivity to the local level, and then getting buy-in on reorganization suggestions from that broadly represented group. The broader group would then determine the appropriate venue moving forward, determine staffing, reimagine the technical team, etc. Alternatively, there was a suggestion for an independent group to assist with this purpose and assess the membership of the EOC after the purpose and goals are clearly articulated.

Since the EOC currently serves largely as an information-exchange body, interviewees shared some thoughts about the kind of venue needed for coordination, planning, and implementation of landscape-level sagebrush conservation efforts. Since partnerships have evolved and there is a broader ecosystem focus, some believe that large-landscape conservation work is beyond the purview, capacity, and authority of being run by wildlife agencies, and needs to be done in an arena that reflects the full range of relevant players in sagebrush conservation.

# SUPPORT FOR A SAGEBRUSH PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE ENTITY

Interviewees were asked if their organization's sagebrush conservation effectiveness would be enhanced if there were a leadership/coordination body, whether the EOC or another body, that developed a common set of objectives for sagebrush conservation, a common prioritization scheme for conservation emphasis of sagebrush landscapes, facilitated access to the latest science on restoration, etc., and implemented a common monitoring and adaptive management system for evaluating effectiveness of conservation.

Several interviewees were energetically supportive of such a leadership body, sharing that there necessarily needs to be a way to organize all the efforts. One interviewee stated their frustration with seeing uninformed efforts leading to entirely ineffective results, and others discussed the need for common schemes for prioritization, monitoring, etc.

The most common response from interviewees was support, with a caveat. The largest caveat idea centered around a system that allows for localized tailoring and autonomy and avoiding a one size fits all approach that will likely not fit the individual cultures of different areas of the sagebrush biome. A concern around respecting jurisdictional authorities was mentioned, as well as the unique political structures within each state. Distrust of top-down prioritization and of Federal Government agencies by community-level folks were also mentioned. Others indicated yes; they would support a leadership body if it:

- Brings a national focus to the biome
- Focuses efforts on already established high priority areas
- Allows more work on the ground to get done and is not a distraction
- Recognizes stakeholders have their own responsibilities. Provides more benefit than if stakeholders are working without the leadership.
- Engage Tribes and integrates Tribal input into the process
- Focuses on national strategy and funding and does not focus on the other actions as listed above (developing a common set of objectives, prioritization schemes, etc.). It was noted by this interviewee that the EOC executive level is not the right level for work on those issues.
- System is streamlined, efficient, and sustainable with workloads and monetarily

A couple of interviewees felt these described actions were already being fulfilled through the EOC and expressed no need to form another coordinating body within sagebrush conservation work or further tailor the EOC in this way.

A couple of interviewees did not support a coordinating body for a few different reasons. One interviewee noted that there must be a partnership with communities and that top-down prioritization has not been successful in the West. Another interviewee indicated that another body would be excessive when what is needed, from their perspective, is simply a sustainable monitoring protocol that is not overly burdensome.

# WHAT HAS WORKED WELL IN SAGEBRUSH BIOME CONSERVATION

Interviewees identified numerous examples of what’s working well in sagebrush biome conservation efforts. Examples that were mentioned are detailed below:

WHO	WHAT
BLM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working model for landscape prioritization</li> <li>• Financial resources dedicated to sagebrush work</li> <li>• Work together across state boundaries</li> </ul>
EOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent meetings force higher-level coordination, discussion, and priority</li> </ul>
Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works directly with users on the ground and bridges lack of trust for those who make a living on public land and don’t trust the Federal Government</li> <li>• Well-staffed (13 staff, many full-time) with high quality people.</li> <li>• Sufficient resources</li> <li>• Diverse participation, including industry and private landowners</li> <li>• Voluntary, incentive-based design</li> </ul>
Inter-State Wildlife Agency Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings between groups of State fish and wildlife agencies (ex: WY, ID, MO, CO, UT) or two states (OR and NV) for regional coordination on wildlife and habitat issues</li> </ul>
Natural Resources Conservation Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since 2010, voluntarily and proactively targeted Farm Bill resources to help landowners address sagebrush ecosystem threats</li> <li>• Voluntary 15-year strategic commitment to sagebrush conservation</li> </ul>
Rangeland Fire Protection Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tremendous job at keeping fire starts small; number of fires starts static while number of acres burned has declined</li> <li>• Utilizes local knowledge of the landscape (more effective than someone coming in from out of state)</li> <li>• Communication and relationship building</li> <li>• Connecting training and resources with willing private landowners</li> </ul>
State of Oregon Land-use Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sage-grouse core habitat identified by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.</li> <li>• Aggressive State land use planning build around identified core habitat, including statutory described goals, e.g. big game winter range that counties must protect</li> <li>• Consistently supportive political environment</li> </ul>

<p>Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (restoration work in the sagebrush ecosystem)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 50 partners with \$20 million a year running through the organization.</li> <li>• Centralized coordination, funding (50-60 sources), seed mixing, equipment supply, etc.</li> <li>• Nimble contracting ability at state level to do archeological surveys.</li> <li>• Online, transparent accounting system that accounts for all projects with extensive monitoring and reporting</li> <li>• Support from Governor’s office and legislature</li> <li>• Bottom-up hierarchy: 1 of 5 Regional teams identify and develop projects, elect their own leaders, set goals, and establish focus areas. Statewide team provides State-level prioritization, sideboards, and resources for the projects.</li> <li>• Widely supported and well-funded because of success history</li> </ul>
<p>Western Governors’ Association</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous interviewees indicated that it was extremely helpful when sage-grouse conservation was identified as a Western Governors’ Association initiative</li> </ul>

## BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SAGEBRUSH BIOME CONSERVATION

### INSUFFICIENT FUNDING AND STAFFING

Insufficient funding and staffing were strong themes in the interviews. Nearly everyone brought one or both up as a barrier within their own or within other organizations to effective sagebrush conservation. With additional resources, interviewees imagine they would see more coordination across jurisdictions, local implementation teams getting off the ground with sufficient staffing, more local engagement with private landowners already willing to help, and more resources available for proactive planning by private landowners.

Understaffing in Federal agencies was noted by several interviewees. *“Agency people are usually just treading water with their day to day responsibilities. They don’t have time to be proactive.”* Similarly, insufficient capacity, insufficient contracting capacity, and lack of leadership support was mentioned for both Federal and State agencies. Several interviewees also noted significant capacity issues for Tribes and Tribal natural resource departments, who are often forced to pick and choose between issues to focus on.

An interviewee noted that getting Federal legislative funding for sagebrush conservation may be difficult, in part, because of the ecosystem's size. It's not small enough in scope to require targeting only a handful of legislators, like the Chesapeake Bay Program, but it's also not national in scale, like the international focus of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Interviewees noted that the scope and scale will require creativity.

## COMMUNICATION SILOS AND JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Interviewees agreed there are communication silo problems on and between every scale of the sagebrush biome. Local people often work only within their own district or county. State direction on sagebrush and sage-grouse conservation is significantly influenced by Governors' offices and State legislatures, and coordination across state lines, while it occurs, is limited. And Federal agencies are impacted by their own jurisdictional boundaries, whether those are state lines, or forest, district, and regional boundaries.

Even interviewees from partnership organizations pointed out how they would like better communication between themselves and other organizations. The only interviewees not reporting to have these issues are NGOs, who see themselves as able to bridge those jurisdictional gaps.

## DATA AND MONITORING LIMITATIONS

Several interviewees noted challenges around data and monitoring systems. Keeping track of all data was mentioned as a challenge, and that there is room for improvement in repository systems that are used. It was also noted that although some monitoring matrices are used in common by multiple entities, states have been doing data collection and monitoring efforts differently, leading to a need for these methods to be universal. In addition, data reported by individual states varies, and challenges with accurate and consistent reporting from Federal agencies to states was noted. It was also noted that monitoring requirements can be overly burdensome for those doing the monitoring. In addition, collecting data around disturbances was specifically noted as a challenge, and a need was identified for data to reflect what's on the ground in reality rather than data that was collected in the permitting process. It was noted that the goal of adjusting management of industry and grazing based on wildlife and vegetative responses is only effective when sufficient monitoring data is collected (and that often it is not).

## WASTELAND PERCEPTION

The interviewees strongly focused on sagebrush land being perceived by the general public or those not from the region as wasteland. Some hear it labeled as "*sheer nothingness*" and one interviewee likes to call it the "*Rodney Dangerfield of biomes*" after the comedian that often said "I get no respect." Compared with forests and even grasslands, sagebrush seems to attract less national public interest.

Interviewees were quick to point out that the sagebrush landscape is an indicator habitat that is deeply intertwined with other habitats and that recognizing that interconnectedness is critical. For example, you could not enjoy wildlife in forested landscapes if that wildlife didn't have the sagebrush and prairies to winter in. Some interviewees emphasized the need for public education about what is special about the sagebrush landscape.

## FUNDING STRUCTURES

A few interviewees cited the barriers and constraints created by budget silos and by funds being tied to different budget line items. For example, the way many agencies and programs are funded, there is a lot of duplicative effort and competition for the same funds. For example, funding for sagebrush conservation competes with other often more glamorous or urgent priorities such as fire suppression. Another example would be the existence of specific fire restoration funds but not general restoration funds. If general restoration funds were available, those funds could be used in low fire years toward other priority restoration. Some agency budgets are also becoming increasingly centralized, with higher level offices making decisions without an understanding of the local culture or ecosystems.

## INCONSISTENT AND INSUFFICIENT PRIORITY

Interviewees mentioned inconsistent priorities both between different agencies and State Governors' offices. The will to protect the sagebrush habitat is much stronger in some areas than others at any given time.

This patchwork priority map also changes over time as Federal and State administration changes bring different levels of interest for the sagebrush landscape. Many interviewees noted a complete pendulum swing from one presidential administration's priority in sagebrush to the next and had a feeling of starting all over. Staff turnover also precludes a long-term vision and commitment to the work.

Interviewees also mentioned a lack of priority generally once there was no longer a threat of listing sage-grouse as an endangered species. This loss of attention slowed the work and removed a unifying objective from otherwise different groups such as the livestock community and the environmental community. It was noted that the threats to the sagebrush biome are well understood and that what's needed is for the community to "stop talking and start implementing" conservation efforts on a large scale.

It was noted that at times competing priorities can also be in direct conflict with conservation goals, and that there's a need to subsidize public benefits. Specific examples of competing priorities cited included increasing road access for energy interests which can worsen the spread noxious weeds, and the lack of inclusion of sufficient conservation considerations in extractive analyses.

## THREATS TO THE BIOME (FIRES, INVASIVE PLANTS, ETC.)

Nearly all interviewees noted significant challenges to sagebrush conservation posed by fire and invasive grasses and agreed that efforts to address these issues must be bold and occur at a massive scale. Many interviewees noted how fire damage is massively outpacing fire reduction work and how this trend will most likely continue given climate change. Fire seasons are now much longer. With the amounts lost now, either the systems don't recover, or they take a great deal of resources to recover. Therefore, fuel reduction and reducing fire risk must be top priorities and are critical to addressing sagebrush conservation. Some also noted, this heavy lift must be made by the Federal Government as states would never be able to afford restoration on this scale. One interviewee mentioned how proper mapping of cheatgrass "fire highways" must also be part of overall fire strategy.

Hand in hand with fire concerns, nonnative species, and invasive weeds like cheatgrass and medusa head were a central focus for interviewees. All agreed aggressive focus and treatment will be needed to get ahead of the spread. There were different thoughts on how to battle invasive weeds, such as whether to use native grasses for restoration or whether to utilize a non-native plant community, like crested wheatgrass, that has a history of success at stabilizing the plant community. And a few interviewees mentioned how there will need to be patience and a long-term view, the willingness to apply multiple treatments, and adaptive management before seeing results.

It was noted by one interviewee that at this point no existing landscapes are natural and that all are coupled human-natural landscapes. As a result, what kind of landscape is considered a “problem” or not and which landscape to manage towards depends on who you are and what kind of landscapes you prefer.

Degradation of habitat by wild horses and wild horse overpopulation were also mentioned by several interviewees as concerns that spans the entire sagebrush biome.

## LEARNING FROM OTHER COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Interviewees pointed to several lessons learned from other collaborative efforts that should be applied to sagebrush conservation efforts. Interviewees cited ocean and arctic conservation efforts, the Intermountain West Joint Venture, the North American Waterfowl Management Planning process, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC), the Payette National Forest management planning process, Rangeland Fire Protection Associations, and the Blackfoot Challenge as examples to learn from. Lessons learned that were mentioned included:

Broad partnerships	The Intermountain West Joint Venture’s inclusion of industry and private landowners in addition to states and Federal agencies was cited as key to its success. It was noted that Tribes are not currently involved in IWJV but need to be.
	The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) model included ranchers, private landowners, Native peoples, and a whole range of stakeholders which was cited as effective. However, interviewees noted that critical parties such as states and other organizations were not deeply involved in developing the model which ultimately led to challenges.
Ecosystem focus	Collaborative efforts with a more holistic rather than a single-species focus were noted as more effective in the long run.
Story telling	Highlighting stories of successes can garner momentum, gain media attention, and increase bipartisan support for efforts.
Dedicated staffing	The Intermountain West Joint Venture’s dedicated, full-time staff was mentioned as another key factor to the group’s effectiveness.
Core area planning	Delineating the strongest places and keeping them strong is a principle from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.
Bottom-up efforts	Interviewees noted that LCC’s effectiveness was limited because they were too top-down.

Inclusion of local people	Key to the Blackfoot Challenge’s success was laying the proper foundation of first going to the community and asking community members what was important for their future.
	Based on research on international environmental policies and local responses to those policies if local people are not invited to be involved in the effort they will often ignore or resist the policies.
Attention to incentives to participate	Long-term initiatives tend to home in on incentives for participation, understanding that people participate in collaborative efforts because they get more out of it than they would if they didn’t participate. Focusing on what’s in it for each stakeholder and why they should care is critical to implementing a long-term collaborative effort that folks will think is useful to participate in.
Sufficient time and resources	Patience and sufficient resources were noted as key to successful collaborative efforts.
Collaborative efforts lead to better outcomes	The Payette National Forest management planning process was noted as an example of a complex and high stakes collaborative process leading to a better outcome on the Forest.
Dedicated funding sources	It is easier to bring people to and keep them at the table when there is a known set amount of money or ability to compete for money. It was also noted that most, if not all, examples of successful collaboratives have multiple funding streams.

# CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL COORDINATION OF SAGEBRUSH CONSERVATION EFFORTS AT THE LANDSCAPE-LEVEL

## FEDERAL AGENCIES

Many interviewees noted the need for leadership, priority-setting, and recognition of the need for sagebrush conservation at top levels of the Department of Interior and by political appointees, Congress, and State senators and representatives. It was also noted that Congressional authority to work beyond the politics of each administration would greatly support agency sagebrush conservation work. A need to empower managers at all levels was also noted by several interviewees.

Additional ideas for critical actions required by Federal agencies for successful sagebrush conservation efforts include:

- Develop a common, range-wide vision for sagebrush conservation; Identify barriers to vision and work to address them
- Prioritize resources (funding, capacity, etc.) for sagebrush conservation and work across agencies, and in coordination with states, to develop joint, unified priorities to garner support for conservation work



- Commit to addressing invasive species and wild horse issues that have hindered sagebrush conservation work
- Ensure good science and good policies to protect the remaining core habitat
- Fulfill Federal Trust responsibilities to Tribes, engaging Tribes, discussing issues and potential actions
- Commit to implement priorities across the entire agency (across all forests, ranger districts, State offices, etc.)
- Ensure Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is invited to all post-fire rehabilitation meetings so private land considerations are included in planning
- Clearly state what success looks like in this endeavor
- Use public NEPA process to ensure transparency and opportunities for public input
- Streamline the NEPA permitting process, prioritizing approved projects on Federal land
  - Concerns were noted that the effects of streamlining NEPA processes would be to remove protection and engagement if NEPA processes were streamlined, pointing to the need to ensure good science, a thoughtful decision-making process, and public engagement.
- Provide capacity-building opportunities (example: training to Rangeland Fire Protection Associations , etc.)
- Create monitoring metrics and programs that that will not be overly burdensome to private landowners
- Educate the public on the need for sagebrush conservation
- Embrace EOC work and continue to improve coordination across agencies
- BLM – increase boots on the ground, continue partnership-based approach to sagebrush conservation, modify disturbed habitat reporting to reflect actual project implementation data rather than proposed permit data, and more flexibility and ease in permitting (example: making extended grazing permits easy to apply for so that they can be used more frequently in high-moisture times to lessen the grass per acre and ultimately reduce fire danger)
- FS – increased attention and priority at the Washington Office on sagebrush rangelands
- FWS – develop unified vision of work across regions; reduce burden of monitoring Candidate Conservation Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances so that program is more sustainable
- NRCS – create programs to reach beyond one producer’s fence line
- USGS – put resources into translating and communicating their science, and putting it in the hands of managers and users

## TRIBAL AGENCIES

The overwhelming response from many interviewees was that they have limited to no experience working for or with Tribes on this issue and thus do not have an opinion on actions needed from Tribal agencies. Along with that, many emphasized how critical it is for Tribes to be included at the table and expressed their confidence that Tribes are interested in participating. Several interviewees also noted that sagebrush conservation efforts need to reflect Tribes’ cultural values and needs, and that these values need to be integrated in prioritization processes. Tribal input needs to be integrated into strategic planning efforts so that Tribal lands are not islands that are not considered in the overall

strategy. Many interviewees acknowledged barriers to Tribal participation including sufficient capacity to engage, resource issues, changes in leadership, and bureaucracy. Several interviewees noted that Tribes should be invited to participate in the EOC.

Several interviewees point out that they feel the responsibility is on those with management authorities and those who are affected by sagebrush issues to reach out to Tribes and help reduce their barriers to participation in sagebrush conservation efforts. One interviewee suggested that the Department of Interior needs to identify critical Tribes managing large amounts of sagebrush habitat and fund their participation in coordination efforts and implementation activities.

Suggestions were made to engage with the Intertribal Agriculture Council, and other similar associations like the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, Native American Timber Council, and Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission, who have capacity, expertise, and an ability to share Tribal perspectives on these issues. The National Association of Conservation Districts' Tribal Outreach and Partnership Group was cited as an example of successful partnership example between conservation districts, Tribal conservation districts, Tribes, Tribal associations, and other partners.

## STATES AND STATE AGENCIES

General themes of actions required by states and State agencies for successful sagebrush conservation efforts include a willingness to embrace recommendations from the EOC or other leadership body, looking beyond jurisdictional boundaries, increasing coordination with State departments of agriculture and land, playing a critical role of facilitating coordination across partner organizations, committing resources on a sustainable basis, and influencing leadership commitment to lessen the impact of political pendulum swings.

Additional ideas for critical actions required by states and State agencies for successful sagebrush conservation efforts include:

- Governors' Offices working with others to provide a joint unified briefing to incoming Department of Interior leadership on the importance of sagebrush conservation
- Protect what's left, limit solar farms and oil wells in sagebrush habitat under State jurisdiction
- Recognize the pinon/juniper encroachment problem
- Empower landowners to have fire associations and fund local implementation teams, modeled after Oregon's successful programs
- Establish a central hub within the Governors' Offices to coordinate planning and funding aspects of the state's sagebrush conservation response (for example: Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon) efforts in Oregon).
- Coordinate through the Western Governors' Association; focus on sagebrush as an initiative
- Recognize that there's a long-term need for engagement on sagebrush and sage-grouse issues
- Educate the public on sagebrush habitat and what is at stake; Publicize the collaborative work that is happening.
- Prioritize resources for sagebrush conservation; for example, a branch dedicated to on-the-ground rehabilitation work
- Hold a holistic ecosystem approach rather than a single species focus to connect with broader issues and communities

- Acknowledge that no state has the authorities to address the issue alone; look to regional priority setting bodies to continue focus on priorities that last beyond individual Department of Wildlife Directors and governors' administrations.

## PRIVATE SECTOR AND LANDOWNERS

Overall, interviewees agreed that the private sector and landowners need to be willing to represent their issues in a common venue. Interviewees emphasized that it is important to highlight for these groups why their involvement matters and understand how it will benefit them in the long run. Private sector and landowners also need to be involved in collaborative partnership efforts with others to further conservation efforts and share best practices that work practically. One interviewee mentioned the importance of increasing understanding between different user groups, be they mining, livestock, timber, recreationalists, environmentalists, etc. Another interviewee suggested continued education for the private sector and landowners on incentive program such as conservation credit systems, informing them of the tools that encourage proactive conservation on their private land.

Specifically speaking about the private sector, several interviewees noted that mineral, oil, gas, solar, and wind companies by and large, follow the regulations and laws required of them. Highlighting and applauding biodiversity or good stewardship programs will encourage their growth and their becoming a part of the industry culture. It was noted that one area of focus should be private urban development, where there is opportunity to affect local planning and zoning permitting and educate on urban sprawl concerns.

Interviewees focused on similar themes regarding landowners, highlighting the need to realize the threats to their property and how to make them healthy and resilient, the need to be adaptive, and the need to be willing to come to the table. This includes commitment to fire reduction and invasives work on their lands. Many interviewees see landowners as already understanding the importance of healthy land and naturally having a vested interest. Where they need help is with adequate funding, technical expertise, and incentives —especially seeing how it can benefit their bottom-line and keep lands working, increasing ways to implement plans economically, and educating on how to contribute to healthy landscapes at a broader scale. Other partner organizations can also highlight successful model and examples of working with landowners. Landowners can also explore tools for voluntary conservation such as Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs). One interviewee also pointed out that many of these landowners know their State and Federal legislative representatives and can push for support for sagebrush conservation efforts from the bottom up.

## INTERVIEWEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAGEBRUSH CONSERVATION GOVERNANCE

### LANDSCAPE PRIORITIZATION

Interviewees nearly all agreed that spatial targeting of priority landscapes is critical to avoid completing, as one interviewee noted, *“random acts of conservation kindness”*. Almost all indicated that prioritization of the landscape needs to be based on preserving strong, core sagebrush habitat areas

first. There was some variation in answers about whether those core areas still need to be identified. One interviewee mentioned that the 2015 BLM land use plan amendments for sage-grouse already sufficiently identify the core areas. Two interviewees mentioned a matrix to help make this determination, one mentioning a resistance/resilience matrix and another mentioning a high vs. low probability of success matrix developed by BLM and a Boise-based fire group. A suggestion was also made that prioritization needs to allow for local actions to continue to some extent with a specific portion of the effort (10-20% of available resources) focused on the highest priority efforts.

After initial prioritization of the core sagebrush habitat areas, there were some differing opinions of where to focus next. Some interviewees suggested that the focus should turn to non-natural conditions in fuel loads, invasive species threats, and areas degraded by wild horses. It was noted that while prioritization is critical, there is also great merit in addressing areas that are shrinking or disappearing. Another interviewee thought the second priority should be on the areas surrounding the high priority areas. It was suggested that focus on work in priority areas shouldn't become so narrow that opportunities for making gains in non-priority landscapes are missed.

Interviewees suggested areas where there is room for improvement. One area is in ensuring that planning is expansive and inclusive so that none are marginalized. Another area that was suggested as value added is in charting wildlife uses of the landscape and suggested focusing on migration corridors, citing that many times those migration corridors are areas where infrastructure projects are often pushed because they are lesser quality sagebrush areas. They noted that more wildlife data will support defending conservation efforts in those areas when conflicts arise between various interest groups.

## INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

There was a strong theme of the need for diverse, inclusive, and broad partnerships to coordinate sagebrush conservation efforts at the landscape scale. One interviewee expressed that there is generally a lack of diversity of ideas within Federal and State agencies. Another interviewee shared their research experience which shows that if the local community are not included, there is a good possibility of failure as the local community either ignores or undermines efforts. One interviewee worded it this way, *"If you create [a house] without the people who are going to live in the house, you're going to have a structure that everyone throws stones at and nobody wants to live in."*

Several interviewees raised concern with the lack of Tribal and private landowner participation. One interviewee pointed out that there is a vested interest for them to be involved if they can see resources to be applied. Another interviewee suggested that there's opportunity for increased engagement by Tribal associations and other representatives such as the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, the Native American Timber Council, the Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission, and land grant universities such as New Mexico State University and their Range Improvement Task Force. It was suggested that lessons could be learned from the way other strategic efforts such as the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy group included Tribes and tribal input. Additionally, several interviewees mentioned how important it is to have industry involvement. Lastly, another interviewee was concerned with the lack of representation from the Forest Service, because they have a lot of forest and timber lands adjacent that could contribute to fire in the sagebrush area.

## DEDICATED STAFFING

Several interviewees indicated that dedicated staffing could make or break an effort. In the absence of dedicated staffing, coordination efforts can be just another duty on top of everyone's already existing duties. One interviewee phrased it, *"When it is someone's job to wake up every day and think about how to stitch things together across the landscape, I've seen amazing things come alive."* It was noted that the EOC does not have many dedicated staff to move its work forward, and that increasing staffing could help with its effectiveness.

## RECOGNIZE AND HIGHLIGHT SUCCESSES

Several interviewees emphasized that significant coordination is already occurring and that those efforts need recognition. They posited for framing efforts to improve coordination of sagebrush conservation efforts as *"better understanding current coordination and empowering all"* so as not to be perceived as, *"another attempt of others telling me what I should be doing."*

Other interviewees indicated the power of highlighting successful projects in support of furthering conservation efforts. Recognizing successes can show what's possible, garner further support and resources, and increase momentum. Rewarding success can be enough motivation for some, e.g., publicly traded companies, that need to show they are good environmental stewards. People want to support successful projects, and it was noted by several interviewees that there are a lot of existing projects that have worked well and could be highlighted as successful models.

## CONNECTING LANDSCAPE LEVEL COORDINATION TO LOCAL WORK ON THE GROUND

A strong theme throughout the assessment interviews was the inherent tension between a centralized structure and overarching leadership which is needed to plan and coordinate this work on a large scale, and implementation, autonomy, and decision making at the local level with those on the ground. Most interviewees noted that large-scale coordination across the entire sagebrush biome is needed, and that it is critical for that large scale work to be connected to State and Local levels; others thought that top-down efforts were off base and that all work should be left to State or Local levels. Many pointed to the need for overarching leadership, which then trickles down to lower levels for implementation. Those that supported a decentralized approach noted that benefits include that there is room for more responsiveness to local conditions, and that the structure creates resilience – i.e., one area failing does not mean that all areas fail.

Many interviewees expressed that the ultimate objective is for broad discussion of all jurisdictional authorities—fire, weeds, habitat, species, Local, County, State, Federal—that blends jurisdictional boundaries, and utilizes all authorities. The need for participatory decision making at the local level, skillfully facilitated meetings, and bringing people together for these discussions in a safe environment is key. It was also noted that local level input will also help alleviate distrust of government in general.

## DATA AND MONITORING

The need for a sustainable and not overly burdensome monitoring system was noted. Regarding data, one interviewee suggested more homogenized data collection across states and coordination of incoming data. The interviewee suggests a staff position at the EOC to apprise the body of incoming data, create a repository of data, and interpret data and relay it to the broader audience.

Interviewees suggested various recommendations for how to measure success, including:

- Reduced acres lost annually
- Increase in species using conserved or restored habitats
- Well-being of all species, including humans
- Sustainability for species, which is an indicator of land and aquatic health
- Positive responses from both plant and animal species

A couple of interviewees discussed incorporating Indigenous knowledge and Tribal input. One stated there is a lot of lip service to integrating traditional ecological knowledge, but there are questions that remain of how to best integrate that knowledge.

Finally, an interviewee suggested certain tools for more centralized monitoring such as Terra-pulse, a satellite imagery tool that looks at snowpack through time. It can look across the whole biome and understand water, drought, vegetation growth and decline, surface water, etc. It was suggested that there is a large role for academics to play in long-term data, research, and monitoring efforts, and that these types of partnerships should be explored.

## ON THE GROUND EMPOWERMENT AND INCENTIVES

Several interviewees strongly emphasized making this work about people and their connection to the land. They cited seeing successes when there are common benefits to people and nature. The relevant question is, “*How can we do things that benefit people who work and live on this landscape?*” These interviewees did not think there has been enough listening to local people to better understand how to more successfully coordinate what local people are already doing. Local people know what works, what does not, and what the possibilities are. They are the ones who have been living and working on the landscapes. Ultimately, the best possibility for success is understanding that people associate lands with experiences they have had there: producing, hunting, fishing, bird watching, recreating. These experiences are what they value. The coordinating body must communicate the purpose of sagebrush conservation efforts as trying to protect those experiences for the next generation.

One interviewee notes different people will have different motivations, be it money, a public showing of being a good environmental steward, or knowing their kids and grandkids can see sage-grouse. They advised recognizing and using all of these tools to reward and motivate people to stay in the work.

Interviewees also noted specific ways to incentivize involvement of landowners in fire suppression and fuel reduction efforts, such as streamlined permitting processes for temporary non-renewable grazing for fuel reduction, retiring fire equipment to landowners sooner so it has a longer lifespan for fire reduction, and providing needed infrastructure for landowners to coordinate on fire suppression efforts.

## SAGEBRUSH CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP – WHO SHOULD LEAD THIS EFFORT

Interviewee responses to who should lead sagebrush conservation efforts were mixed, and numerous different leaders were suggested. However, many interviewees focused on the importance of connecting large-scale priority and coordination with local-scale autonomy and implementation.

Responses, as well as the reasons why, are below:

WHO SHOULD LEAD	WHY
All / Horizontal Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All should agree on a venue and way to coordinate. Needs to be a flexible approach. Those doing work on the ground should determine who best to lead the effort.</li> </ul>
BLM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They're the lead partner.</li> <li>They're facilitating bringing entities together in partnerships.</li> <li>They manage a significant amount of sagebrush habitat.</li> <li><i>*It was noted that BLM needs rebuilding before it can get back to where they need to be to manage these issues.</i></li> </ul>
Communities impacted by future of the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A community-driven approach to leading and designing is needed. It's important to listen to what's worked well and build relationships.</li> <li>Governance structures can be perceived as top down.</li> <li>Community voice should even trump current structures.</li> </ul>
EOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EOC should lead but they need a recommitment and a reboot. They need buy-in from all partners or they need to determine what another appropriate venue is.</li> <li>Since EOC is mostly high-level leadership, it should create another group with authority to act, get things done on the ground. Needs to be inter-agency, lots of partners, directors + staff level.</li> </ul>
Federal Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than 60% of sagebrush land is Federal land.</li> </ul>
Federal funding + local implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal funding is needed to support efforts.</li> <li>However, implementation needs to be local.</li> </ul>
Multiple leaders at different scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The idea of a single leader is not sufficient. Need efforts at all levels. If you do not have local involvement, local communities will look at the efforts as misguided.</li> <li>National level leadership plays role in empowering state and local people to be successful. Need to ensure flexibility for state and local communities to have enough flexibility to make decisions.</li> <li>Provide national infrastructure, coordination, and policy</li> </ul>
NRCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They have a lot of funding going toward habitat work.</li> </ul>
States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States have a lot of influence in DC.</li> <li>They can identify sagebrush conservation as a priority and request commitment from the Federal Government.</li> </ul>
State + Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BLM because of how much sagebrush habitat they manage.</li> <li>States because of their stewardship.</li> </ul>
State Fish and Wildlife Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They have staff embedded in these communities and know how to relate. It is their mission to conserve wildlife populations.</li> </ul>
State Fish and Wildlife Agencies + Land Management Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States have critical role in sage-grouse conservation.</li> <li>Land management agencies have authorities in habitat issues.</li> </ul>
States + Federal + Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All have significant acreage of sagebrush habitat.</li> </ul>
Western Governors' Association (WGA) or similar level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WGA is the appropriate level to oversee other State offices that are essential pieces of the puzzle. Inter-state coordination.</li> </ul>



# PANEL TO REFINE GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR SAGEBRUSH HABITAT CONSERVATION EFFORTS ACROSS LANDSCAPES

Generally, most interviewees were confident and fairly satisfied with the list presented to them; though, they would often have additional suggestions.

One person expressed their hopes that from this group will come a unified message, specific assignments, policy, legislation, a short-term plan with real actionable items, and not just produce a report.

Several echoed a theme that developing a governance model without the input of those implementing the model on the ground can be dangerous and might unravel the work. To this point, one person stated, *"I have grave concern if the community's private landowners and people on the ground are not part of this panel. Right now, it seems like a repeat of agencies and academics.... A repeat of exclusivity without community representation."*

General suggestions are mostly encompassed in the specific recommendations list below. Suggestions not directly covered in the list below include Tribes, private landowners, those who manage land, all State and Federal agencies with science and jurisdictional backgrounds, and those who affect land management decisions on a national level.

Specific recommendations included:

- Universities
  - Colorado State University
  - Idaho State University
  - Montana State University
  - Oregon State University – specifically their rangeland program
  - University of Idaho
  - University of Wyoming
  - Utah State University – specifically Dr. David Stoner
  - Dr. William Lauenroth, Yale University
- NGOs – including those who are proactive partners on sagebrush conservation work
  - Audubon Society
  - Center for Biological Diversity
  - Mule Deer Foundation
  - National Wildlife Federation
  - Natural Resources Defense Council
  - Nature Conservancy
  - Sierra Club
  - Pheasants Forever
  - Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
  - The Nature Conservancy
  - Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
  - Wilderness Society



- Wildlife Management Institute\*
- Tribal
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs\*
  - Intertribal Agriculture Council – Zach Ducheneaux, Executive Director\*
  - Native American Fish and Wildlife Society
  - Native American Timber Council
  - Southwest Tribal Fisheries Commission
- Associations
  - Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies – specifically authors of the President’s Task Force on Shared Science and Landscape Conservation Priorities Report
  - Intermountain West Joint Venture
  - Western Governors’ Association
- User Groups
  - Industry, including wind and solar
  - National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
  - Robbie LeValley – rancher, county commissioner, range scientist in Colorado
- State
  - Department of Agriculture
  - Department of Wildlife
  - Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (e.g. in Oregon or Idaho) – they also have connections to private landowners
  - Governor’s Office, Economic Development Representative
- Federal
  - Forest Service National Forest systems science people
  - Former Landscape Conservation Cooperative coordinators – lessons to learn from them
  - Jeanne Chambers, Forest Service
  - Natural Resources Conservation Service
  - United States Geological Survey lab in Arizona

\*other interviewee(s) did not agree with this recommendation

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Assessment interviewees pointed to the need for diverse, inclusive, and broad partnerships in order to coordinate sagebrush conservation efforts at the landscape scale. Interviewees also pointed to the challenges of top-down approaches that leave out community-level input and those doing work on the ground at the local scale. Many assessment interviewees also indicated a general lack of familiarity with work done by Tribes and Tribal agencies on sagebrush conservation efforts, and noted that Tribes, Tribal lands, and Indigenous knowledges are often left out of conservation strategies and planning processes. We also heard a desire for representation from universities in all states with sagebrush habitat, representation from Governor’s offices, and from those with responsibilities for invasive plants and fire. Our recommendation is to invite a broad list of affected parties at all levels to participate in a webinar

and workshop process to develop and provide input on refining sagebrush conservation governance models for inclusion in the Sagebrush Conservation Strategy. Due to COVID-19, these engagements will be virtual. We recommend obtaining input from a cross section of private landowners, Tribes or inter-Tribal organizations, industry and user groups (oil, gas, solar, mining, etc.), Governor's office representation, NGOs, representation from those with fire and invasive plants responsibilities (State departments of agriculture and forestry, County weed districts, etc.), State wildlife agencies and Federal land management agencies, partnership organizations (IWJV, WGA, etc.), academics from states with sagebrush habitat, and other identified stakeholders.

Building on the results of the assessment, the group may want to consider the following recommendations and questions during the webinar and workshop process as they further develop and refine partnership governance model(s) for landscape-level sagebrush conservation:

*Building on Successes and Leaving Room for Innovation:*

Interviewees discussed the many existing successes in sagebrush conservation efforts and noted numerous examples of effective relationships and coordination efforts that are working well. They stressed the importance of building on and learning from what's going well already while also working to address any gaps. They also noted that efforts to date have not been sufficient to conserve sagebrush at a massive scale, and that unprecedented and creative efforts will be required to do the work that's needed. Interviewees also discussed the importance of highlighting successful efforts in service of completing additional conservation work. They noted that highlighting successes builds momentum and rapport, garners additional support, gains media attention, celebrates milestones along a larger process, and develops bi-partisan support.

- How can the governance model(s) identify and build on successes that already exist in sagebrush conservation and coordination efforts? How can successes and successful projects be highlighted throughout to build momentum and rapport, garner additional support, gain media attention, celebrate milestones along a larger process, and develop bi-partisan support?
- How can the governance model(s) integrate best practices as well as leave room for innovation to meet challenges in new and creative ways?

*Continuity, Dedicated Resources, and Staffing:*

We heard from interviewees that sagebrush conservation is a long-term effort, and that insufficient and inconsistent funding, staffing, and priority have been significant barriers to successful coordination of sagebrush conservation efforts. Dedicated funding, staffing, patience, and sufficient time were all highlighted as key aspects of other successful large-landscape scale collaborative efforts. A successful partnership governance model will need to include mechanisms to ensure long-term priority and continuity across individual staffing and administration changes, as well as dedicated and sufficient funding and staffing.

- How can the governance model(s) be designed in ways that maintains continuity regardless of change on the individual level and that is durable in the long term (100+ years) for sagebrush conservation efforts?

- What mechanisms can be integrated into the governance model(s) to provide consistency in funding, participation, and priority across changing administrations at Federal and State levels?
- How can sufficient and dedicated staffing for sagebrush conservation efforts be ensured?

*Broad Participation at All Levels, and Coordination Across Scales:*

Interviewees pointed to the need for diverse, inclusive, and broad partnerships to successfully coordinate sagebrush conservation efforts across landscapes. At the grassroots scale, participants were incentivized to participate in conservation efforts if it aligns with their missions and brings more resources to the table. Interviewees suggested that connecting sagebrush conservation work to people's connection to the land and why they care is critical. At the agency level, people were motivated to participate if given direction and priority by their leadership. A successful partnership governance model will therefore need to have a mission that encompasses that of those working on the ground and will also need to engage high-level agency leadership in a sustainable way. Interviewees also noted the need to balance large-scale planning with regional and local-level autonomy and implementation. Different organizations have different strengths to bring to the table (ability to serve as a bridging organization, resources, ability to quickly administer contracts, etc.) and the partnership governance model(s) should utilize these strengths.

- How can participation at all scales be incentivized? How can the issue(s) and solutions be framed to incentivize participation, help people realize what is at stake, and make participation worth their time? How can authorities and responsibilities at all levels be utilized to further landscape-scale sagebrush conservation efforts?
- How can the governance model integrate strengths of both centralized approaches (national priority, coordination across the entire sagebrush biome, etc.) and decentralized approaches (autonomy, flexibility, responsiveness to differing landscapes, politics, and needs, etc.)? How can conservation efforts at the landscape level be coordinated with conservation efforts done on the ground?

*Data, Monitoring, and Landscape Prioritization Considerations:*

Interviewees pointed to the need for prioritization of landscapes in order to use available resources in the most effective way possible. We also heard from interviewees that numerous challenges exist around data and monitoring systems, including keeping track of all data, the use of different matrices, data collection methods, reporting, and monitoring by different organizations. Some interviewees noted that monitoring could be overly burdensome, indicated the challenge of collecting data around disturbances, and noted a need for data to reflect what's on the ground in reality rather than data that was collected in the permitting process.

- What's working well in current data, monitoring, and landscape prioritization efforts in sagebrush conservation? How can existing challenges in these areas be addressed?

# APPENDIX A – ASSESSMENT INTERVIEWEES

Abbie Josie	Utah Deputy State Director – Resources, BLM
Ali Duvall	Director of Strategic Partnerships, Intermountain West Joint Venture
Amy Lueders	Regional Director, USFWS
Arthur “Butch” Blazer	Board Member, National Wildlife Federation; Previously Deputy Under Secretary – Natural Resources and Environment – Forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); Previously President, Mescalero Apache Tribe
Brian Nesvik	Director, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Brian Rutledge	Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative Director, National Audubon Society
Chris Jasmine	Manager, Biodiversity and Rangelands - Nevada Gold Mines
Curt Melcher	Director, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
David Jenkins	Assistant Director of Resources and Planning, BLM
Jeremy Maestas	Sagebrush Ecosystems Specialist, USDA-NRCS
Joe Tague	Retired; Previously BLM Forests, Rangelands, Riparian, and Plant Conservation Division Chief
John O’Keeffe	Cattle Rancher; Oregon Cattlemen’s Association; Landowner Representative, Oregon’s SageCon
Marvin Vetter	Rangeland Fire Protection Association Coordinator, Oregon Department of Forestry
Miles Moretti	President and CEO, Mule Deer Foundation
Neil Thagard	Director, Nez Perce Tribe Natural Resources Wildlife Program
Raul Morales	Retired; Previously BLM NV Deputy State Director Resources, Lands, and Planning
Rory Reynolds	Deputy Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources
Steve Torbit	Retired; Previously USFWS Assistant Regional Director for Science
Tony Wasley	Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife

# APPENDIX B – ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you characterize your experiences and/or your organization/agency's involvement in coordination of sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes? (please include experiences from previous work if your current position does not involve sagebrush conservation activities, or if you have retired).  
How have you individually, (and if applicable, your organization,) been involved with sagebrush habitat conservation efforts?
  - a. Do you think your organization's efforts for sagebrush conservation are sufficient given its authorities?
  - b. How can conservation activities be better coordinated across organizations and scales? What are your thoughts on prioritizing landscapes?
2. WAFWA coordinates meetings of the Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee. Have you or your agency participated on this Committee?
  - a. The EOC and its technical arm, the Range-wide Interagency Sagebrush Technical Team, or RISCT, were originally formed to implement the Comprehensive Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy, which called for prioritizing landscapes and implementing a series of conservation actions under an adaptive management and monitoring framework. Do you think the EOC as presently configured has done this? If not, why not? Do you think the EOC should play more of a role in coordinating and implementing conservation actions across entities and scales?
  - b. Do you think the EOC has the diversity of representation needed to do this, and if not, would you support broadening the EOC to include other parties?
  - c. If your agency has not been involved in the Sagebrush EOC, do you think your agency's sagebrush conservation efforts would be more effective if you were invited to participate? Why, or why not?
  - d. Whether through the Sagebrush EOC or another leadership/coordination model, would your agency's sagebrush conservation effectiveness be enhanced if there were some body that developed a common set of objectives for sagebrush conservation, a common prioritization scheme for conservation emphasis of sagebrush landscapes, facilitated access to the latest science on restoration, etc., and implemented a common monitoring and adaptive management system for evaluating effectiveness of conservation emphasis?
3. What are the key challenges/what needs improvement within existing sagebrush habitat landscape level conservation governance and coordination efforts?
4. What are the critical factors and priorities that would need to be reflected in successful sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes?

- a. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to successful efforts to coordinate sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes?
5. If durability were guaranteed, what are the critical actions that would need to occur by the following players to successfully coordinate sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes?
  - a. By Federal agencies
  - b. By Tribal agencies
  - c. By States and State agencies
  - d. By private sector
  - e. By landowners
6. What does your organization/agency need to participate in sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes?
7. What are some of the lessons learned from other large-landscape collaborative conservation efforts that should be applied to sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes?
8. How do you see sagebrush conservation efforts related to other conservation efforts in forests, grasslands, etc.?
9. Whom do you think should lead sagebrush conservation efforts, and why?
10. A series of virtual workshops will be conducted to build on the results of this assessment and refine/develop considerations for sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscape for inclusion in the Sagebrush Habitat Conservation Strategy. Anticipated panel organizations include: *[read list of organizations]*:
  - a. Do you think there is any critical organization/expertise missing from this list?
  - b. In your opinion, do you think that this panel would have the combined expertise to identify considerations for successful coordination of sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes? Do you have any concerns that would prevent you from supporting considerations for coordination of sagebrush habitat conservation efforts across landscapes that were developed by this group?
11. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that wasn't covered here?