



Potential Sagebrush Conservation Partnership Model Options

[Quick Link to Explanatory Narrative for Sagebrush Partnership Model Options](#)

ELEMENTS OF PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE IN COMMON ACROSS OPTIONS:	
Tribal Engagement	<p>For the biome-scale, create a tribal-convened Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC), (initially convened by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes or another tribe with similar capacity), composed of tribal representatives currently active in sagebrush conservation across the biome. The TAC will choose and accept a facilitator who is Native American. The purpose of the TAC is to provide the Biome-level partnership table with advice and recommendations, and to serve as a conduit to and from Tribal Nations not represented on the TAC. Follow this link to the Essential Tribal Engagement Commitment narrative.</p> <p>Mid-scale tribal representation would be accomplished through the creation of a Tribal Technical Committee (TCC), initially convened by each state, to invite participation from one representative from all the tribes in the state as they have interest and capacity in doing so. Group members will be currently active in sagebrush conservation across the biome, with associated technical skills. The TCC will choose and accept a facilitator who is Native American. The purpose of the TTC is to provide Mid-Scale level advice to the TAC, and to serve as a technical conduit to individual Tribal Nations not represented on the TTC.</p>
Diverse Representation	<p>The partnership structure tables at the Biome and Mid-scales would include representation from Tribes, industries, WGA, State and Federal Wildlife and Land Management Agencies, conservation NGOs, and landowner interests. Level of agency representation may vary by option / model, see below. State, NGO, and potentially tribal representation may need to rotate for a manageable size.</p>
Level of Representation	<p>At Biome scale, there are a continuum of options from (a) Top Executives of Departments, NGOs, Tribes, etc., (Secretary of USDI, USDA, Governors, etc.) to (b) Agency and NGO Heads (Director of BLM, Director of USFWS, Director of Nevada Department of Wildlife) to (c) Senior Management levels of Agencies, NGOs, and Tribes (Under Secretary of Interior for Lands and Minerals, BLM Wildlife or Lands Chief, Assistant Director for Habitat, Nevada Department of Wildlife, etc.) to (d) appointees designated by any level described here. Input is needed on which of these options (or integrated combinations) is most desirable.</p> <p>At Mid-scale, representation would fall to appropriate Regional leadership; Regional Director of USFWS or designee, State Wildlife Agency Director or designee, etc.</p>
Project Funding	<p>Funding provided at federal level on an annual or earmark basis (Congressional appropriation with integration into federal budget process). This would be “new” funding. Anticipate other funding sources/in-kind funding opportunities from partners at all scales (e.g., state, NGO, private, etc.), as well as a cost-share requirement to match Federal dollars for conservation projects. A mechanism is needed to provide gap funding until a more established funding mechanism is in place. A redirection of existing conservation funds to this “higher need” by Federal and State agencies and NGOs supplemented with conservation grant funding could serve as seed money to get this off the ground while also moving the needle on sagebrush conservation.</p>



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Science, Tech., Comm’s Support	A Science Advisory Committee or other means (contract with USGS, University, etc.) of obtaining GIS support, other technical support, and inputting new science into planning and adaptive management constructs and over time will be necessary, particularly at the biome scale. Communications, both external and within the Sagebrush Partnership, is also a needed function that could also be handled through a Communications Support Team formed from participating entities or be assigned to Partnership staff. The intent is that science, technical, and communications efforts would both feed-up / be informed by the Mid- and local scales as well as feed-down / inform the Mid- and local scales.
Funding for Partnership Administration	At the Biome and Mid-scales, funding for administering the partnership table would need to be secured and would be new across all models. Funding would be provided at federal and/or state level on an annual or earmark basis (from existing agency budgets) or through “dues” assessed members. Like the other models, the NGO model could be a recipient of such federal and/or state funding or “dues” funding, or it could be supported through direct capacity building grants (from the philanthropic or government sector) at the startup, eventually shifting to indirect on pass-through grants or state-federal funds.

ELEMENTS OF PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE THAT VARY ACROSS OPTIONS:

Role	Description	OPTION 1 – Governor Convened Representative Group	OPTION 2 – NGO Partnership	OPTION 3 – Federally led Coordination Committee
Biome Level Convener / Leadership— Steering Committee	Entity or entities that have the authority or gravitas to bring people together to a partnership table, command attention, and motivate engagement. Need not be one entity / person—could be jointly shared. “Leadership intent” to mid-scale	Governor-convened biome-level group with representatives appointed by Executive level of agencies, NGOs, Industry, Tribal rep(s) appointed by TAC. Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of bi-partisan governors 	Biome-level coordinating group with an NGO as the convening entity (form a new NGO, rather than have an existing NGO lead).	Federal agencies convene Biome-level coordinating body. USDI/USDA as joint conveners.



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-partisan governors in partnership w/ Secretaries (Interior and Agriculture) • Bi-partisan governors in partnership w/ DOI, USDA, plus BIA / DOI 		
Biome-level “Functional Support” / process and project management	Entity that would ensure functional meeting organization, facilitation, and work getting done on behalf of partnership members between meetings; facilitate the “governance” and funding side (create the “safe space” for collaboration for all); Tee’s up/Implements/helps inform the big picture decisions; communication and outreach specialist functions that support mid/local scale effort	Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracted entity (private independent entity or university-affiliated) • Staff from WGA or state-affiliated entity w/ capacity 	Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid Executive Director, communications specialist, and support staff (grant specialist, accounting, etc.) as needed. • Contracted facilitation or process management roles 	Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NISC model, executive director and operations manager located within the Office of the Secretary at the U.S. Department of the Interior. • Federal and/or state staff with existing agencies (or entity like WAFWA) provides support • Contract out certain roles
Mid-Scale Level Coordination (the role may be combined with “mid-scale level functional support” for some options)	Entity or entities that have the relationships to motivate engagement and bridge the biome and local scales. Need not be one entity / person— could be jointly shared.	States/Tribes. Project delivery coordinated through state-led programs such as Oregon SageCon, WY Sage-grouse Implementation Team, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative and similar new or derivative programs in other states.	“JV-like”, organized at ecoregional level. Establishes a Coordinating Committee to: 1) establish objectives that step down from and support biome-wide objectives; 2) rank project proposals for funding consideration; 3) develop and implement communications	“JV-like” organized at ecoregional level and staffed by Federal employees to establish a Coordinating Committee to: 1) establish objectives that step down from and support biome-wide objectives; 2) rank project



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			<p>plan; Generally same categories of representation as above.</p> <p>Stay connected with other Mid-level “JV’s” (either through Biome direction or through mid-level horizontal coordination, Stay connected with local scale through NGO and agency contacts at that level.</p> <p>Project delivery coordinated through state-led programs such as SageCon, WY, WY Sagegrouse Implementation Team, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative and similar new or derivative programs in other states.</p>	<p>proposals for funding consideration; 3) develop and implement communications plan; Generally same categories of representation as above.</p> <p>Stay connected with other Mid-level (either through Biome direction or through mid-level initiative.</p>
<p>Mid-Scale Level Functional Support</p>	<p>Objective entity/third party that would ensure functional meeting organization, facilitation, and work getting done on behalf of partnership members between meetings; facilitate the “governance” and funding side (create the “safe space” for collaboration for all).</p> <p>“Staff Role”—two or three people...know where</p>	<p>Presumably, state entities (Governor’s Office or DOW) already have staff responsible for conservation delivery with local entities, would be a need to add a responsibility to existing staff or a new staff person within each state and participating tribe to coordinate mid-level activities with biome scale.</p>	<p>Could be new employees of new NGO, additional employees of members of NGO collaborative (TNC, Audubon, Sierra Club, etc.), or duties assigned to existing employees of these groups.</p>	<p>USDI and/or USDA employees who staff offices at ecoregional levels (Great Basin, Pacific Northwest, Wyoming Basin, Colorado Plateau, etc.). Could be co-located with JVs (IWJV, Prairie Pothole, Northern Great Plains) or Federal Research Stations.</p>



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	conservation actions are happening, ensure reporting is being uploaded into a shareable database, QA/QC upload of data, facilitate/coordinate local collective action)			
Authority	Level of authority the partnership body has with respect to funding or other decisions, etc.	Prescriptive at the biome and mid-scale	Advisory for federal funding/priorities, but prescriptive for NGO-specific (unless provisions provided in statute...e.g., Congress specifies)	Prescriptive at the biome and mid-scale in that projects supported must support goals established at biome and ecoregional scales.
Interim/transition steps required	Steps that may need to be taken when initiating the new partnership (in addition to rows above identifying clarity needs around funding availability and how functional support will be provided)	Place / time for Governors to come together to set this up (could be at the request of a higher power / Sec. Of Interior; or on their own via WGA) Process and structure for governors to make appointments	Who has the standing to establish the new biome-scale NGO entity and compel participation? EOC, TNC, IWJV, WGA, WAFWA?? NGOs could move quickly with capacity building grant(s) and this model could be a transitional step ultimately replaced by one of the other models or it could persist.	Secretary or Congressional - level action to direct the creation of the entity. Clarity on convener (joint at the fed. level; with states / gov's)? FACA exempt or FACA-chartered?
Operating Principles	The intended "charge" or direction for partnership body members (i.e., the north-star people would be expected to work for and represent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared objectives and values that transcend boundaries • Understanding of the challenges/opportunity of economic impacts, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared objectives and values that transcend boundaries likely achievable with mainstream NGOs • Understanding of the challenges/opportunity of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-down structure and government administration may impede development of shared objectives and values that transcend boundaries



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Watershed agreement” that makes it difficult to back out later. • Dependable, predictable funding 	<p>economic impacts may shift towards primary funder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Watershed agreement” may be difficult in this model and viability will likely depend on achieving progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the challenges/opportunity of economic impacts, • A “Watershed agreement” Is very achievable in this scenario given Federal funding leverage and ability to tie success to not warranted decision for sage-grouse.
Data Mechanisms. (Could be a role of mid-scale functional support)	To ensure accountability and for effectiveness monitoring to support adaptive management – QA/QC assurance check, contact for local level	Accountability aspect (did local groups do what they proposed to do with funding) could be assigned to local agency staff who are likely cooperating on proposals anyway. Effectiveness monitoring roles negotiated through partnership.	Reliance on local employees of affiliate NGOs to collect and forward data to Ecoregional mid-scale; need to make it a condition of project funding to obtain assistance from others.	In addition to reliance on local collaborators, USDI and USDA bureaus can assign data collection and reporting to their employees.
Authority/mechanism Required	This mechanism would be used to evaluate the viability of the model options	Governors and Tribal leaders have broad authorities to create something like this but would have to get agreement across most or all of 13 states through an entity such as WGA which could be difficult and/or time consuming. New funding at National or State level would require legislative approval.	Authority vested in NGOs now in that consistent with mission, easy to do, agencies, tribes, industry, etc., would likely participate initially but not likely to surrender any of their own authorities to the biome or mid-scale entities and “bleed-over” into other agency policies and programs likely to be minimal.	State and Federal governments have a rich tradition of supporting collaborative conservation, so authorities and mechanisms in place; constraint may be their regulatory authorities may in some respects get in the way.



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*****Essential Tribal Engagement Commitment:** To achieve successful, collaborative partnerships between Tribes, Federal, State, and local entities under any and all models, Sagebrush Conservation Partners commit to the following:

- **Acknowledgement** that Tribes are sovereign nations with rights accorded through the Trust Doctrine and its assurance of federal responsibility to Indians requiring the federal government to support tribal self-government and economic prosperity, duties that stem from the government's treaty guarantees to protect Indian tribes and respect their sovereignty. Treaty rights and other trust doctrine obligations must be respected and honored by sagebrush conservation partners and prioritized in partnership conservation actions.¹
- **Protection** of Tribal data, consistent with Tribal Historic Preservation Officer/Cultural Officer guidance and Tribal data sovereignty.
- **Support** for a cultural shift in how partners and indigenous people communicate and interact. Such a shift can only be realized through training and practice in collaborative, interpersonal interactions that emphasize humility and honesty within a diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEISJ) framework to create safe and inclusive spaces for indigenous people.
- **Compensation** that enables Tribal participation in partnership activities, builds Tribal capacity, provides for soliciting Tribal Elder advice, and acknowledges the unique contributions indigenous people bring to sagebrush conservation.

¹ First draft of legal language describing these relationships. Final language will be reviewed and refined by a Native American Tribal Law expert.



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Explanatory Narrative for Sagebrush Partnership Model Options

The Draft Writing Group attempted to construct alternative models that could accomplish biome-wide and mid-scale Sagebrush Partnership functions based on input or support from the Assessment Interviewees, Advisory Group Members, and workshops to date (see ... *insert links*). These models are a work in progress and intended to inform further / next step input from Advisory Group Members and broader interests rather than reflect a conclusion of that input. Although we show linkages from biome and mid-scale structures to the local level, we did not describe partnership structural options at the local (community or project level) scale because of a broad consensus for the partnership to support and facilitate conservation actions at that scale but maintain autonomy and independence at that level.

Option assumptions and guiding principles. The options developed for a partnership structure at biome-wide and mid-scales assume those responsible for, or deeply committed to sagebrush conservation would stand up these structures, namely state and federal agencies, NGOs, and Tribes. All these entities have strengths in collaborative conservation, and we view all these models as potentially viable approaches to improving coordination and enhancing effectiveness. The models are presented as independent alternatives but any of these biome-wide alternatives could be paired with any of the mid-scale options and/or potentially integrated / combined across one another into more hybridized concepts.

All the models assume substantial additional funding for sagebrush conservation in the future. A significant function of this partnership and these structures is to distribute those funds from the biome-level through the mid-scale to local communities and projects in a manner that maximizes probability of achieving mid-scale and biome-wide scale conservation objectives. There is strong concurrence among all participants that additional funding (and related partnership coordination) is not only necessary to conserve sagebrush so that we can continue to derive ecosystem services from it (and keep sagebrush obligates like greater sage-grouse and pygmy rabbits off the Endangered Species List) but also that such funding (and related distribution by the Partnership) is also a strong and needed incentive for participating in the partnership. Historically for large-scale conservation efforts, this funding has been Federal and Congressionally appropriated from a variety of sources. It is anticipated that all partners including Industry, NGOs, and state and local governments will continue to contribute significant funding.

These Partnership models are designed to enhance and improve effectiveness of voluntary, collaborative conservation efforts and are not intended to substitute for regulatory aspects of government agencies such as issuance of grazing permits, oil and gas or renewable energy development permitting by state, federal, Tribal, or local governments, etc. However, there is a hope, and perhaps an expectation that improved understanding of human and wildlife needs from the sagebrush system and the threats to that system, along with common objectives for conservation that some of these positive conservation aspects will “spill-over” and indirectly impact how agencies at all levels approach threats to sagebrush.

To the extent possible and practical, we sought to use existing conservation structures rather than create new ones.



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Option 1: Governor-led

In this model western state Governors and Tribal leaders convene the biome-wide coordinating committee and Governors and Tribal leaders from each state would establish a Sagebrush Conservation Coordinating Committee as well as State/Tribal Implementation Teams that function at the mid-scale. Representation on these groups would be diverse, broadly representing stakeholders and those in a position to address threats. Presumably, in states that already have programs in place for sage-grouse or watershed conservation (Oregon SageCon, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, Wyoming Sage-Grouse Implementation Team, etc.), these programs, with slight modifications to increase diversity of representation and focus (sagebrush vs. sage-grouse for instance) could serve as the mid-scale Coordinating and/or implementation team. In this model, Governors and Tribal leaders, with Federal representation and support, would oversee sagebrush conservation objective setting, planning, implementation, including monitoring and adaptive management, at the biome and State/Tribe level. Decisions about how best to allocate Congressionally appropriated funding would be made by the Sagebrush Conservation Coordinating Committee consistent with objectives and plans they develop, and distributed (and matched to some degree) through States and Tribes.

Option 2: NGO-led

Conservation NGOs would convene the biome-wide Sagebrush Conservation Coordinating Committee and provide staffing at the biome level. It is unlikely any single existing NGO will take this on alone, given the scope, scale and complexity of the conservation needs and the potential for this to compete for, rather than complement existing funding, but a new non-profit NGO formed specifically for sagebrush conservation could be formed. Representation on this Coordinating Committee would be broad as well, and this group would develop biome-wide conservation goals and priorities, develop and administer a monitoring and adaptive management construct, and make decisions about distributing funding to local scales based on rankings and priorities established at the mid-scale. A Congressional Appropriation directly to this group is possible, as are obtaining other funds through grants, charitable contributions and member contributions, mitigation banking, etc.

This model has a split mid-scale, a regional or ecoregional group (several states, constructed around ecological or sociological aspects of sagebrush conservation, or both) to develop regional objectives and priorities that step down from the biome-wide objectives and priorities and to evaluate and rank proposals submitted from local scales against those objectives and priorities. The other mid-scale structural component is a State/Tribal implementation group that would be responsible for administering conservation grants to local entities. Again, in states that already have programs in place for sage-grouse or watershed conservation (Oregon SageCon, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, Wyoming Sage-Grouse Implementation Team, etc.), these programs, with slight modifications to increase diversity of representation and focus (sagebrush vs. sage-grouse for instance) could serve as the mid-scale implementation team.



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Option 3: Federal Government led

This option is probably the most traditional, and in many respects resembles the Structure used to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and administer funding under the North American Wetland Conservation Act. It envisions a Federal entity developing and maintaining a Biome-wide Steering Committee with diverse representation. This Steering Committee would set policy, including biome-wide goals for sagebrush conservation, and identifying priority areas for conservation. This group would approve distribution of federal funds to local projects based on rankings established at the mid-scale. Several options make sense for which Federal entity coordinates the biome-wide partnership effort including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

This model also has a split mid-scale, a regional or ecoregional group (several states, constructed around ecological or sociological aspects of sagebrush conservation, or both) to develop regional objectives and priorities that step down from the biome-wide objectives and priorities and to evaluate and rank proposals submitted from local scales against those objectives and priorities. The other mid-scale structural component is a State/Tribal implementation group that would be responsible for administering conservation grants to local entities. Again, in states that already have programs in place for sage-grouse or watershed conservation (Oregon SageCon, Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, Wyoming Sage-Grouse Implementation Team, etc.), these programs, with slight modifications to increase diversity of representation and focus (sagebrush vs. sage-grouse for instance) could serve as the mid-scale implementation team.