

Draft Criteria for Healthy Lands Initiative Proposals: Oregon-Idaho-Nevada Cooperative Shrub-Steppe Restoration Partnership

Criteria 1: Focus on sage-grouse inhabited landscapes.

A key consideration of the Oregon-Idaho-Nevada Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI) Cooperative Shrub-Steppe Restoration Partnership is to accelerate implementation of the three states' sage-grouse conservation plans. Consequently, the initial screening criterion for project proposals is that a project: (a) must occur within or near sagebrush communities or associated riparian areas that support greater sage-grouse; and (b) is expected to contribute toward the achievement of state-level or Local Working Group Plan objectives for sage-grouse.

Criteria 2: Protecting and enhancing existing sagebrush habitat followed by strategically restoring connectivity.

Important project considerations, not necessarily in order of priority, include:

a. Protection and maintenance of existing high quality sage-grouse habitats or enhancement of moderate quality habitats: These types of projects serve to protect or maintain existing high value habitats that support the seasonal needs of sage-grouse. In general, such areas will already be characterized by adequate sagebrush canopy cover and understory composition/cover for the site. Use of statewide "R" maps (NV, OR) or the Idaho Sage-grouse Habitat Planning Map as a coarse filter in identifying such areas is recommended. Example projects include, but are not limited to, wildfire fuel breaks, removal of encroaching juniper into sagebrush-steppe, riparian restoration and others, depending on local needs.

b. Restoration of connectivity: These projects involve strategically restoring connectivity within and between high and moderate value sage-grouse habitats. Examples include connecting intact areas or patches of sagebrush to create a broader sagebrush-dominated landscape mosaic, or restoring degraded interior portions of habitat patches.

Criteria 3: Achieve a landscape effect.

Projects that address multiple habitat issues or that augment on-going or previous habitat improvement projects to achieve a landscape effect will receive greater consideration. An example is multiple projects (juniper control, noxious weed control, and riparian area restoration) that address resource issues within a watershed or other landscape unit.

Criteria 4: Partnerships.

Building and maintaining partnerships is a cornerstone of HLI. Projects must have partners affiliated in order to be considered under HLI. Project proposals with greater partner contributions (funding or in-kind) will be given higher consideration. It is not a requirement that funds change hands. For example, if a private landowner is willing to treat noxious weeds on his private land adjacent to a HLI weed treatment on public lands, it can be considered a partnership project. The end result of this type of coordination is to increase the overall treatment effect on the landscape.

In general, projects that address the complete “package” of habitat improvement needs within a given area, such as riparian restoration, weed treatment and upland seeding completed in conjunction with a nearby juniper removal project will receive priority consideration. Projects that augment or improve upon situations resulting from previous treatments also fall in this category.

Criteria 5: Short-term, quantifiable objectives.

We expect further Washington Office direction on monitoring and reporting methodologies. In the meantime, proposals must contain a monitoring plan that evaluates treatment implementation and effectiveness in the short -term.

Monitoring of project implementation (i.e. did we do what we said we would?) and treatment(s) effectiveness (did we accomplish our resource objectives?) are essential for reporting and improving future project implementation. The following components are required to meet this criteria:

- 1) Quantifiable criteria to evaluate treatment(s) success. For example, “Reduce juniper canopy cover from 25% to 15% in 2007 in the Cedar treatment unit. Increase canopy cover of native grasses and forbs from 5% in 2007 to 15% in 2009 in the same area.
- 2) Pre- and post-treatment data collection and photos including a schedule for these activities.
- 3) Documentation of project completion to be reported in BPS Success Stories. Attach documentation of treatments implemented (including where to find GIS shape files of treatment perimeters) and photos of project (before, during, and results).