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Partnership to Enhance Cooperation between BLM and Soil and Water Conservation Districts

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Oregon State Office entered into [an agreement](#) to improve communication and coordination to manage, develop, and protect federal and private land and water resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner.

This agreement is a local example of the cooperative conservation strategy that is being discussed for sage grouse habitat conservation at a national level by the Western Governors' Association, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the BLM.

While the BLM manages 15.7 million acres of public land in Oregon, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) provide leadership, technical assistance, and cost share services for conservation of private lands in Oregon. In many cases the BLM and SWCDs work closely to manage adjacent federal and private lands. A Memorandum of Understanding signed on August 11th formalizes the working relationship between BLM and Oregon's SWCDs.

"I believe in the motto, 'when you're building something to last, you don't have to hurry.' The time and effort to build this agreement will have great benefit in the future," said Johnny Sundstrom, OACD President. "We are very satisfied with the results."

"This agreement will help SWCDs fulfill our historic functions by bringing together both public land managers and private landowners to benefit both while maintaining the strengths of each," said Sundstrom.

"SWCDs have always been the link between government programs for conservation on private working lands and the owners and managers of that landscape. Now, we are moving ahead to become partners in the relationship between federal lands and local citizens. Working together for the benefit of both natural resources and communities requires commitment and dedication, but what else has such great potential to enhance both?" he added.

"We are excited about the on-the-ground work this agreement brings forward," said Elaine M. Brong, BLM State Director, Oregon/Washington. "We look for this to enhance our existing working relationship and encourage innovative collaborative efforts between BLM and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts."

Among the areas prioritized for cooperative conservation efforts are lands managed for sage grouse habitat, drought recovery, coordinated wildfire rehabilitation, and management of noxious weeds. A second priority will be identification of areas for enhanced collaboration and capacity building.

One partnership that may be facilitated by the Memorandum of Understanding involves the Malheur SWCD and the BLM Vale District. Malheur County in eastern Oregon contains one of the largest areas of upland range vegetation that provides vitally important sage grouse habitat. The proposed partnership would focus on removing encroaching Western Juniper and restoring native grasses and shrubs. Results of the project should reduce catastrophic wildland fire potential, and improve wildlife habitat.

To facilitate coordination the BLM and SWCD will convene annual meetings to identify goals and priorities, identify liaisons and technical experts, initiate joint planning studies and demonstration projects, and conduct trainings and conferences. Additionally, the agencies will seek opportunities to apply of new field technologies.

OACD's purposes include providing leadership, information, and state representation to advance the interests of soil and water conservation districts for the conservation and wise use of Oregon's natural resources. OACD also informs and involves the public in activities enhancing soil and water conservation, flood prevention, land use planning, economic development, recreation uses, fish and wildlife habitat, and other benefits by collaborating with public and private partners through the 45 SWCDs. The main purposes of SWCDs are to identify local natural resource concerns and then provide technical assistance and access to financial resources to allow landowners to focus financial and technical resources on recommended conservation systems. More information on OACD and SWCDs is available at www.oacd.org.

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages more land--261 million surface acres--than any other federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1.9 billion, also administers 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing activities such as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural and other resources on the public lands.

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