

# RESTORING AMERICA'S SAGEBRUSH

## Rangeland Wildfire, Invasives, and Climate Change

Sagebrush rangelands once covered millions of acres in western North America.

### TODAY, THIS LANDSCAPE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO HALF ITS SIZE.

The invasion of annual grasses, rangeland wildfire, and the catalyst of climate change have created a feedback loop resulting in substantial habitat loss and degradation. Arid rangelands provide essential ecosystem services, biodiversity, and a vast array of natural and cultural resources. These working lands filter and store critical regional water and carbon resources that are increasingly valuable in the face of a changing climate.



EQUALLY IMPORTANT, THESE LANDS ARE WILDLIFE-RICH AND PROVIDE HABITAT FOR SOME 350 SPECIES. DEEP-ROOTED TIES TO THE LAND – INCLUDING NATIVE AMERICAN USE, RANCHING, AND PUBLIC LAND RECREATION – ALL RELY ON SUSTAINING HEALTHY SAGEBRUSH LANDSCAPES.

### THE CHALLENGE

- Cheatgrass, an invasive annual grass, fuels wildfire. **As little as 1% cheatgrass cover can double the risk of wildfire.** Meanwhile, medusahead and ventenata are two other invasive annual grasses marching across the West that have no forage value and also fuel rangeland wildfire.
- **Climate change represents an additional pressure** that hastens the frequency of disturbance to invasion and produces conditions more conducive to weeds.
- Most wildfire in the continental U.S. occurs on rangelands (56%). Within the Department of the Interior's jurisdiction, the number is even higher, where **73% of all acres burned are rangelands.**
- In 2020, western wildfires burned from June to December and smoke blanketed all 48 contiguous U.S. states, often at levels extremely hazardous to human health. In Washington state alone, **rangeland wildfires all but wiped out state-threatened populations** of pygmy rabbits and Greater Sage-grouse.
- Ninety percent of pinyon-juniper **woodland expansion has occurred at the expense of sagebrush** ecosystems.







# Your Help is Needed

## HELP SCALE UP RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THESE RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES:

### 1) Rangeland wildfire and invasives

Increase the number of proactive invasive plant management actions across the West using a variety of tools such as herbicides, native seeding, and targeted grazing. Reduce the frequency, intensity, and impact of mega-wildfires with interagency coordination of pre-fire fuel management, invasive species management, and post-fire re-seeding and recovery. Focus capacity and resources using the latest climate science and modeling efforts.

### 2) Pinyon-juniper and other invading conifers

Increase targeted conifer removal to prevent the loss of sagebrush habitat and wildlife species. Utilize the latest science to craft management prescriptions based on ecological site potential and historical stand conditions to address the needs of multiple species.

### 3) Mesic rangeland resources

With increased drought and decreases in water availability in rangelands, support collaborative whole-watershed conservation strategies that prioritize protection and restoration of mesic resources. These wet habitats provide landscape resiliency for rural communities, tribal lands, wildlife, and agriculture. Additionally, mesic biomes provide greater potential for carbon sequestration.

## KEY RESOURCES:

- **Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Sagebrush Conservation Strategy**: This strategy will provide a roadmap for voluntary conservation for managing and conserving the sagebrush ecosystem that builds on measures already in place for Greater Sage-grouse.
- **NRCS Framework for Conservation Action for the Sagebrush Biome and Rangeland Analysis Platform**: This is an innovative online tool that quickly visualizes and analyzes vegetation data for the western U.S.



*"As ranchers, we make management decisions in hopes of maintaining wet meadows in sagebrush year after year because they are critical, not only for our livestock, but also for the wildlife that we steward."*

**- Kim Brackett,  
Brackett Ranches, Idaho &  
Vice President of the Idaho  
Cattle Association**





## WE NEED YOUR HELP TO:

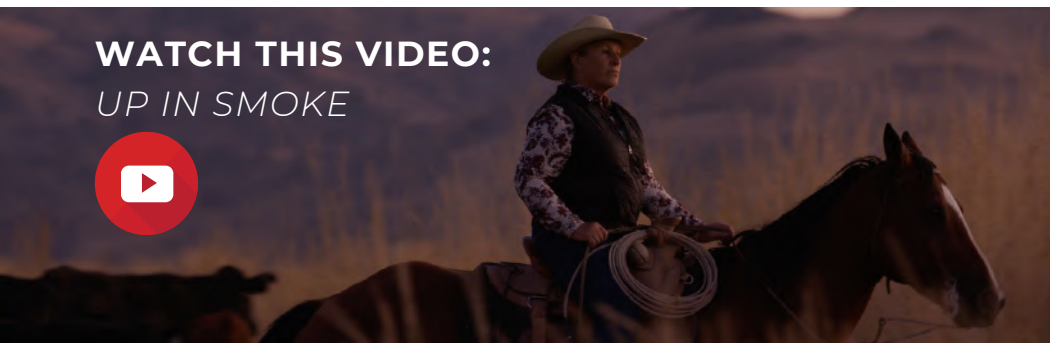
**1) Increase financial resources, capacity, and science-driven practices by federal and state agencies.**

- **Direct multi-year funding** from Congress and the Executive Branch to DOI, USDA, and states to collaboratively address all three priorities across jurisdictional boundaries with states, private, and tribal partners using shared stewardship and cooperative agreements.
- **Coalesce invasive species efforts** and partnerships around the [Western Weed Action Plan](#), Western Governors' Association [Cheatgrass Toolkit](#), and other [state-led efforts](#) to encourage shared purpose, leveraging of resources, and partnerships at multiple scales.
- **Increase community-based and tribal partnerships** through cooperative agreements with conservation entities that have a track record in landscape-scale conservation, such as rangeland fire protection associations, county weed management, conservation districts, cross-boundary collaboratives, and watershed groups.

**2) Keep working lands in operation and improve ecosystem resiliency.**

- **Restore and manage habitat across public and private lands** in ways that connect people to working lands and foster common ground solutions.
- **Strengthen relationships** with private landowners, tribal partners, and recreators through directing agency staff to collaborate at the local level and be inclusive of traditional knowledge.
- **Create resources** for voluntary, incentive-based conservation; innovative climate stewardship programs; and payment for ecosystem services.
- **Invest in science** that promotes rangeland productivity and ecosystem resiliency, and improves the potential for carbon sequestration.

**WATCH THIS VIDEO:**  
*UP IN SMOKE*



*"We cannot respond our way out of this challenge. Western wildfires are more challenging than ever and we have to focus on preventative efforts using the best climate-based science and an integrated approach to management."*

**- Wade Crowfoot,  
California's Secretary for  
Natural Resources**



# SAGEWEST

**THERE IS A GROWING SAGEBRUSH COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK CALLED SAGEWEST. JOIN THE COMMUNITY HERE: [PARTNERSINTHESAGE.COM/SAGEWEST](http://PARTNERSINTHESAGE.COM/SAGEWEST)**

## 3-BILLION BIRDS

Data shows that since 1970, the U.S. and Canada have lost nearly 3 billion birds, a massive reduction in abundance involving hundreds of species, from beloved backyard songbirds to long-distance migrants. Many sagebrush birds are among those declining. [Access this study here.](#) This trend warrants rapidly increasing the pace and scale of habitat conservation—and we believe that can be best accomplished through science-based, proactive, voluntary conservation implemented through diverse partnerships.



## GET IN TOUCH WITH US

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This document is a product of the Intermountain West Joint Venture Sagebrush Conservation Committee and Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee.

