



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service · Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife

NEWS RELEASE

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CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPED TO ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION OF COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN WALLOWA COUNTY, OREGON

Columbian sharp-tailed grouse in Wallowa County, Oregon, will benefit from conservation measures under a recent agreement signed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The agencies have developed a Candidate Conservation Agreement to help increase the grouse population by encouraging interested private landowners to implement sharp-tailed grouse conservation measures on their land.

Sharp-tailed grouse are chicken-like gamebirds native to the prairies and grasslands of the western U.S. The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse is the smallest of the seven subspecies of sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed grouse were once widespread in Oregon, but were extirpated from the state by the 1960s. Excessive hunting in the mid-to-late 19th century contributed to the early extirpation of local populations. Extensive habitat loss from conversion to agriculture of the grouse's preferred grassland and riparian habitat, along with habitat degradation caused by heavy livestock grazing was a primary cause of population declines. Columbian sharp-tailed grouse populations have been extirpated from California, and severely reduced in Washington, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado.

In 1991, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife initiated a Columbian sharp-tailed grouse reintroduction program, which has resulted in the establishment of a small grouse population on private land in Wallowa County. Long-term establishment of a viable self-sustaining Columbian sharp-tailed grouse population is dependent on cooperation from private landowners who own most of the suitable habitat. The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement is intended to provide a cooperative program among the federal and state agencies and private landowners that encourages all parties to work together to reestablish this native gamebird in Oregon.

Under the agreement, participating private landowners would voluntarily undertake management activities to enhance, restore or maintain habitat benefitting sharp-tailed grouse on their land. These management activities could include: enrollment in the CRP program, enhancement or protection of habitat along streams, management of livestock grazing to provide adequate cover in grasslands, or other measures identified by ODFW. Candidate Conservation Agreements encourage private and other non-Federal property owners to voluntarily

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implement conservation efforts for at-risk species in exchange for regulatory assurances from the Service that they will not be subjected to increased property use restriction should the species eventually be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Financial incentives are also available under the agreement for interested landowners willing to participate in the program.

“The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse Candidate Conservation Agreement is an excellent example of creative partnerships among federal and state agencies and landowners to save rare wildlife species. We are extremely pleased to have entered into this agreement with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and private landowners, and we look forward to the positive benefits to the species while minimizing disruption of landowner’s agricultural activities. This agreement could be used as a model for similar agreements for other species in the Pacific Region,” said Bob Ruesink, Snake River Basin Office Supervisor.

“This is a ‘win-win’ situation benefitting all involved parties,” said Eric Rickerson, ODFW Upland Game Bird Program Manager. “With this agreement we will be able to continue our reintroduction program while providing incentives to cooperating landowners. Without this agreement, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse would face an uncertain future in Oregon.”

Interested land owners should contact *Vic Coggins*, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 65495 Alder Slope Rd., Enterprise, Oregon 97828, (541) 426-3279. For further information about this or other Candidate Conservation Agreements, please contact *Dennis Mackey* at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, (208) 378-5267. This news release, a copy of the Agreement and information about Conservation Planning is available on the Snake River Basin Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/r1srbo>.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.