

## Sagebrush Steppe Habitat

Lake County's unique sage brush steppe habitat is important to the Greater sage grouse. Priority actions are established within the State's Oregon Sage Grouse Action Plan to improve habitat and population objectives for this species. Landscape-scale sage-grouse conservation is critically important in Oregon as the habitat present here, along with that in southwest Idaho and northeast Nevada, has been identified by Fish and Wildlife Service as one of two sage-grouse 'strongholds' in the U.S. These sage-grouse strongholds are distinguished primarily as those areas that contain the highest densities of birds, are the most resistant and resilient to invasive species and altered fire regimes, and are the least vulnerable to impacts associated with the onset of climate change.

Sage-steppe habitat occurs throughout eastern Oregon and in parts of Central Oregon. Several ecoregions identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy (i.e., Northern Basin and Range, Blue Mountains, Columbia Plateau and East Cascades) contain this habitat type.

These habitats are both extensive and diverse. In general, sagebrush habitats occur on dry flats and plains, rolling hills, rocky hill slopes, saddles and ridges where precipitation is low. Sagebrush-steppe is dominated by grasses and forbs (more than 25 percent of the area) with an open shrub layer. In sagebrush steppe, natural fire regimes historically maintained a patchy distribution of shrubs and predominance of grasses. Connectivity corridors of similar habitats between these areas are important to connect otherwise fragmented sage-steppe habitat.

Sagebrush/sage-steppe habitat is an imperiled habitat that supports a range of species. These areas are associated with an economically and socially important ranching and agricultural industry in communities throughout a large portion of the state. The state of Oregon is developing an "Oregon Sage Grouse Action Plan" to outline the actions necessary to conserve sage-grouse in Oregon in an effort to proactively avoid ESA- listing of the species. The plan has broad support by state and federal agencies, the ranching industry and conservationists.

