

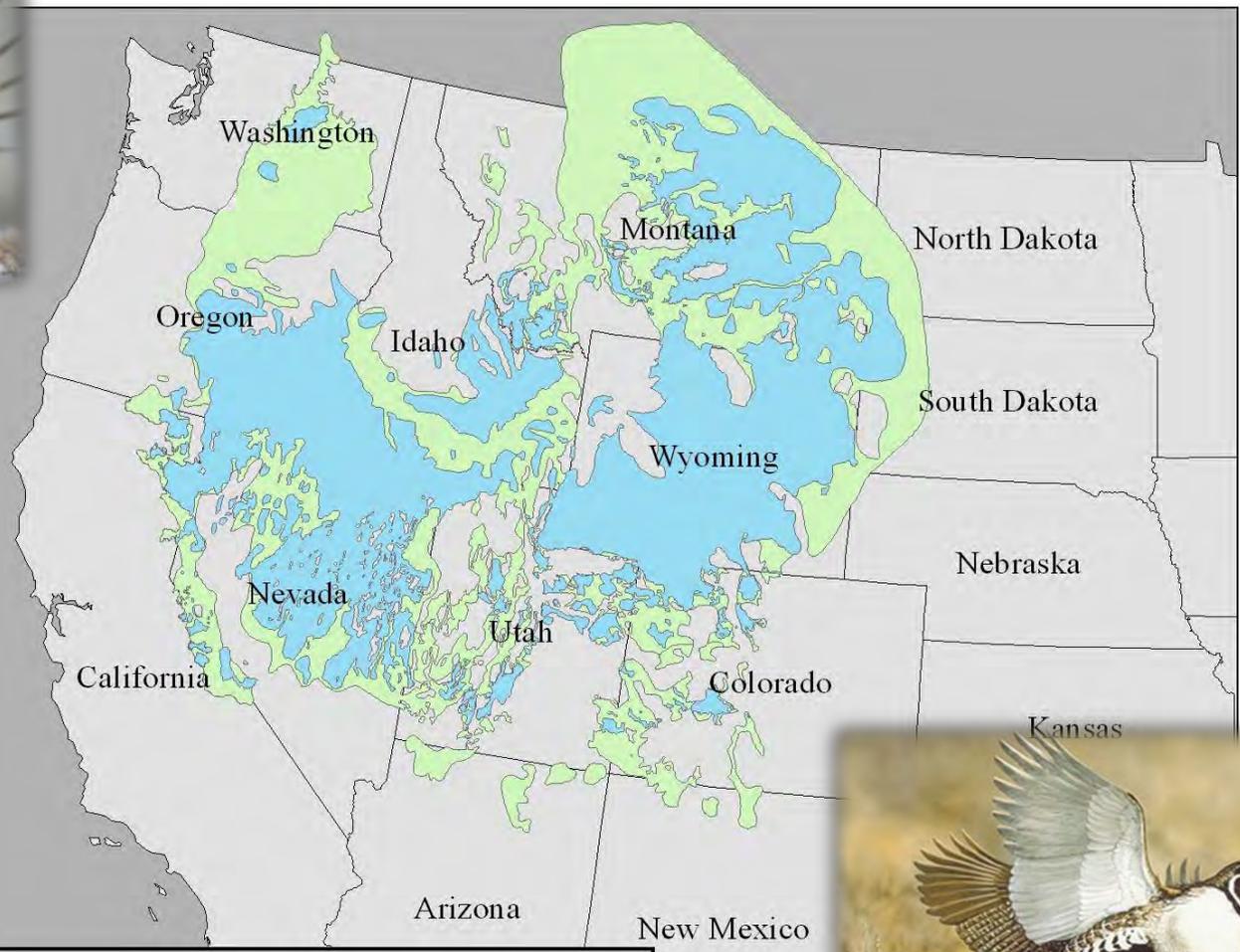
Developing an Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy

October 29, 2015



Agenda

- Background on Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy
- Rangeland Fire and Sage-Grouse Viability
- The Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy (S.O. 3336)



Current Greater Sage-Grouse Distribution

Historical Greater Sage-Grouse Distribution



Sage grouse depend on Sagebrush

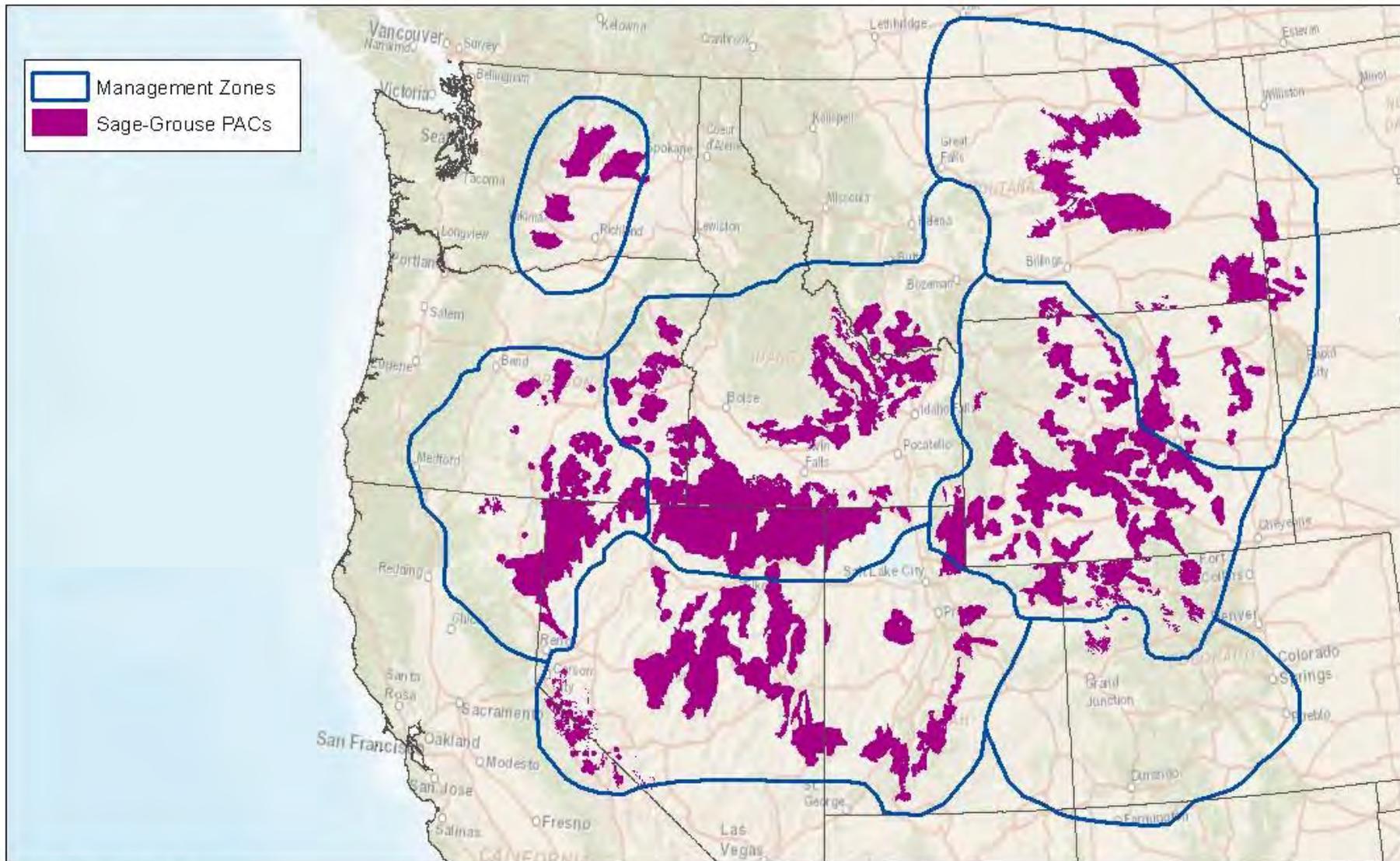
- Sagebrush is the most widespread vegetation in the intermountain lowlands of the western United States.
- Sagebrush is long-lived, with plants of some species surviving at least 150 years.
- Healthy sagebrush provides shelter and forage for a host of species from songbirds, pygmy rabbits, sagebrush lizards to big game animals like mule deer, elk and pronghorn.
- Sagebrush is the iconic landscape of the western rangelands.

Sagebrush is Under Threat

- Sagebrush is one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America due to continued degradation and lack of protection.
- Sagebrush has resistance to environmental extremes, but once killed it takes decades to centuries reestablish.
- Threats to sagebrush (and sage grouse) include:
 - **disturbance** caused by development in the eastern half of its range,
 - **rangeland fire fueled by invasive plant species** like juniper and cheatgrass in the western half of its range.
- Due to low resistance to fire and long recovery times, the sagebrush ecosystem is susceptible to more frequent fires caused by fire-loving weeds like cheatgrass.

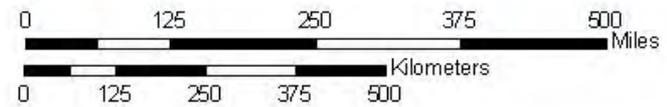


COT - Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs)



Management Zones
 Sage-Grouse PACs

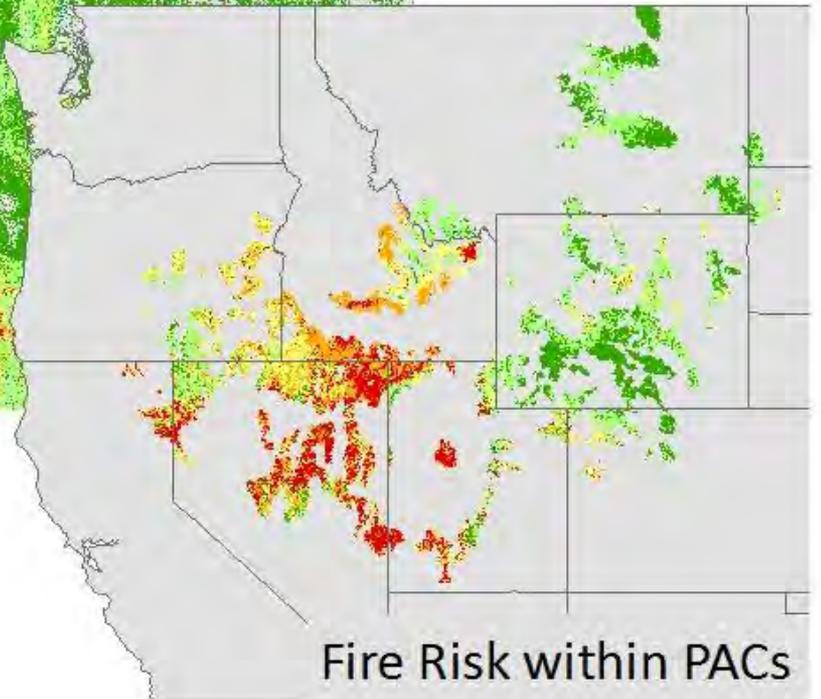
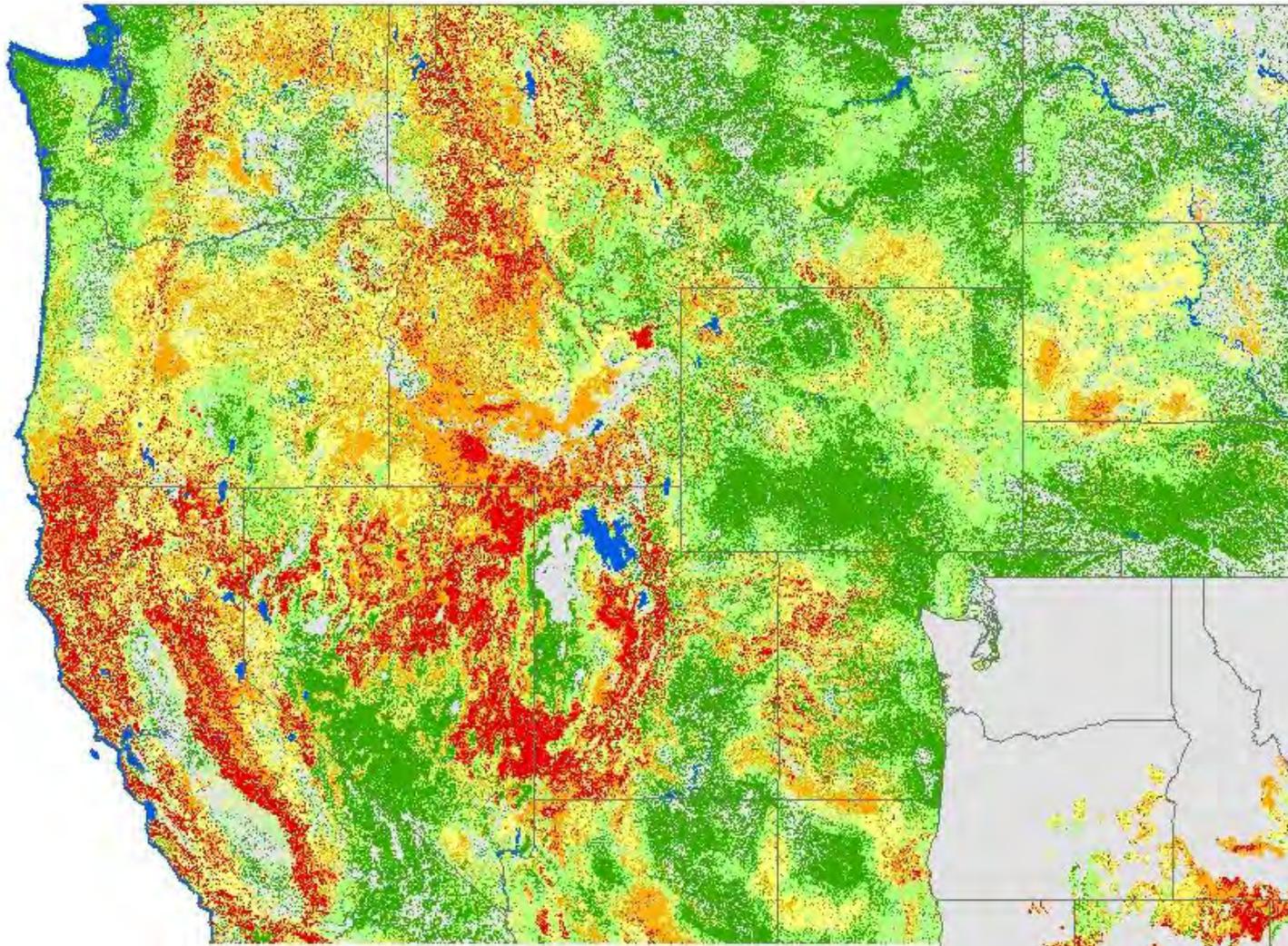
Created By: US FWS, Wyoming ES
 Map Date: 3/6/2013
 Source: CAGG | COPW | IDFG | MTFWP |
 NDGF | NDOW | ORDFW | UTDWR |
 WDFW | WYGF | BLM | WAFWA | FWS



Three Elements of the Rangeland Conservation Strategy

- Strong Federal Plans (50% of the remaining range)
- Strong State Plans
- Effective Strategy to Reduce the Risk of Fire to Greater Sage-Grouse





Fire Risk

Fire Risk within PACs

Rangeland Fire



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

ORDER NO. 3336

Subject: Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management and Restoration

Sec. 1 Purpose. This Order sets forth enhanced policies and strategies for preventing and suppressing rangeland fire and for restoring sagebrush landscapes impacted by fire across the West. These actions are essential for conserving habitat for the greater sage-grouse as well as other wildlife species and economic activity, such as ranching and recreation, associated with the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in the Great Basin region. This effort will build upon the experience and success of addressing rangeland fire, and broader wildland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efforts to date, including the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and ensure improved coordination with local, state, tribal, and regional efforts to address the threat of rangeland fire at a landscape-level.

Sec. 2 Background. The Department of the Interior is entrusted with overseeing the management of Federal lands for the benefit of current and future generations as well as the protection and recovery of imperiled species of flora and fauna and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Rangeland fires in the Great Basin of the Western United States have increased in size and intensity in recent years. The accelerated invasion of non-native annual grasses, in particular cheatgrass and medusahead rye, and the spread of pinyon-juniper across the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, along with drought and the effects of climate change, have created conditions that have led to the increased threat of rangeland fires to the sagebrush landscape and the more than 350 species of plants and animals, such as mule deer and pronghorn antelope, that rely on this critically important ecosystem. As a result, the increasing frequency and intensity of rangeland fire also poses a significant threat to ranchers, livestock managers, sportsmen, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts



Sec. 1 Purpose

- Enhanced policies and strategies for preventing and suppressing rangeland fire and for restoring sagebrush landscapes impacted by fire across the West.
- Actions essential for conserving habitat for the greater sage-grouse as well as other wildlife species and economic activity, such as ranching and recreation, associated with the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in the Great Basin region.
- Build upon the experience and success of addressing rangeland fire, and broader wildland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efforts to date
- Ensure improved coordination with local, state, tribal, and regional efforts to address the threat of rangeland fire at a landscape-level.

To accomplish protection, conservation, and restoration of greater sage-grouse habitat

- Work cooperatively and collaboratively with other Federal agencies, states, tribes, local stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations
- Utilize risk-based, landscape-scale approaches
- Address the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive, non-native species.
- Commit wildland fire management resources and assets to prepare for and respond to rangeland fires.
- Utilize technologies for identifying areas of high ecological and habitat value in sagebrush-steppe ecosystems.

To accomplish protection, conservation, and restoration of greater sage-grouse habitat

(continued)

- Improve the identification and protection of resistant and resilient sagebrush-steppe landscapes
- To the extent practicable, utilize locally-adapted seeds and native plant materials
- Expedite processes, streamline procedures, and promote innovations that can improve overall rangeland fire prevention, suppression and restoration
- Enhanced use of veteran fire crews and youth conservation teams, and efforts to further public-private partnerships
- Establish protocols for monitoring the effectiveness of fuels management, post-fire, and long-term restoration treatments

Sec. 4 Policy

Protecting, conserving, and restoring the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and, in particular, greater sage-grouse habitat, while maintaining safe and efficient operations, is a critical fire management priority for the Department. Allocation of fire management resources and assets before, during, and after wildland fire incidents will reflect this priority, as will investments related to restoration activities.

Implementation Plan

1. Develop and implement plans for implementing the Fire and Invasives Assessment Tool evaluation areas in the GB
2. Provide clear direction on the prioritization and allocation of fire management resources and assets
3. Expand the focus on fuels reduction opportunities
4. Fully integrate the emerging science of ecological resilience into design of habitat management, fuels management, and restoration projects
5. Review and update emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation policies and programs to integrate with long-term restoration activities

Implementation Plan

(continued)

1. Commit to multi-year investments for the restoration of sagebrush-steppe ecosystems
2. Implement large-scale experimental activities to remove cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses through various tools
3. Commit to multi-year investments in science and research
4. Develop a comprehensive strategy for acquisition, storage, and distribution of seeds and other plant materials

Schedule for SO Implementation

- **February 1**
 - a detailed plan for implementing this Order that includes a process for tribal consultation
- **March 1**
 - an initial report on actions that will be implemented prior to the 2015 Western fire season
- **May 19**
 - final report to the Secretary on activities that will be implemented prior to the 2016 Western fire season and longer term actions

SO 3336 Implementation - 2015 Season

- The 2015 Fire Season
 - Strengthen planning and preparedness
 - ✓ Increase capabilities of rural/volunteer departments; utilize veteran crews
 - ✓ Ensure fire management organizations are prepared, functional
 - ✓ Increase initial attack and extended attack capability
 - Provide national direction & expectations
 - ✓ Direction to Leaders Memo from Secretaries
 - ✓ Meetings with national/regional fire leadership
 - ✓ Meetings with partners (FS, states, tribes)
 - ✓ Communication with field by each bureau
 - Communication plan

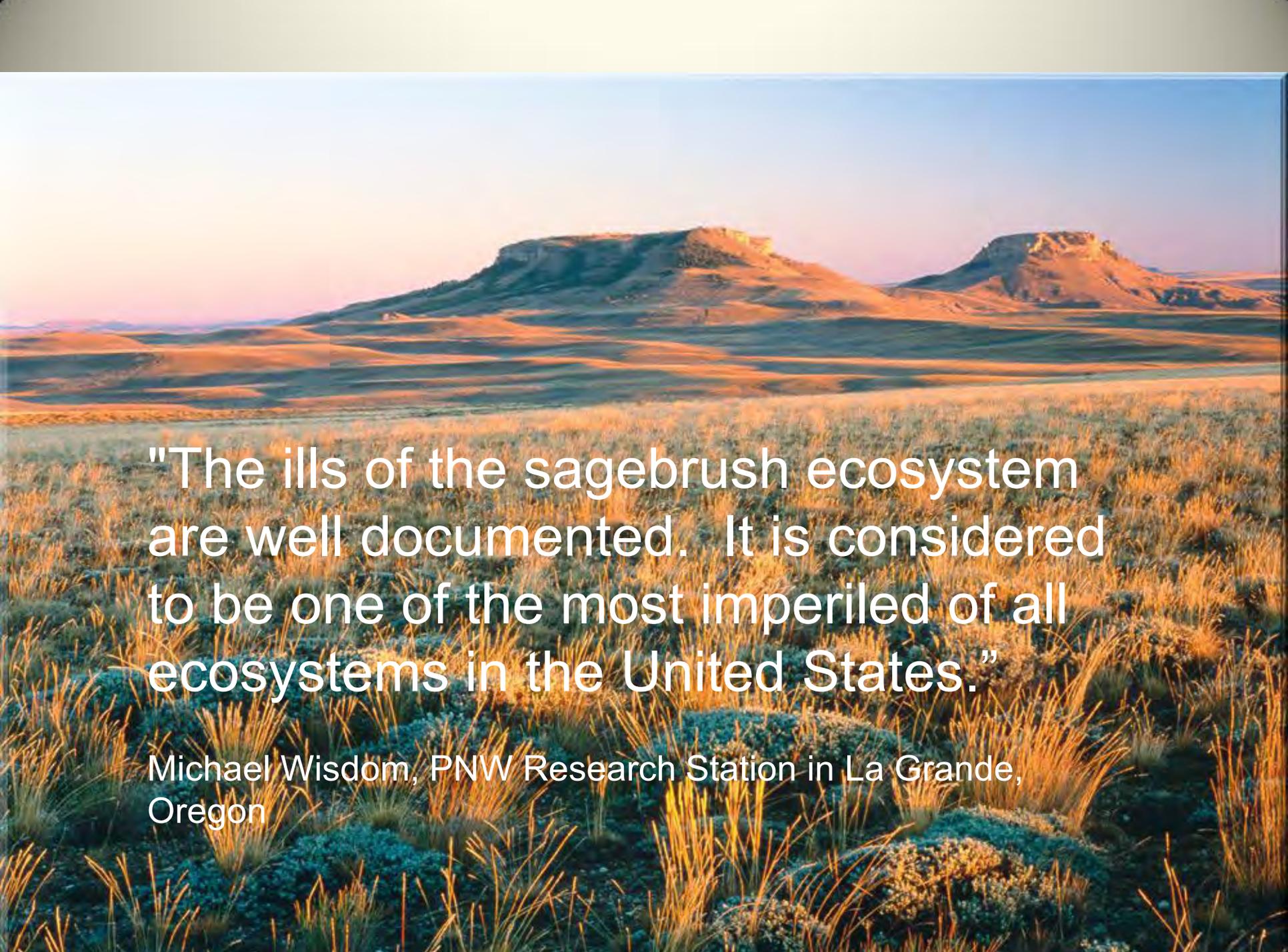
Strengthening Capabilities

- Allocating Resources to Reflect Priority
 - \$4 million in additional base funding moved to the field to **bolster fire programs for the long-term**
 - Approximately \$7.7 million to the field to **hire additional seasonal firefighters**, acquire line-building and support equipment (dozers, water tenders, etc.)
 - **Additional aircraft**, including an air attack on exclusive-use contract in Twin Falls, ID; one call-when-needed (CWN) type 3 helicopter in Elko, NV/ and two Type 2 helicopters on CWN contracts serve to strengthen response in key habitat areas
 - \$500,000 to **train rural fire departments and Rangeland Fire Protection Associations** in important sagebrush-steppe and sage-grouse habitat areas

Plan Elements: Rangeland Fire

Reduce threat of rangeland fire to sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat –

- **Interagency, landscape-scale assessments** to prioritize at-risk habitat and identify priorities for wildland fire fuels management, preparedness, suppression and restoration based on the quality of habitat at risk from loss to fire;
- **Annual treatment and fire management programs** to be developed in coordination with interagency partners and across jurisdictional and ownership boundaries based on priorities identified in the landscape-scale assessments;
- **Aggressive strategy to treat invasives and restore fire-impacted landscapes with native seed and plant stock;**
- **Development of a system of fuel breaks** to protect larger intact blocks of habitat; and
- **Fire response operational enhancements** regarding the location and positioning of crews, dispatch plans, and other operational elements to better protect and conserve crucial habitat.



"The ills of the sagebrush ecosystem are well documented. It is considered to be one of the most imperiled of all ecosystems in the United States."

Michael Wisdom, PNW Research Station in La Grande, Oregon

Questions/Discussion

