

# Oregon Conservation Strategy

## What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan. In Oregon, the action plan is called the Oregon Conservation Strategy. This proactive strategy examines the health of wildlife and prescribes actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect. Developed and led by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Conservation Strategy presents a vision and role for all Oregonians.

## Oregon snapshot

**Geography:** Oregon is a 96,000-square-mile melting pot of ecological regions, and geological formations. The state's natural features attract people from around the world and include Hells Canyon, Crater Lake, Steens Mountain, the John Day Fossil Beds the state's 300 miles of rugged coastline, and 38 champions from the National Registry of Trees.

**Landscape:** Oregon's varied geology, soil and climate support a unique collection of species and habitats which, in turn, help define the state's culture and economy. Oregon's prosperity depends on the use of land for agriculture, timber, industry, and ranching and outdoor recreation. These working landscapes, along with wilderness and other natural areas, provide the rich mix of habitat that supports Oregon's fish and wildlife.

**Wildlife:** There are significant existing challenges to maintaining Oregon's fish and wildlife habitats and emerging issues require new adaptations. The Oregon Conservation Strategy (Strategy) identifies

these challenges and the actions needed to address them. The Strategy builds upon collaborative partnerships, many of which exist in the state today as evidenced by the cooperative work to increase populations of sage grouse and salmon. Through



Greater sage-grouse/Gary Kramer

the work, of these partnerships not only will sage-grouse benefit, but so will many other sagebrush-associated species including the sagebrush lizard, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow, pygmy rabbit and many plants and invertebrates. Salmon, pivotal to Oregon's economy and identity, have also rallied people. Salmon populations are being restored through the innovative Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. Together, Oregonians have restored riparian vegetation, improved salmon habitat, addressed water quality issues and removed stream barriers.

## Oregon's planning approach

The Strategy provides a non-regulatory, statewide approach to species and habitat conservation. It synthesizes existing plans, scientific data and local knowledge into a broad vision and conceptual framework

*"One of Oregon's many unique treasures is our diverse and vibrant wildlife, and the new Oregon Conservation Strategy offers an opportunity for every citizen to contribute to the protection of Oregon's natural resource heritage for future generations."*

– Oregon Governor  
Ted Kulongoski



Coastal tailed frog/Brome McCreary

*“The Conservation Strategy is critical to preserving our state’s native fish and wildlife and their habitats. It was developed by a diverse coalition -- including scientists, conservation groups, landowners, extension services, fishers, hunters, and representatives from agriculture, forestry, and rangelands -- all working together to conserve the natural treasure that is Oregon.”*  
 – Marla Rae, Chair, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission

towards conserving Oregon’s natural heritage, and demonstrate to landowners and local conservation groups how local conservation actions fit into a broader regional or statewide perspective.

The Oregon Conservation Strategy contains information on species and habitats most in need of conservation action, the issues and problems affecting them, and key conservation actions, research and monitoring needed to address those issues. It also presents ideas for expanding and improving voluntary conservation tools, briefly discusses education, tourism and other ways to engage citizens in conservation, and describes many successful cooperative conservation projects. These “success stories” highlight projects that benefit priority species, habitats and issues discussed in the Strategy and demonstrate how people have come together to conserve fish and wildlife.

### Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Oregon

The statewide issues that impact the most species and habitats, as well as people, are conversion of land uses, invasive spe-

for long-term conservation of Oregon’s native fish, wildlife and habitats. The Strategy provides a long-term “blue print” for all Oregonians to help conserve our natural resources in a manner that will maintain or improve those resources for today and for future generations. It is intended to leverage limited conservation resources -- such as money, equipment and time -- in a more efficient and effective manner. Moreover, it aims to encourage voluntary conservation efforts, recognize the contributions that landowners and land managers are already making

Species group	Total number of species*	Species or populations of conservation concern**	Threatened/ endangered***
Invertebrates****	Unknown (thousands)	59	3
Fish*****	138	65	23
Amphibians	33	17	0
Reptiles	28	5	0
Birds*****	360	62	6
Mammals	121	18	2
Plants (vascular)	~ 4,500	60	60
Totals		286	94

\* Existing native species, not including marine species.  
 \*\* Each state is using its own criteria for this category. Oregon focuses on wildlife species with small or declining populations or other characteristics that may make them vulnerable (this includes legally recognized threatened/endangered species).  
 \*\*\* Either state or federally listed species that are discussed in the Conservation Strategy.  
 \*\*\*\* Includes mussels, snails, insects and other invertebrates.  
 \*\*\*\*\* Includes both species and populations (“species management units”).  
 \*\*\*\*\* Regularly occurring species; includes 253 species known to breed in Oregon, as well as migratory and wintering birds.

### Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Grasslands</b>  <b>Ownership: mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burrowing owl</li> <li>Long-billed curlew</li> <li>Common kingsnake</li> <li>Fender's blue butterfly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Altered fire regimes</li> <li>Invasive species</li> <li>Land use conversion (resulting in habitat loss and fragmentation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use mowing, grazing, hand-removal of encroaching shrubs and trees, and prescribed burning to restore lands that benefit from disturbance.</li> <li>Remove invasive plants and prevent new introductions. Re-seed with native plants after restoration.</li> <li>Implement existing land use regulations and landowner incentive programs to conserve, manage and restore grasslands.</li> </ul>
<b>Riparian</b>  <b>Ownership: mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willow flycatcher</li> <li>Yellow-breasted chat</li> <li>Columbian white-tailed deer</li> <li>Columbian Gorge Oregonian (snail)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of riparian habitat, floodplain function, habitat complexity and connectivity</li> <li>Water availability</li> <li>Invasive plants and animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain channel integrity and natural hydrology. Where feasible, restore historic hydrological conditions and reconnect streams to their floodplains. Maintain and restore riparian vegetation.</li> <li>Use cooperative voluntary approaches which allow for purchase of instream water rights, prioritize use for agricultural purposes providing the greatest economic benefit, and maintain streamflow and water storage</li> <li>Remove invasive plants and animals and prevent new introductions.</li> </ul>
<b>Sagebrush steppe and shrublands</b>  <b>Ownership: mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater sage-grouse</li> <li>Loggerhead shrike</li> <li>Sagebrush lizard</li> <li>Pygmy rabbit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Altered fire regimes and localized issues with prescribed fire</li> <li>Invasive plants and animals</li> <li>Damage to microbiotic soil crusts (not relevant to all areas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reintroduce natural fire regimes but avoid fire in low productivity sites with long recovery times or where invasive annual grasses dominate.</li> <li>Remove invasive plants and prevent new introductions. To the extent practical, re-seed with native plants after restoration.</li> <li>Continue to work with public land managers to ensure grazing is carefully managed. Conduct research and develop incentives to determine grazing regimes that are compatible with a variety of conservation goals.</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Oregon's wildlife

Oregon's Strategy Habitats are aspen woodlands, coastal dunes, estuaries, freshwater aquatic, grasslands, late successional conifer forest, oak woodlands, ponderosa pine, sagebrush and wetlands. The above chart shows some recommended actions for conserving three of these habitats.

cies, disruption of historic fire and flooding disturbance regimes, barriers to fish and wildlife movement, water quality and quantity, and institutional barriers to voluntary conservation.

The expanding footprint of human development and 150 years of landscape alteration have left much of Oregon's fish and wildlife at varying degrees of risk. For example, the melodious song of Oregon's state bird, the western meadowlark, is rarely heard in the Willamette Valley anymore. A grassland bird still common in eastern Oregon, the mead-

Riparian restoration/Bruce Campbell



*“I believe it is possible to maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations and healthy economies if we work together and find common ground. This plan gives us the blueprint.”*

*– Russ McKinley, Western Oregon Timber Procurement Manager, Boise Cascade*

*“The Strategy does a great job of identifying investments that will provide the greatest benefit to Oregon’s native ecosystems and the plants and animals they support; wise investments in conservation will provide ecosystem service, quality of life, and economic benefits to all Oregonians.”*

*– Catherine Macdonald Conservation Director, The Nature Conservancy in Oregon*

owlark is not going to be a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act any time soon. The state bird, however, is in trouble across a significant portion of its historic range in Oregon and needs some conservation attention. For the western meadowlark and dozens of other similarly vulnerable species including fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, invertebrates, and plants, the Conservation Strategy offers hope for a more secure future.

## **Working together for Oregon’s wildlife**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) involved as many people and entities as possible during development of the Strategy. While developing the draft, ODFW specialists talked to hundreds of

citizens, biologists, agency personnel and elected officials to gather information and perspectives. The Strategy’s development was guided by a broad-based, geographically-balanced Stakeholder Advisory Committee representing the state’s agriculture, forestry and rangeland management interests, as well as conservation, fishing and hunting, tourism, local governments, landowners, and groups and organizations that work with landowners on conservation and restoration efforts. The draft Strategy was distributed widely for public review and comment, as well as posted on ODFW’s website, with a link for providing comments on-line. Comments and edits were incorporated into the draft document sent to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in August 2005. The Commission endorsed the Strategy at their September 2005 meeting.



Buena Vista/Bruce Taylor

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