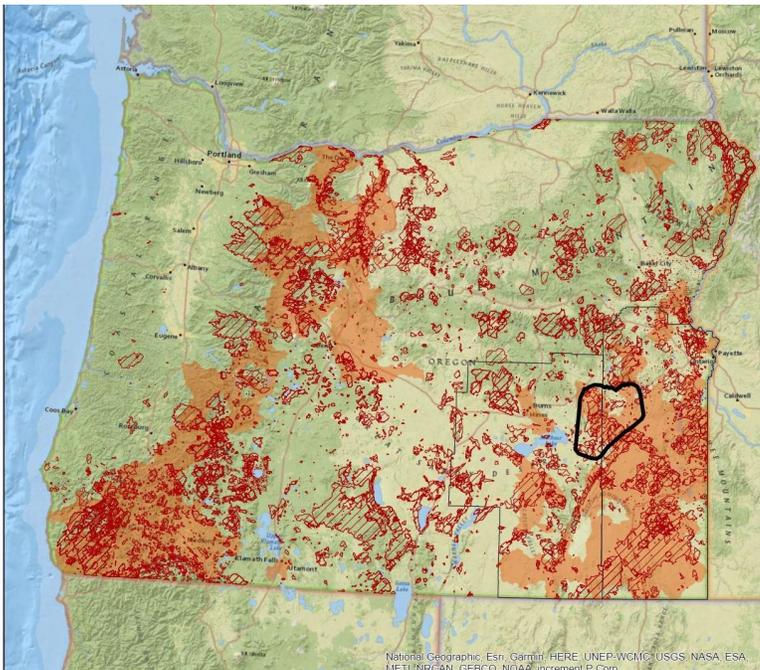




# Southeast Oregon Wildfire Resiliency Project Funding in Action Update

Funding being used to address fire suppression, prevention and restoration of the Southeast Oregon sagebrush sea landscape.

February 2023  
By Scott Barton



One year ago, February 2022, the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative received \$5 million from the Oregon Department of Forestry as part of Senate Bill 762 to address fire suppression, prevention and restoration of sagebrush sea landscape in Harney and Malheur Counties. Named the Southeast Oregon Wildfire Resiliency Project (SOWR Project), partners have worked together to implement actions on the ground to build a more wildfire resilient landscape.

Some recent great news, Oregon Department of Forestry has allocated an additional \$410,713 for Harney County Wildfire Collaborative partners to do additional wildfire resilience treatments.

Josh Hanson is HDP's Forest & Range Ecological Coordinator and is supporting the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative as they implement the SOWR Project. He says that "A big goal for the partners is

managing invasive annual grasses and treating them where we would have the highest return on investment due to funding timelines. This builds wildfire resiliency by decreasing fine fuels that would carry a fire quickly across a landscape." He adds that "By targeting these invasive annual grasses we can help increase firefighter's ability to extinguish a fire, increase perennial bunchgrass (which we want) by decreasing the competition of the annual grasses, and decrease the fire intensity if a fire does go through this landscape."

What the partners accomplished in 2022 within the parameters of the SOWR Project:

1. Aerial applications of pre-emergent herbicide applied to 70,908 acres of private, tribal, state and federal land to inhibit germination of invasive annual grasses.
2. Contracted juniper cutting and pile burning on 837 acres. This effort is essential for protecting Sage Grouse habitat and reducing fuel loads.
3. Seeding 300 acres with grasses and shrub seeds following an invasive grass herbicide application.
4. The collection and cleaning of native plant seeds from strategic sites in both Harney and Malheur Counties. The next step being collaborative work with landowners to grow the hand-collected seeds for future restoration efforts.

- Continual collaboration amongst Harney County Wildfire Collaborative partners on ongoing project progress, what comes next, issues and opportunities.



### **Funding in Action From A Sampling of Collaborative Partners Implementing the Work**

*Pictured: Aerial application of pre-emergent herbicide being applied August 2022. Photo by Brandon McMullen.*

- Tom Segal is a Wildlife Biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Through the SOWR Project, he's working hand-in-hand with a landowner in the Juntura area to treat thousands of acres of invasive annual grasses in what is prime sage grouse habitat. More specifically, they're targeting cheatgrass and medusahead rye with herbicide that

prevents them from germinating, while also allowing perennial grasses, forbes, and shrubs to grow without competition. Through these treatments the landscape will be more resistant to wildfire, habitat will improve for wildlife, and livestock will have increased forage in the future.

- Brandon Palmer is the Wildlife Program Manager with the Burns Paiute Tribe and much of the work he has done in conjunction with the SOWR Project is at the Malheur River Wildlife Mitigation Site, also called Jonesboro. The 6,385-acre piece of land is owned by the tribe and is home to one of the highest density mule deer winter ranges in Oregon. Elk also use the property in the winter. On this range they sprayed for annual grasses and will be re-seeding an area as well with a native seed mix. This past July, the Tribe also treated 500 acres of grasslands in the Crowley Priority Area for Conservation for invasive annual grasses. These efforts will help improve habitat for species like sage grouse, while also making the landscape more resistant to fire.
- Jason Kesling, the District Manager for the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District, oversaw juniper cutting over 800 acres of private land at the northern end of the Stinkingwater Range.
- Tyler Goss, Cooperative Weed Management Coordinator for the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District, coordinated with landowners to treat medusahead rye on private lands throughout Harney County and in 2022 oversaw the treatment of more than 15,000 acres of private lands.

### **Looking Forward**

Money received from Senate Bill 762 and allocated for the SOWR Project has to be used by June of 2023 so some specific plans for the next 5 months include:

- Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife will treat an additional 2,000 acres of invasive annual grasses near Riverside.
- Palmer shares: "we [Burns Paiute Tribe] plan to spread seed purchased with SOWR funds. We will aerially seed a mix of locally adapted perennial grasses, forbes, and Wyoming big sagebrush. Additionally, we are working with researchers from the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center on a study to determine the efficacy of these large-scale aerial treatments."
- The Harney Soil and Water Conservation District working with Burns-BLM will treat an additional roughly 1,600 acres with Juniper cutting and burning and will spray more than 1400 private acres of invasive weeds.

## Why is This Work So Important?

Southeast Oregon boasts some of the most remote country in the West. Each treatment implemented by partners within the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative are improving the wildfire resiliency of this fragile landscape.

*This article is provided by High Desert Partnership; a Harney County nonprofit convening and supporting six collaboratives including the Harney County Wildlife Collaborative.*

