



WASHINGTON

SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE: HELPING RANCHERS & WILDLIFE IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Financial and technical assistance is available for ranchers in limited areas of central and eastern Washington.

There are different options to protect sage grouse habitat and improve range conditions for both existing grazed ranchlands and expired CRP lands.

APPLICATION SUMMARY: THE 2013 SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE

is a continuous sign up, and applications may be submitted at any time. Applications will be evaluated periodically as funding becomes available.

APPLICATION EVALUATION PERIODS END: December 21, 2012

FIND OUT MORE AT:
www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov



SAGE GROUSE RECOVERY IN EASTERN WASHINGTON TOOK A GIANT STRIDE FORWARD IN 2012.

The Sage Grouse Initiative, launched by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2010, applies Farm Bill dollars strategically where the funding will make the greatest difference. The goal is to recover sage grouse through voluntary, incentive-based programs rather than a listing under the Endangered Species Act.

"What's good for ranching is good for grouse" is the guiding principle behind the Initiative. Sage grouse need vast, intact shrub-steppe with a mix of sagebrush and perennial bunchgrasses, and healthy wet meadows to flourish.

In 2012, ranchers enrolled 14,400 acres in grazing programs designed to improve range health for livestock and habitat for this species in jeopardy. The proximity of the lands to each other will provide the landscape-level conservation that sage grouse require.

"We're on the gain here for sage grouse," says rancher Kay D. Leander, who lives in Douglas County near Leahy Junction, about 30 miles west of Grand Coulee Dam.

Leander keeps his eye on the sage grouse that use his ranch, along with other wildlife. He's pleased that with Sage Grouse Initiative funding, he's able make improvements that he wouldn't be able to afford on his own. For instance, new fencing allows him to rest more pastures.

**"We always take good care of our grass," Leander says.
"You can't starve a profit out of a cow."**

Range and Wildlife Conservationist Kelli Bartholomew serves in a partnership position with NRCS and Pheasants Forever to apply Sage Grouse Initiative funds on the ground. She and fellow field staff have focused efforts on Leander's and neighboring ranches that are critical habitat located around leks (sage grouse breeding grounds).



Photo: Will Keller, NRCS

NRCS and landowners test a water system developed as part of an SGI enhancement project.



Photo: Jessica Gonzales, USFWS

A group of sage grouse gather in a wheat field in central Washington.



Photo: Marla Leander

Rancher Kay Leander and his son Joel repair a fence on their ranch.

“We’ve developed a program to work for producers and sage grouse,” says Bartholomew. “That’s the key. We listened to what they wanted first.”

In Washington, sage grouse inhabit only eight percent of their historic state range. Unlike other parts of the west, private lands harbor the best remaining habitat that has not been converted to cropland. Recovering sage grouse populations require improving and connecting these vital lands.

Landowners enrolled in the Sage Grouse Initiative are developing rotational grazing plans that alternate pastures over two growing seasons. The result will be higher residual cover left in the spring for nesting sage grouse and their chicks, and better range for cattle operations.

“It’s good for the whole community,” Leander says. He explains that jobs are few and hard to come by in their rural area. Every contract for fencing, drilling wells and adding pipeline is an economic boost to the close-knit community.

Living far from town where dark skies glisten with stars and the nearest neighbor is several miles away isn’t for everyone, he says. For Leander and his family it’s a way of life that is enriched by the wildlife around them.

“I like the deer. I even like the coyotes,” he says. “I figure any guy that can make it out here deserves to live.”

He leaves water running in pastures when cattle are gone, so grouse will have a place to drink. When driving his combine through the fields at night, Leander keeps a sharp look out for wildlife, especially as he nears the unplowed Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands.

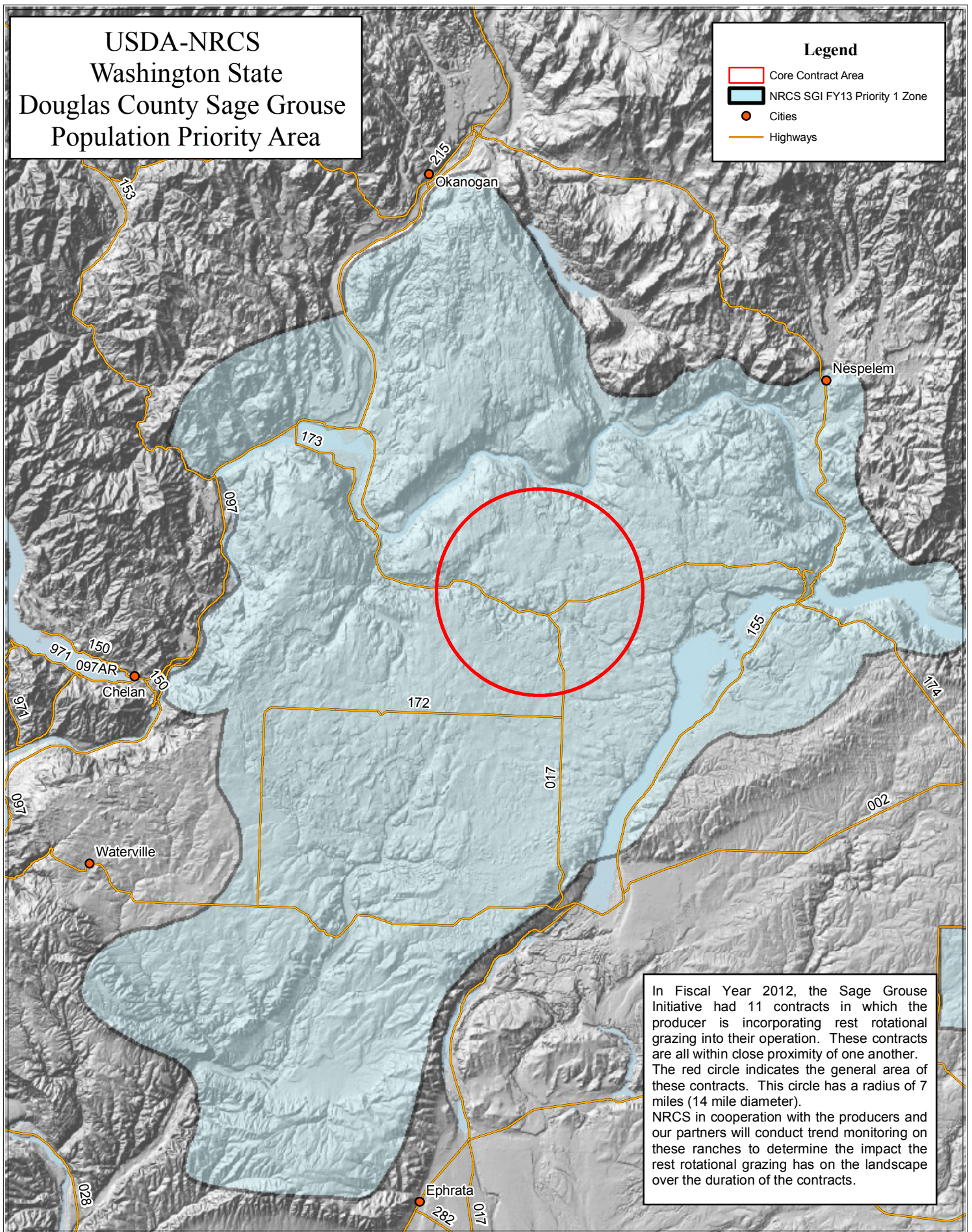
“The biggest bunch I ever saw was two years ago,” Leander says. “I saw 35 or 40 of them. I couldn’t believe it. If we can keep the sage grouse numbers going up, that’s good.”

For more on the Sage Grouse Initiative, go to:
www.sagegrouseinitiative.com

USDA-NRCS
Washington State
Douglas County Sage Grouse
Population Priority Area

Legend

- Core Contract Area
- NRCS SGI FY13 Priority 1 Zone
- Cities
- Highways



In Fiscal Year 2012, the Sage Grouse Initiative had 11 contracts in which the producer is incorporating rest rotational grazing into their operation. These contracts are all within close proximity of one another. The red circle indicates the general area of these contracts. This circle has a radius of 7 miles (14 mile diameter). NRCS in cooperation with the producers and our partners will conduct trend monitoring on these ranches to determine the impact the rest rotational grazing has on the landscape over the duration of the contracts.