FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 16, 2013

Contacts

Sage Grouse Initiative
Dr. David Naugle, Professor, University of Montana, and National Science Advisor, USDA-NRCS, Sage Grouse Initiative: david.naugle@umontana.edu, 406- 240-0113
Jeremy Maestas, National Technical Lead, USDA-NRCS, Sage Grouse Initiative: jeremy.maestas@or.usda.gov, 541-604-6171

The Nature Conservancy
Dr. Jeff Evans, Senior Landscape Ecologist, The Nature Conservancy: Jeffrey_evans@tnc.org, 970-672-6766
Dr. Sharon Baruch-Mordo, Spatial Scientist, The Nature Conservancy: sbaruch-mordo@tnc.org, 970-484-9598 x7102

Saving Sage Grouse from the Trees: New Study Shows Benefits of Targeted Tree Removal to Declining Birds

Proactive conservation that removes encroaching trees helps maintain sage grouse populations within their remaining strongholds, according to a study published today in the scientific journal, Biological Conservation. In the absence of fire, juniper and other conifer tree species have greatly expanded their range into native sagebrush habitats where they don't belong, reducing shrubs and grasses that grouse rely on for their survival.

On the heels of a 2010 Endangered Species Act "candidate" designation, partners in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) have accelerated removal of encroaching trees by ten-fold across western states like Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and California.

"Our key finding is that grouse populations are unable to make a living once encroaching trees occupy more than 4% of their habitat," said Dr. Sharon Baruch-Mordo, lead author and scientist with The Nature Conservancy. This new study validates SGI's strategy of targeting and removing trees early in the invasion process to prevent birds in jeopardy from being lost.

"Early tree removal is highly effective and less costly than a delay-and-repair approach that tries to turn a forest back into a sagebrush ecosystem again," said Dr. Dave Naugle, SGI's National Science Advisor at the University of Montana. Naugle goes on to say this new study gives confidence to partners involved in watershed scale tree removal that their investment is achieving the desired conservation outcome.

The study closes with an estimate of $8.75 million annually to eliminate the tree encroachment threat in Oregon within the decade, an investment well within the scope of conservation already achieved. "In 3 short years, we developed both the biological and economic game plans required to match scale of the solution to that of the problem," said Jeremy Maestas, SGI's Oregon-based National Technical Lead. Maestas adds that grouse do not recognize boundaries, so the next frontier in ratcheting up conservation is to seamlessly deliver tree removal across private and public land ownerships in the West.

To learn more about tree removal and hear from our SGI partnership, view the short video.

#

Research Article
Saving sage-grouse from the trees: A proactive solution to reducing a key threat to a candidate species. Sharon Baruch-Mordo, Jeffrey S. Evans, John P. Severson, David E. Naugle, Jeremy D. Maestas, Joseph M. Kiesecker, Michael J. Falkowski, Christian A. Hagen, Kerry P. Reese. Download here.