

Conifer Encroachment

Sage grouse breeding habitat is lost to invading junipers when trees exceed 4% canopy cover. Focused tree removal prevents conversion of sagebrush steppe to conifer woodlands and benefits sage grouse populations.

Benefits of conifer control

1. Maintaining native understory plants.
2. Reducing risk of large and severe wildfires.
3. Improving habitat for declining species.
4. Reducing soil erosion and conserving soil water.
5. Increasing ecosystem resilience to fire and resistance to cheatgrass.

Did you know that trees catch the snow?

Removing encroaching conifer stands from sagebrush ecosystems helps keep snow on the ground longer during the spring. This allows water to seep slowly into the ground to better sustain plants, streams, and wildlife during the West's hot, dry summer.



nrcs.usda.gov/wildlife
sagegrouseinitiative.com

The Sage Grouse Initiative is a partnership-based, science-driven effort that uses voluntary incentives to proactively conserve America's western rangelands, wildlife, and rural way of life. This initiative is part of Working Lands For Wildlife, which is led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

HEALTHY SAGEBRUSH COMMUNITIES

THE SAGE GROUSE IS AN UMBRELLA SPECIES

Studies have shown that conservation efforts for sage grouse also help 350 other species of plants, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals inhabiting the sagebrush sea, like mule deer and songbirds.



Raptors

Conifers provide perches for predators.

THREATS

Invasive Grasses

The spread of invasive annual grasses, like cheatgrass and medusahead, are linked to unwanted wildfires. Invasive grasses are highly flammable and dry out earlier than native plants, leading to more frequent, hotter fires. Once sagebrush habitat burns in a megafire, it's hard to restore, leaving noxious weeds that degrade rangelands and wildlife habitat.

These invasive grasses replace the sagebrush sea's diverse, native plants — like sagebrush, wildflowers, and bunchgrasses — with a monoculture of weeds. That's bad for birds and herds, which rely on nutritious, native perennial plants.

HEALTHY RANGE

Solution

Conservation on working western landscapes restores sagebrush communities where sage grouse and other wildlife share the same extensive home range, and helps ranchers pass on their legacy and rural way of life.