



# Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative

Background and Concept – September 2015

## The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

The Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act (FLAME) of 2009 directed the US Departments of Agriculture and Interior to develop a cohesive wildland fire management strategy to address the myriad of growing issues surrounding wildland fire (increasing losses to lives, communities, budgets and economies, habitat, forests/landscapes, and watersheds).

A collaborative process that included a [national scientific analysis](#), culminated in the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#). The vision of the Cohesive Strategy is *to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire.*

The Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is a strategic push to work collaboratively among all stakeholders and across all landscapes, using best science, to make meaningful progress towards the three goals:

**Restore and maintain resilient landscapes:** Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.

**Create fire-adapted communities:** Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.

**Safe & Effective wildland fire response:** All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient, risk-based wildfire management decisions.

The ultimate success of the Cohesive Strategy effort depends on how strategic direction and national priorities can be translated into the on-the-ground, local actions of agencies, organizations, governments, and individuals with meaningful, cumulative effects.

## **The Central Oregon Story**

In Central Oregon, fire and land managers, cities, counties, non-governmental organizations and private citizens have a long and rich history of identifying shared goals and cooperating to accomplish shared outcomes. Here, a culture of strategic alignment, collaborative engagement and programmatic alignment has existed for decades and continues to build. The challenges of an isolated, geographic location, limited budgets and diverse interests helped steer stakeholders to work together under the concept that groups that cooperate and coordinate efforts can achieve far more than one agency or organization alone. When the Cohesive Strategy was framed in the West, it was quickly recognized as an evolution of collaborative strategies and behaviors that already exist and are enjoyed in Central Oregon.

With this positive foundation in place, stakeholders in Central Oregon have witnessed much success through current collaborative efforts:

- Increased hazardous fuels and restoration treatments on public lands in the WUI through the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project;
- Establishment of a Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network Hub through Project Wildfire;
- BLM is working with NRCS on creating resilient landscapes across jurisdictional lines;
- Comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plans across Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook Counties;
- Integrated wildland fire response including mutual aid and cooperating agency agreements;
- Local agreements between federal land managers and private landowners to treat lands regardless of ownership;
- Consistent engagement and support by local elected officials, County Emergency Management and law enforcement;
- Central Oregon Joint Information System for emergency information;
- Agreement between Upper Deschutes Coalition and Deschutes National Forest for treatment both on private and public lands to create resilient landscapes and maintain fire-adapted communities;
- Natural Resources Conservation Service is working collaboratively with other federal and state agencies to create resilient landscapes on private, non-industrial forests near communities.

- Private land owners with critical sage-grouse habitat have completed Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) and are working with federal agencies to complete Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) to protect greater sage-grouse while maintaining viable economies and grazing operations.
- Project Wildfire through a collaborative steering committee, established by county ordinance, continues to facilitate and lead hazardous fuels treatments to create and maintain fire adapted communities, treating over 110,000 acres of private lands with the cooperation and participation of private landowners.

Even with all these successful efforts, the risk of loss to lives, our natural resources, economies, habitat, and communities is still extreme and there is much work before us. This begs the question: Can stakeholders in Central Oregon continue to use this successful history of coordination and collaboration to achieve greater restoration and reductions of risk on a landscape level, increase the community's understanding and acceptance of risk, and improve the safety and effectiveness of wildfire response, and successfully implement the Cohesive Strategy? The answer is YES.

### **Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative**

The Cohesive Strategy provides a solid framework for making meaningful progress towards three goals – Restoring Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities and Safe & Effective Wildfire Response. What is the method to achieve that progress? Collaboration... to manage vegetation and fuels; protect homes, communities, and other values at risk; manage human-caused ignitions; and safely, effectively, and efficiently responding to wildfire.

Stakeholders in Central Oregon now appreciate a solid platform from which to advance current collaborative philosophies and efforts and integrate them under one umbrella for increased success (the notion of “bigger, better, safer and faster”) across jurisdictions.

The collective ambition is to bring federal, state, tribal and local agency stakeholders together with interested non-governmental organizations and private landowners across five counties – Deschutes, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake and Crook – to embark on a collaborative journey to identify shared values and goals, and implement prioritized actions to achieve them. These will achieve meaningful progress towards resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities and a safe and effective wildfire response using the Cohesive Strategy as guidance to continue successful implementation.

More than just successfully implementing the Cohesive Strategy, this coordinated, collaborative multi-county project aims for recognition as a “regional learning laboratory” for others to either replicate and/or utilize valuable lessons learned to create similar successful environments throughout the western United States.

This level of integration, coordination and collaboration will require the following:

- Share and implement the purpose of our efforts:
  - To collaboratively implement the Cohesive Strategy through an “all hands – all lands” approach across five counties, and
  - Provide the “regional learning laboratory” for success for the Pacific Northwest and other areas in the west;
- Prioritized landscape treatments across jurisdictions;
- Increased, collective investments for these projects;
- Continue to identify and leverage resources among all stakeholders.

Stakeholder support to-date:

Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project	Miller Conservation Consulting
Project Wildfire	Crook County Fire
Sunriver Fire	Brooks Resources, West Bend Property Company, The Tree Farm
Deschutes Land Trust	La Pine Fire
Jefferson County Fire	Walker Ranger, Crescent Fire
Bureau of Land Management	Oregon Dept of Fish & Wildlife
Miller Lumber, The Tree Farm	OSU Extension
Crook County	Warm Springs
Black Butte Ranch Fire	Oregon Wild
Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation District	The Nature Conservancy/Fire Learning Network
Deschutes County Forestry	Crook Soil & Water Conservation District
Oregon Wild	Tennant Developments, The Tree Farm
Central Oregon Land Watch	Sisters Fire
Oregon Department of Forestry	DCSO/Emergency Management
NW Fire Science Consortium	Ochoco National Forest
Jefferson County	SROA
Deschutes County	Deschutes County SWCD
Klamath Soil & Water Conservation District	Cloverdale Fire
Deschutes National Forest	Natural Resources Conservations Service
Warm Springs Fire & Safety	Redmond Fire
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Klamath County	Bend Fire
Lake County	Interfor, Inc

**Next Steps:**

- Create a Steering Committee consisting of senior agency and local government leaders, private land stakeholders and non-governmental leaders.
- The Steering Committee, with the support and contributions of all stakeholders, will ensure strategic alignment, collaborative engagement and programmatic alignment as the Cohesive Strategy Initiative is implemented.
- The Steering Committee will develop a coordinated approach to the three goals of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Develop and implement a robust, inclusive communications strategy to strengthen internal and external support for the collaborative efforts of the Initiative.
- Strengthen capacity to collect, analyze, interpret and integrate all types of data and information, including recognized data gaps, to inform decision-making. (Relying on scientific data and analyses, on the part of all stakeholders provides the best opportunity to restore and maintain landscapes, protect communities from wildfire, and effectively respond to wildfires when they occur. Using science and data analysis to support implementation planning and decision-making must continue).
- Utilize performance measures and monitoring information to assess effectiveness and accountability.
- Develop capacity and support training and utilization of support tools to better inform decision-making and trade-off analyses at all levels of fire and land management.
- Document successes and determine common themes of successful projects. Maintain knowledge and information resources that are easily accessible to stakeholders.
- Create incentives for all stakeholders to participate and embrace the principles of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Continue to foster Cohesive Strategy behaviors to change behaviors and attitudes, and ultimately change cultures.
- Continue to identify and engage all stakeholders.
- Identify political education and leveraging opportunities.
- Identify all current investments/programs/achievement and their value to truly understand values to be protected and measures of achievement.
- Develop the concept of this Regional Learning Lab and how others might take advantage of the learning opportunities here.

## The path forward

Success in Central Oregon depends on the collective commitment by all stakeholders at all levels to take action toward meaningful reductions in risk in the short- and long-term. Looking ahead, this will require:

- **Prioritized investment and use of resources.** Reducing risk significantly will require that existing resources, including budgetary resources, are used more efficiently.
- **Acceptance of increased short-term risk.** Significantly reducing fuels across broad landscapes will require expanded use of wildland fire to achieve management objectives. Using fire as a tool carries inherent risks that must be considered in the short-term to achieve the longer-term benefits.
- **Achieve greater collective investment.** Even with greater efficiency and acceptance of short-term risk, current levels of investment may be inadequate to achieve the levels of risk reduction desired. All who have a stake in the outcome, from individual property owners to the federal, state, tribal, and local governments, must share the costs and level of effort necessary to redeem responsibilities for reducing risks posed by wildfire.