

Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee

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March 26, 2018

RE: Letter of Support for SageWest Communications Network

Dear SageWest Oversight Committee,

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) has a long and proud history of working with a wide range of partners, with the goal of conserving wildlife for the use and benefit of all citizens, now and in the future. As such, our meetings and working groups provide valuable platforms for exchanging management information with a variety of entities. Amongst these formal groups is the Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee (EOC). Members of the EOC include State and Provincial wildlife agency directors, as well as representatives of federal natural resource agencies. Our primary responsibility is to coordinate planning and implementation of conservation actions to conserve Greater Sage-grouse and other species of conservation concern in the sagebrush biome. Our members recognize that successful long-term conservation, recovery and restoration of sagebrush habitats and wildlife will require sustained, concerted and well-coordinated efforts among a spectrum of landowners, land managers, resource specialists, scientists and land users.

The SageWest Communications Network (SageWest), since its inception in mid-2016, has impressively expanded the quantity and diversity of perspectives relevant to sagebrush conservation. The unique composition of participants reflects the level of interest in the sagebrush ecosystem and the variety of stakeholders that are engaged with it. SageWest has filled an important niche of facilitating valuable, range-wide communications and networking opportunities across the broad range of stakeholders, which has included EOC members and many of our partners. This inclusive approach is critical to building broader awareness of, and public appreciation for, the sagebrush ecosystem, as well as a durable conservation programs across the western United States.

The diverse partners that voluntarily contribute to the various working groups and actively share technical and other resources reflect the larger effort underway across the range to bring together people and organizations with common interests in realizing healthy sagebrush habitats. In this sense, SageWest is performing two important functions: telling the story of sagebrush country and the wildlife and people who call it home; and, approaching that story-telling in a way that embodies the same collaborative spirit with which the EOC and our partners are pursuing sagebrush science and conservation delivery across the range. For these reasons, the EOC remains encouraged and supportive of the growing momentum of SageWest.

Communication and interaction with stakeholders in the sagebrush biome is critical if we are to conserve and enhance our wildlife resources so that future generations can enjoy their natural heritage. The EOC appreciates SageWest's ongoing commitment to using communications to advance our sagebrush ecosystem conservation efforts, both internally (across the many stakeholders) and externally (with the public), and looks forward to many more years of a productive partnership through the SageWest platform.

Sincerely,

Virgil Moore, Chairman
Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Geological Survey



U.S. Forest Service
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Farm Service Agency

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SAGEWEST

COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK



CHARTER

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For additional information or to get engaged, please contact the following members of the Technical Committee:

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- Hannah Nikonow, Intermountain West Joint Venture, Hannah.Nikonow@iwjv.org
- Jennifer Strickland, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jennifer_Strickland@fws.gov

I. INTRODUCTION

Every American has a vested interest in preserving the long-term health of this western ecosystem. However, the many entities that have a stake in the management of this iconic ecosystem sometimes struggle to reach across their industry and organizational silos to share their successes with other stakeholder groups or areas of specialty, thus failing to seize opportunities that could be more broadly beneficial.

To serve the need for improved networking and advancing communication around the uniquely western heritage that is embodied in the rugged sagebrush country, **SageWest**, a network of diverse stakeholders advancing sagebrush conservation communications, was launched in 2016. By amplifying existing work across currently siloed audiences and strengthening relationships amongst stakeholders, SageWest hopes to heighten enthusiasm and renew commitment by the American public to conserve the sagebrush ecosystem and connected western communities. Our unifying vision is: **A sagebrush country that is sustainably managed and restored in a balanced, collaborative manner for the benefit of people and wildlife.**

By amplifying existing work across currently siloed audiences and strengthening relationships amongst stakeholders, SageWest aims to heighten enthusiasm and renewed commitment by the American public to conserve the sagebrush ecosystem, not only for its ecological value (contains diverse plants and wildlife, ensures clean air and water, etc.) but also for the cultural and economic connection to western communities.

To support this objective, SageWest outlined the following goals (in no particular order):

- **Public:** Foster understanding of, appreciation for, and connection to natural and human communities in the sagebrush ecosystem, the threats they face, and the need for conservation action.
- **Stakeholders:** Increase communication and cooperation among stakeholders to build on common ground for working together.
- **Support:** Increase stakeholders' and decision-makers' awareness of and investment in sagebrush ecosystem conservation.
- **Education:** Educate, inspire, and engage future generations of sagebrush ecosystem stewards.
- **Network:** Network the diverse group of communicators working on sagebrush ecosystem issues so they can share assets, lessons learned, and develop shared materials and communication strategies.

This charter document describes the intent and purpose of the SageWest network, how it operates, and envisioned possibilities for its evolving future.

II. ABOUT THE SAGEWEST NETWORK

A) ORIGINS

Managing sagebrush country in an ecologically sustainable manner, while meeting the needs of the wide range of stakeholders that have an interest in its future, is challenging. Despite the many stakeholders that are increasingly engaged in efforts related to its management, most Americans are unfamiliar with and have little connection to our nation's largest ecosystem type.

In 2016, a diverse cross-section of sagebrush stakeholders convened in Salt Lake City for the *Sagebrush Ecosystem Vision and Communications Forum*. Participants recognized they shared many common bonds through their unprecedented collaborative work in the sagebrush ecosystem to conserve the Greater Sage-grouse. Furthermore, the decision-makers from various agencies and organizations (alongside their communication staff) acknowledged the need and importance of improved coordination related to the sagebrush ecosystem.

The group uniformly agreed that a focused investment in communication efforts among entities working in this ecosystem, as well as with the general public, would be a valuable and necessary endeavor. Together, participants launched a concerted effort to improve internal and external communication efforts within their organizations/agencies and related to the management of sagebrush country. Thus, the SageWest communications network was formally launched in late 2016 to meet this need.

Through its leadership structure and uniquely diverse range of participants, SageWest endeavors to address the inherent shortcomings of operating within our individual silos by facilitating internal and external communication efforts.

B) PURPOSE

SageWest is an evolving network of diverse stakeholders focused on advancing communications related to sagebrush management efforts. The SageWest network brings together individuals with a wide range of expertise and perspectives, including state agencies, federal agencies, tribal representatives, ranching stakeholders, energy industry, sportsperson groups, conservation groups, and other relevant non-governmental organizations.

Through coordinated and strategic communications, network participants strive to achieve the following:

- Heightened enthusiasm and renewed commitment to conserve sagebrush country;
- New or strengthened relationships among stakeholders;
- Amplification of existing efforts, information and tools, sharing of success stories, cross-fertilization of ideas, and identification of new opportunities; and,
- Enhanced appreciation for the value of multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Note: The network does not address policy or advocacy, but instead provides tools, resources, and a unique networking opportunity for participants.

C) GOVERNANCE AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

SageWest’s direction, purpose and goals are guided by two primary groups:

The Oversight Committee

Comprised of leaders from federal, state, non-government and private industries working in sagebrush country, members of the Committee provide critical guidance in decision-making and prioritizing the areas of focus for SageWest communications. Additionally, members provide the leadership support and other resources necessary to strengthen the public-private partnerships fueling the continued success of SageWest. Together, these members ensure that while SageWest evolves, it remains true to its original purpose of advancing collaborative communications.

The Technical Committee

A subset of communication specialists in organizations directly engaged in sagebrush habitat work serve on this committee. They are the leads responsible for managing guiding documents, ensuring the functionality of network tools and resources, and serve as leaders among their peers in the SageWest network. These members work directly with the Oversight Committee to translate its recommendations into communication opportunities for the full SageWest network. They also work to empower members of the network, supporting them as they undertake new and innovative communications projects that further the network’s mission and identifying opportunities for collaborative work.

D) MEMBERSHIP

Sagebrush country encompasses a vast geography with a wide range of people that have a direct or indirect interest in its conservation and management.

Becoming a member of the SageWest network is voluntary but requires support of the vision statement (see page 2) and agreement to abide by the terms of use (see listserv discussion on page 5). Joining the SageWest network provides participants with access to a uniquely diverse network of stakeholders that are engaged in work related to the sagebrush ecosystem, thus facilitating collaboration opportunities across perspectives. Participants also bring a wide range of expertise to the network – including not only communication professionals but also researchers, private landowners and ranchers, land managers, energy generation and transmission analysts, sportsmen, members of the conservation community, and others.

The success of SageWest is entirely driven by the commitment of its participants and their recognition of the increased benefits a coordinated approach to communication produces. All participants in the SageWest voluntarily contribute their time and skills.

E) APPROACH FOR THE FUTURE

Participants recognize the importance of sagebrush country being managed in a sustainable and collaborative manner that benefits wildlife and meets the needs of the wide range of stakeholders that have an interest in its future. This presents a variety of challenges given the diversity in stakeholders, their perspectives, and the variety of pressures/demands placed on this widespread and enigmatic ecosystem. In recent years, despite an increasing number of stakeholders becoming engaged in efforts related to sagebrush ecosystem management, most Americans continue to be unfamiliar with and have little connection to our nation's largest ecosystem type.

Challenges presented as limited and changing resources, combined with multiple-use management, has created opportunities for collaboration - both in regards to on-the-ground work and in outreach opportunities. These are the stories stakeholders need to continue to efficiently tell, to increase awareness of and build that sense of connection to an iconic American landscape. Given the breadth of this ecosystem and the many of stakeholders involved, internal and external communication efforts must be improved.

Through guidance and efforts led by the Oversight and Technical Committees, participants endeavor to achieve these goals utilizing an evolving variety of tools and resources. Specific workgroups are collaborating on audience-specific projects to address timely and relevant issues.

III. TOOLS AND RESOURCES

A) LISTSERV

Engaging in SageWest automatically provides access to the Audubon-hosted listserv. It is the primary communication method for participants and serves as a consistent platform to share and receive timely information/resources that can formally and informally advance awareness, appreciation, and support for the individual and collaborative work being done in sagebrush country.

The use of a single email address that is connected to a wide range of stakeholders, enables organizations/agencies to share information relevant to the sagebrush ecosystem across a potentially unparalleled audience base, as each participating entity has access to own unique audience. Since its launch in February 2017, it continues to grow to include a wide range of perspectives and expertise.

The listserv facilitates information sharing related to:

- The value of the sagebrush ecosystem
- Success stories
- New science, policy, and technical resources
- Conferences or trainings pertaining to the sagebrush ecosystem
- Opportunities to cross-fertilize ideas
- Assist in the identification of new communication opportunities or tools.

Joining the SageWest Communications Network, and thus access to the listserv, requires not only support for the vision statement but agreement to the following ‘Terms of Use’:

- Recognition of the intention of the listserv – to be a tool to help improve internal and external communications amongst those supportive of the vision statement.
- This listserv is a communication platform that encourages a collaborative approach.
- The SageWest network was formed based on the foundation that a collaborative approach that balances competing interests is far preferable to an atmosphere of conflict and misinformation.
- The listserv is not to be used to address policy or promote advocacy positions.
- Content posted on listserv is to be respectful in nature and not inflammatory or derogatory to other stakeholders, many of which are represented on this listserv.

Failure to comply with these ‘Terms of Use’ can result in removal from the network. Once an individual is added to the listserv, which is hosted by National Audubon Society, they receive emails related to the sagebrush ecosystem. In addition, they receive contact information for all participants on a monthly basis, so as to facilitate networking and collaboration.

B) PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

Intermountain West Joint Venture hosts an [online folder](#)¹ that serves as a publicly-accessible storage location for documents pertaining to the SageWest network. It contains resources and materials for use by practitioners, including:

- **List of Participating Entities**
- **SageWest FAQ:** A resource for participants to use when describing SageWest to partners and colleagues, as well as for their own clarity.
- **2016 Communications Framework:** Created in late 2016, based upon discussions that took place at the *Sagebrush Ecosystem Vision and Communications Forum* (August 2016, Salt Lake City, UT). This document serves as a tool for those engaged in communicating about the sagebrush ecosystem, outlining the wide range of values associated with the ecosystem, obstacles to its management, and initial efforts at identifying target audiences, tools, and key messages.
- **2017 Communicators Workshop Notes:** This document summarizes discussions and outcomes from a Communicators’ Workshop (June 2017, Denver, CO).
- **PowerPoint:** In an effort to increase awareness about and participation in SageWest, members of either the Oversight or Technical Committees provide Powerpoint presentations at different forums. Among these is a standing presentation at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee, which connects and coordinates conservation efforts across the 13 western states and 2 Canadian provinces where sagebrush ecosystem is found. This platform provides a valuable opportunity to interact with a wide range of stakeholders.

¹ <https://iwjv.org/resource/sagewest>