

# Greater Sage-grouse Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement With Assurances

Baker and Union Counties

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA)?

CCAs are formal agreements between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and one or more parties to address the conservation needs of at-risk species before they become listed as endangered or threatened. In return for conservation measures included in the CCAA, participating property owners receive assurances that no additional conservation requirements will be imposed if the covered species is listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service provides these assurances through an “enhancement of survival” permit issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the ESA. Under the permit, participating landowners also receive authorization for take that is incidental to activities covered by the CCAA.

Landowners have an essential role in the success of the CCAA program and their participation is voluntary. Landowners may elect to enroll all or a portion of their property. By enrolling in the CCAA, landowners agree to implement the conservation measures cooperatively developed with the CCAA Coordinator and/or the Service to maintain or promote sage-grouse habitat on their property for the life of the agreement (30 years). Because enrollment is voluntary, landowners may discontinue their enrollment at any time with 30-days written notice to the CCAA permit holder (PBWC).

More information about candidate conservation agreements is available on the Service website:

<https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/CCAs.pdf>.

### Can I still enroll even though the sage-grouse is no longer a candidate species?

Yes! The Service determined in 2015 that sage-grouse were not warranted for protection under the ESA so sage-grouse are no longer a candidate species. However, to continue to promote voluntary conservation on private lands, landowners may still enroll in the CCAA. Also, the Service wished to extend the enrollment opportunity to continue to provide CCAA assurances to landowners in the event that the sage-grouse listing decision was overturned through future litigation.

### What are the benefits of enrolling?

Enrollment in the CCAA may benefit landowners in several ways:

- Proactive conservation efforts may eliminate the need for ESA-listing. When landowners voluntarily commit to implement specific actions that remove or reduce threats to the covered species, a listing decision may be averted.
- If at some future time, sage-grouse become protected under the ESA, enrolled landowners are conferred (through the permit holder; in this case, the Powder Basin Watershed Council) authorization for incidental take of the species for all activities covered in the CCAA.
- Enrollment provides assurances to the landowner such that if they carry out the agreed upon conservation measures described in the site-specific plan (SSP) for their property, they will not be required to implement additional conservation efforts.
- For landowners who want to conserve the species or manage habitat on their land, the CCAA provides an avenue to federal or state cost-share programs.

### What happens if sage-grouse become listed under the Endangered Species Act?

Should sage-grouse be ESA-listed in the future, CCAA-enrolled landowners are conferred (through the permit holder) authorization for incidental take of the species for standard ranching activities covered in the CCAA. Enrollment provides assurances to enrollees that no additional conservation measures will be imposed beyond those already agreed to in their site-specific plan. It should also be noted, that if/when sage-grouse do become listed, landowners will lose the opportunity to enroll in the CCAA.





## How will my privacy be protected when the CCAA is transferred from the Baker Valley SWCD to the Powder Basin Watershed Council?

Privacy protection was an important consideration as Baker County, the Service, and other partners sought a new permit holder for the Baker CCAA. Landowners will have equivalent privacy protection with the PBWC as they have experienced with the Baker Valley SWCD. PBWC, as a non-profit organization rather than a public agency, is not subject to public records requests; thereby, eliminating any threat of the public acquiring landowner information via a records request. The same coding procedure that was developed for use in communications between the Service and the SWCD will be maintained for communications between the Service and PBWC. This tracking system is used in all communications between CCAA permittees and the Service and requires all landowner personal identifying information, including name, legal descriptions, place names, etc. to be coded or redacted.

## I'm currently enrolled. What do I have to do to stay enrolled?

If you are a landowner who is currently enrolled in the CCAA under the SWCD, your enrollment will continue automatically with the PBWC once the CCAA is transfer is complete. **No action is required on your part.** Files relating to your enrollment will be securely transferred from the SWCD to PBWC. The CCAA Coordinator employed by PBWC will contact you for introductions and will assume the annual monitoring responsibilities as detailed in your SSP. You may also contact the PBWC (541-523-7288) or the Service's La Grande Field Office (541-962-8593) directly.

## I have a signed Letter of Intent (LOI) to enroll and would still like to enroll. How do I initiate enrollment?

The SWCD has maintained a list of landowners with LOIs expressing their intent to enroll in the CCAA. **If you signed an LOI and still wish to enroll, you must notify the SWCD in writing by September 8, 2020** and it will be transferred to PBWC. You may also contact the PBWC (541-523-7288) or the Service's La Grande Field Office (541-962-8593) directly to request enrollment. If you signed an LOI and no longer wish to enroll or if you do not respond by September 8, 2020, your LOI will not be transferred. If at some point in the future you would like to enroll, you may submit a new LOI to the PBWC.

## What if I'm currently enrolled but would like to discontinue my participation in the CCAA?

Because landowner participation in the CCAA is voluntary, you may discontinue your enrollment at any time with 30-days written notice. If you are currently enrolled under the SWCD and do not wish to continue your enrollment when the CCAA is transferred to the PBWC, please notify the SWCD in writing by **September 8, 2020**. Discontinuation of enrollment terminates all assurances previously afforded to you as detailed in the Baker Enhancement Of Survival permit and CCAA, effective 30 days from the date written notice is received by the SWCD. The SWCD will retain all relevant landowner files, subject to the SWCD's record retention policies. If at some point in the future you would like to re-enroll, you may submit a new LOI to the PBWC.

## What is the CCAA Advisory Board?

A CCAA Advisory Board will be established by the Powder Basin Watershed Council to help the CCAA program succeed through discussions with a broad selection of interested parties. Just as with other aspects of sage-grouse conservation, the successful implementation of the CCAA program requires input and feedback from a variety of perspectives. To that end, membership of the CCAA Advisory board will be comprised of 50% landowners with property within sage-grouse habitat and/or with an interest in sage-grouse conservation, where possible. Since this program involves private landowners, success requires that it is conducted in a way that is compatible with management of private lands. The other stakeholders will include representation from a variety of agencies, government and organizations that can provide technical and biological expertise. It is expected that the board will meet bi-annually at minimum to review overall implementation progress and may convene more often, as needed. The CCAA Advisory Board will discuss and evaluate issues related to CCAA implementation brought forward by PBWC. Examples of issues that have been addressed by other CCAA advisory groups include technical input and program outreach.

## Who can I contact for more information?

US Fish & Wildlife La Grande Field Office: 541-962-8593  
Powder Basin Watershed Council: 541-523-7288  
Baker Local Implementation Team: 541-239-7016  
Baker Valley SWCD: 541-523-7121