

RANGELAND FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATIONS



Rangeland fire is one of the greatest threats to sagebrush habitat in our state, posing a risk to people, livelihoods, ecosystems, and wildlife. The loss of sagebrush areas due to fire can create barriers to wildlife movement across the landscape, impede important ecological processes and functions, and increase the risk of future fire when invasive cheatgrass is present.

In 2018, nearly 163,000 acres of sagebrush habitat burned in Washington, putting us in the top third of western states for sagebrush loss.

Fire knows no boundaries. In our current system local, state, and federal fire-fighting entities are spread too thin to provide protection and rapid response in rangeland habitat – yet these areas, left unattended, can serve as a conduit to funnel fire into local communities.



Sage Thrasher

A SOLUTION: RANGELAND FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATIONS (RFPAs)

Audubon Washington, The Nature Conservancy, and Conservation NW work in partnership with state, federal, and other NGO entities to implement a shared conservation vision for the Columbia Plateau. This vision focuses on sustaining healthy landscapes and native species, and improving connections between habitat areas.

The increase in fire frequency in sagebrush areas, and the need for a coordinated response, has emerged as a key concern among local landowners, with Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) identified as a possible solution.

RFPAs provide a legitimate, safe way for landowners to be active participants in the protection of their land and livelihoods, and support our shared goals around the protection of rangeland, agricultural livelihoods, and sagebrush species and habitat.

The RFA model, which empowers landowners to participate in rangeland fire response in coordination with local, state and federal entities, has been successful in neighboring states because it creates a legitimate pathway for landowners to respond to fires. RFPAs in these states have helped protect over 20 million acres of federal, state and private lands from fire.

BIRDS BENEFIT - BUT SO DO LANDOWNERS AND FIRE RESPONDERS

For landowners, benefits include:

- A seat at the table amongst local, state and federal fire entities before and during wildfires
- The ability to take action quickly, safely, and effectively to protect property (including livestock) and important forage areas
- Improved relationships and coordination with public land managers

Fire Responders benefit from:

- Increase capability, capacity, and response time to fight wildland fires
- Leverage local knowledge, equipment
- Improved relationships and coordination with neighboring private landowners
- Opportunity for collaboration with RFPAs for other fire-related issues, such as invasive plant control and habitat restoration

Greater Sage Grouse



Western Meadowlark



FILLING THE GAP

Protection of rangelands is a challenge for firefighters, who must deploy their limited resources in support of structural and community protection. **This leaves considerable areas of “no-man’s lands” that lack coordinated fire coverage.** Yet these areas represent important habitat for birds and wildlife, and serve as rangelands for our agricultural communities.

RFPAs are considered assets to local fire districts when it comes to rangeland fire response. RFA members have unique skillsets - ready access to equipment like bulldozers, and knowledgeable of the local landscape. They do not act on their own and are designed to be a supporting entity to lead jurisdictions. All members are trained in wildland fire response, wear the necessary safety equipment and are integrated into common communication systems.

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