

Project Title: Integrating Landscape Conservation Design into Partner Actions in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion

Project Coordinator: Cynthia Wilkerson, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Project Principal Investigators: Cynthia Wilkerson, WDFW (cynthia.wilkerson@dfw.wa.gov); Russ MacRae, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (russ_macrae@fws.gov); Pene Speaks and John Gamon, Washington Department of Natural Resources (pene.speaks@dnr.wa.gov, john.gamon@dnr.wa.gov); Chris Sheridan, Bureau of Land Management (csherida@blm.gov); Christi Norman, Audubon Washington (cnorman@audubon.org); Sonia A. Hall, SAH Ecologia LLC (hallsoniawild@gmail.com).

Project Team and Partners: Jessica Gonzales, USFWS; Joanne Schuett-Hames, WDFW, Project Manager; Brian Consentino, WDFW, GIS Analyst; the Arid Lands Initiative Core Team.

Project Summary: We propose to integrate the shared priorities developed by the Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) in the Columbia Plateau ecoregion into implementation mechanisms of existing and new ALI partners. We will finalize the ALI’s comprehensive strategy by assessing and agreeing on which partners are best positioned to implement which priority actions in which priority areas, integrate these priorities into existing partner work, identify gaps that new partners need to be engaged to address, design 1-2 ALI projects for collaborative implementation, and track and adapt the overall implementation efforts. This project will not only allow the ALI to successfully transition from planning to coordinated action, but will also provide a case study to help the Sage Steppe and Columbia Basin Partner Forums’ efforts to establish priorities and support landscape-scale conservation action.

Category for Proposal: Partner Forum Sponsored – this proposal has been developed with feedback from the Columbia Basin Partner Forum and discussed in detail at the CBPF meeting regarding GNLC proposal priorities.

Need

The Arid Lands Initiative is a private/public partnership convened in 2009 to address the dual challenges that landscape-scale conservation in eastern Washington must overcome: an intricate mix of land uses, which has resulted in a highly fragmented system; and an equally intricate and fragmented ownership pattern, where no entity has the authority and resources to achieve landscape-scale conservation goals. The vision articulated by the ALI core team is focused on collaboration and coordination among private, public and tribal interests so that their efforts cumulatively achieve a viable, well-connected system of eastern Washington’s arid lands and related freshwater habitats.

Representatives from state, federal, and private entities involved in the ALI’s core team, with input from experts and stakeholders knowledgeable in the region, have agreed on:

- *biological priorities* – a set of eight focal systems and species, many of which are also GNLC priorities (Table 1);
- *strategic priorities* – a set of six priority actions directed at making progress towards landscape-scale, measurable goals for each focal system and species. These priority actions were selected to address highest-impact stressors such as development, invasive species and climate change, which also reflect the GNLC’s focus.
- *spatial terrestrial priorities* – a set of ranked priority areas across the Columbia Plateau ecoregion where the core team agrees priority actions should be implemented first to achieve landscape-scale outcomes (Figure 1). To identify these priority areas the ALI relied on two GNLC-funded strategic science projects in the Columbia Plateau ecoregion, this project’s geographic scope: the *Washington Connected Landscapes Project*

ALI biological priorities	GNLC Conservation Targets
Shrub Steppe and Dry Grasslands	Sage shrub/grassland; Grasslands
Riverine Systems (incl. associated riparian areas)	Riverine; Riparian Areas
Depressional Wetlands	Wetlands; Pothole Lakes
Cliffs, Talus and Caves	
Transitional Woodlands	Woodland
Grouse	Greater Sage-grouse
Burrowing Animals	Includes needs of Pygmy Rabbit and Burrowing Owl

Table 1. Cross-walk of ALI focal systems and species and the GNLC’s Ecosystem and Species Conservation Targets. Though not explicitly addressed in this table, the goals for each ALI biological priority are based on a viability/integrity assessment, which identifies key ecological attributes of patch or population size, condition, and landscape context (including natural fire regimes and connectivity), thereby addressing some of the GNLC’s Ecosystem Process targets as well.

of the Washington Habitat Connectivity Working Group, and the project to *Pilot a Strategic Approach to Conservation Planning and Design*, led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Regional Office National Wildlife Refuge System conservation planning team. These spatial priorities do not yet reflect areas important for all ALI focal systems; there is a gap in our understanding of whether priority areas for riverine systems are the same or different to those selected so far. The ALI is submitting a separate and related strategic science proposal to the GNLC to address this gap.

In order to realize the benefits of the spatial analyses named above, we must translate the identified priorities into action on the ground. The need for conservation action is urgent, and knowledge gaps notwithstanding, the ALI's shared priorities provide the foundational components for coordinated conservation action, so that projects not only achieve site-specific objectives, but also strategically contribute to shared landscape-scale goals.

We propose to bring the ALI's shared priority terrestrial areas and the set of priority conservation actions to apply to these areas into practice. In order to do this, we must identify which of the priority actions to apply in which areas, who will do the applications, and how. We then need to institutionalize the ALI's shared conservation priorities. We propose to do so by incorporating these priorities into the existing processes and work plans that drive partner entities' on-the-ground conservation activities. Through this early implementation – which we see as one step in an adaptive process – we will (a) learn lessons on how to successfully collaborate in pursuit of landscape-scale conservation goals, (b) lay the groundwork for incorporating future science products as our knowledge gaps are filled. The funding requested here would allow us to complete these final planning steps, integrate these actions into existing partner implementation mechanisms, support the coordination of their application across existing and new partners, and track and collaboratively assess our success in application.

The combination of the ALI's scope and the range of biological priorities we are focused on sets this partnership in a unique place at the intersection of the interests of two of the GNLC Partner Forums: the Sage Steppe Partner Forum, given our focus on shrub-steppe systems and grouse species, and the Columbia Basin Partner Forum, through our inclusion of upland and riverine systems in the Columbia Plateau. Successfully achieving this proposal's objectives will allow the ALI to provide a case study and lessons learned in the process to the Partner Forums as they establish priorities and support landscape-scale conservation action.

Goals and Objectives

Overall Goal of Project: *To integrate existing and broadly shared landscape conservation priorities into on-going implementation mechanisms by partners to achieve on-the-ground implementation, and to share lessons learned in the process.*

We propose to identify and test approaches to implementing collaborative projects guided by landscape-scale shared priorities by taking advantage of existing mechanisms used by ALI partners to guide actions, and by overcoming known challenges to collaborative efforts, including addressing other priorities each partner responds to, clearly identifying lead entities for priority work, tracking partner implementation efforts, and adapting those to increase their contribution to landscape-scale goals. In this way, this project will provide a concrete example of science applications for focused resource conservation, a key GNLC's objective. It will also begin our contributions to a second GNLC function: tracking and evaluating resource management efforts.

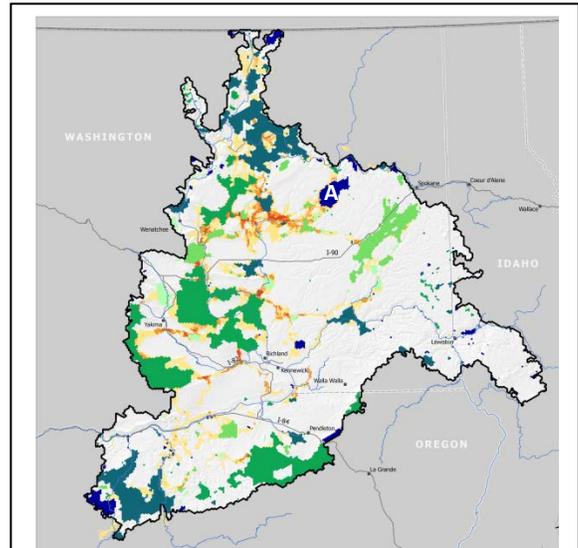


Figure 1. Map of the ALI spatial terrestrial priorities across the Columbia Plateau ecoregion. Core areas important for the ALI focal systems and species are colored light green (low priority) to dark blue (high priority). Linkage areas important for multiple wildlife species representative of ALI focal systems and species are colored in tones of orange. The black boundary shows the extent of the ALI's geographic scope, in eastern Washington, northcentral Oregon and northeastern Idaho. A highlights the Swanson Lakes priority area.

Methods

Objective 1: *Determine which strategic conservation actions to apply to which priority areas.* The ALI's priority actions range from protection and restoration to working with local governments, farmers and ranchers, and the energy industry to mitigate impacts or enhance the contribution of the lands they manage to the functioning of the whole system. Not all actions are equally important across all priority areas. Based on partners' on-the-ground knowledge and available information on the *need* for different actions across the landscape, the *opportunities* for partnering with stakeholders, and the *potential for success*, we will develop a suite of maps showing where each ALI priority action will focus, that complement our current map of shared priority areas.

Objective 2: *Assess which partners are positioned to lead in which priority areas.* Once we have the actions identified for each priority area (output of Objective 1), we will hold an all-day workshop with the current ALI core team. The outcomes of the workshop and follow-up activities are:

1. A completed comprehensive strategy that includes a matrix describing which partners will be responsible for pursuing which components of the ALI's shared priorities.
2. A prioritized list of new partners critical to successful implementation. A number of these potential new partners (e.g. Yakama Nation and Colville Confederated Tribes; energy industry and county government representatives; conservation entities active in north central Oregon) have provided input in the ALI's planning process. We will start building deeper relationships with these critical new partners.
3. Specific outcomes we expect to achieve this first year, in terms of what successful implementation looks like, and what successful coordination looks like.

Objective 3: *Institutionalize the ALI conservation design by integrating shared priorities into partners' existing processes and work plans.* With the completed comprehensive strategy for landscape-scale conservation in the Columbia Plateau, partners will be well-positioned to act on ALI shared priorities. The approach to integrating these priorities into existing mechanisms will be tailored to each partner's processes and work plans:

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – WDFW will integrate priority conservation actions into:

- *The State Wildlife Action Plan*, a plan developed in 2005 for non-game species' needs across the state that is used to prioritize and direct conservation actions implemented by WDFW as well as many of their partners. This is a 10-year plan that is currently being updated, with a target completion date of October 2015. The SWAP identifies Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and ecological systems of concern and their associated conservation actions.
- *The Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Management Plan*. WDFW owns and manages the 21,000 acre Swanson Lakes, a high priority core area for the ALI (A in Fig. 1). WDFW is currently working cooperatively with BLM in this area – where BLM also has significant land holdings – to restore shrub-steppe including greater sage-grouse habitat. We will incorporate the ALI priorities into the on-going update of this plan. The BLM collaboration will both benefit from responding to these shared priorities, and will help the ALI incorporate these priorities so they inform the actions of both ALI partners.
- *The work of private lands biologists*. WDFW has biologists in its regional offices that work directly with private landowners to influence their management actions, including work to identify and implement strategic conservation easements and habitat acquisitions. Additionally, private lands biologists work to link conservation funding and actions through the U.S. Farm Bill that align with our agency priorities. We propose to work with WDFW's private lands biologists in the geography of the ALI to apply the identified strategic actions in the identified priority areas.

Washington Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Program – As part of implementation of the biennial *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, the Natural Heritage Program will incorporate ALI spatial priorities into on-going conservation planning efforts. Natural Heritage Program scientists will also identify biological and ecological inventory needs for non-ALI conservation targets within spatial priority areas.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management – BLM is currently integrating the ALI spatial priorities into its draft land use plan, and will use the ALI spatial priorities to inform BLM's prioritization of restoration and conservation actions.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – USFWS proposes to use the ALI shared priorities to:

- Identify future land protection planning/land acquisition opportunities; and to target habitat management in priority areas, such as Refuge lands and lands of landowners willing to test the cheatgrass biocontrol agent as part of restoration activities – USFWS Refuges.
- Further greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, and Washington ground squirrel recovery and habitat restoration efforts, including the development of a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for greater sage-grouse on state lands in Washington – USFWS Ecological Services.
- Advance project planning reviews, which include analysis of the environmental impacts of federally licensed or funded infrastructure projects on fish and wildlife, and recommendation of options that would minimize detrimental impacts and enhance benefits to trust resources – USFWS Ecological Services.

Audubon Washington – Audubon proposes to integrate the ALI shared priorities into their two main programs in the Columbia Plateau:

- The *Saving Important Bird Areas Campaign* works to minimize the effects of habitat loss and degradation on birds and other biodiversity. Audubon’s goal is to take action before populations of birds decline to dangerously low levels. The Washington Shrub Steppe Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are strongly aligned with the ALI’s shared terrestrial priority areas. Audubon will establish citizen science avian monitoring where species overlap with the Shrub Steppe Important Bird Areas, to:
 - ✓ Verify the accuracy of the analyses used to inform the Arid Lands Initiative priority areas.
 - ✓ Refine which ALI priority areas Audubon highlights as its priority areas, restoration opportunities, and prioritized connectivity linkages.
 - ✓ Inform Audubon’s contributions to partners’ plans, namely WDFW’s Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area plan, and the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan update (see WDFW section, above).
- The *Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative* focuses on policies related to management and conservation of the sagebrush biome, which includes the Columbia Plateau and its biodiversity. Audubon will integrate data and the findings from the Arid Lands Initiative and related analyses (such as those led by the Washington Habitat Connectivity Working Group) into Audubon’s analysis for the proposed Spokane District Bureau of Land Management Resource Plan revision (see BLM section, above).

Objective 4: *Engage partners and design 1-2 collaborative “ALI projects” guided by shared priorities.* Once the roles of individual ALI partners in specific areas are defined and the shared priorities are being institutionalized (see Objectives 1 to 3 above), we will collaboratively identify initial “ALI projects” driven by ALI priorities. The funding requested in this proposal will support ongoing coordination and collaboration between partners working to design these projects, our efforts to build relationships with new partners critical to their implementation, and the pursuit of funding to implement them. By the end of the year we expect to have initial ALI projects designed with partners, sources of funding identified and applied for, so that they are ready to implement. Depending on the outcomes of Objectives 1-3 above, these ALI projects might be an easement, a designation of a protected area, a restoration project, a pilot project with ranchers to test new grazing practices, or other projects that could become pilots for implementing the ALI’s priority actions.

Objective 5: *Track overall implementation efforts and adapt priorities annually.* As part of agreeing which partners will lead implementation of which priority actions (Objective 2, above), we will articulate first-year outcomes for implementation and for successful coordination of actions. We propose to establish indicators that will inform our progress towards those outcomes. Through regular, monthly core team coordination calls we will track progress throughout the year and document what’s working and what’s being adjusted.

In addition, we propose to evaluate additional data gaps that are essential for implementation of shared priorities. These may include the ecosystem’s condition, plant and wildlife inventory needs in priority areas, and how to best take advantage of partners’ existing monitoring efforts and volunteer and citizen science projects in the region to fill any identified gaps. This will lay the foundation for collaborative monitoring to track the status of the ALI’s conservation priorities across the ecoregion.

Finally, we will host a second ALI core team workshop at the end of the year, to report on and document progress towards first-year outcomes, establish outcomes for the next year/s, compile lessons learned that can be shared with the Partner Forums, and make key decisions on how to adjust priorities based on new knowledge, such as the results of the GNLCC-funded project *Assessing the Condition and Resiliency of Collaborative Spatial Priority Areas*. Should the GNLCC also fund the related ALI proposal to integrate freshwater and terrestrial spatial priorities, these results will also be incorporated during this workshop.

Objective 6. *Share lessons learned in implementing collaborative landscape-scale conservation plans.* As mentioned above, the ALI is uniquely situated to provide a useful case study for collaborative landscape-scale conservation relevant to both the Sage Steppe and Columbia Basin Partner Forums. We propose to share progress on a semi-annual basis with these two Forums, so that the ALI’s efforts can provide a strong platform for the Columbia Basin Forum to expand shared conservation targets and strategies to a broader geographic area, and provide the Sage Steppe Forum with a case study of efforts to collaboratively implement conservation actions in pursuit of shared, landscape-scale goals. These communications efforts will contain (a) an articulation of the adaptive management context that reflects the approach the ALI took to planning and the GNLCC’s approach expressed in its Science Plan; and (b) the opportunity for a two-way flow of information, so the ALI can elicit help and learn from the Partner Forums, as well as share lessons learned through the proposed work. Possible venues include webinars or presentations at Partner Forum meetings, and the specific venue will be arranged with the GNLCC coordinators and Partner Forum leads.

Outcomes and Deliverables: A list of outcomes and deliverables to be completed follows:

- A. Map and associated GIS layers indicating which priority actions to pursue in which priority areas of the landscape conservation design.
- B. A matrix of roles and responsibilities indicating which ALI partners are responsible for pursuing implementation in which priority areas, and in monitoring status and trends. The matrix will be incorporated into the ALI’s coordinated strategy document.
- C. Prioritized list of new partners critical for success, along with documented progress in engaging them.
- D. Integration of the ALI’s conservation priorities into WDFW’s State Wildlife Action Plan, Swanson Lakes management plan, and the work plan priorities of relevant private lands biologists; into the implementation of WDNR’s Natural Heritage Plan; into Audubon Washington’s Shrub Steppe Important Bird Areas and Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative; into BLM’s Resource Management Plan; and into USFWS’s land management, acquisition and species recovery and restoration work.
- E. Documented design and progress of 1-2 on-the-ground collaborative “ALI projects”.
- F. Annual summary of progress towards implementing the conservation design, including first-year outcomes, lessons learned, and any resultant shifts in implementation strategy or priorities.
- G. At least 2 webinars, presentations or other venues shared with the GNLCC Partner Forums, as agreed to with the GNLCC coordinators and Partner Forum leads. The specific targets, stressors and quantitative objectives will depend on the outcomes to Obj. 1 and 2, progress made on the rest, and the Partner Forums’ needs.

Schedule:

Objective	2014						2015						
	Jl	A	S	O	N	D	Jn	F	Mr	A	My	Jn	Jl
1. Mapping actions to priority area*			A*										
2. Assess which partners lead which actions, where					B,C								
3. Institutionalize ALI conservation design													D
4. Pursue on-the-ground through “ALI projects”													E
5. Track overall implementation efforts and adapt													F
6. Share lessons with Partner Forums							G						G

* Numbers in the 1st column refer to the objectives described in the Methods section. Letters in the body of the table refer to the deliverables listed above.

Statement of Compliance: The Project Coordinator and PIs have read the GNLCC Information, Management, Delivery, and Sharing Standards and agree to comply with those standards if the proposal is selected.

Project Title: Integrating Landscape Conservation Design into Partner Actions in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion

Project Coordinator: Cynthia Wilkerson, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Project Principal Investigators: Cynthia Wilkerson, WDFW (cynthia.wilkerson@dfw.wa.gov); Russ MacRae, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (russ_macrae@fws.gov); Pene Speaks and John Gamon, Washington Department of Natural Resources (pene.speaks@dnr.wa.gov, john.gamon@dnr.wa.gov); Chris Sheridan, Bureau of Land Management (csherida@blm.gov); Christi Norman, Audubon Washington (cnorman@audubon.org); Sonia A. Hall, SAH Ecologia LLC (hallsoniawild@gmail.com).

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- 1 – US Fish and Wildlife Service**
- 2 – Audubon Washington**
- 3 – Bureau of Land Management**



United States Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex
64 Maple St
Burbank, WA 99323
Phone: (509) 546-8300 Fax: (509) 546-8303



O-FWS-14-0016

March 13, 2014

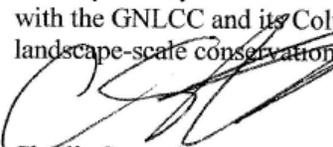
Yvette Converse
Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative
2327 University Way, Suite 2
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Ms. Converse,

I write to extend the Mid-Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Complex's support for the proposal that the Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) is submitting to the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative for funding, titled "*Integrating Landscape Conservation Design into Partner Actions in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion.*" We are encouraged by this effort to connect landscape-scale analysis with efforts on the ground.

An important goal within the Mid-Columbia NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan is to enhance monument resources by establishing and maintaining connectivity with neighboring habitats through coordination with other agencies and adjacent landowners. Connectivity on a larger landscape scale is essential to promote recovery of declining shrub-steppe obligate species (e.g., sage grouse, burrowing owls, curlews, pygmy rabbits, ground squirrels). We are therefore very appreciative of your consideration to this proposal to fund such coordination, which will ensure previous GNLCC investments in science in the Columbia Plateau effectively inform and guide decisions.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. We look forward to continuing to work with the GNLCC and its Columbia Basin and Sage Steppe partner forums to achieve landscape-scale conservation goals.


Charlie Stenvall
Project Leader
Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex
US Fish and Wildlife Service



March 13, 2014

Yvette Converse
Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative
2327 University Way, Suite 2
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Ms. Converse,

I write to extend the Audubon Washington's support for the proposal that the Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) is submitting to the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative for funding, titled "*Integrating Landscape Conservation Design into Partner Actions in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion.*" As a core team partner of the Arid Lands Initiative, I am very encouraged with this effort to integrate the ALI's shared priorities into existing implementation mechanisms of current and new partners, so that each partner's conservation efforts on the ground will also respond to these landscape-scale priorities, contributing to a viable, well-connected system across the Columbia Plateau ecoregion. Coordinating this implementation, and, ensuring that we leverage existing actions and collaborative mechanisms to efficiently achieve landscape-scale action are critical to success. I therefore am very appreciative of your consideration to this proposal to fund such coordination and leverage, which will ensure previous GNLC investments in science in the Columbia Plateau effectively inform and guide decisions.

I look forward to participating in this coordination by working with my colleagues to incorporate the ALI's shared priorities into our Saving Important Bird Areas and Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative for implementation and coordination. I will also participate through regular calls or meetings where I share Audubon's progress and planned projects and how they align with the ALI's shared priorities, and keep up-to-date with partners' efforts, which will allow all ALI core team partners to better coordinate and collaborate on projects that contribute to achieving our shared vision for this landscape, and learn together in the process. I estimate that this participation will lead to an in-kind contribution of approximately \$11,000 in addition to the funding for implementation of the coordinated projects, which will be determined as we identify and begin implementing these shared projects.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. I look forward to continuing to work with the GNLC and its Columbia Basin and Sage Steppe partner forums to achieve landscape-scale conservation goals.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christi Norman".

Christi Norman
Program Director



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Spokane District
Wenatchee Field Office
915 Walla Walla Avenue
Wenatchee, Washington 98801

IN REPLY REFER TO:

ORW020 (1110)

March 13, 2014

Yvette Converse
Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative
2327 University Way, Suite 2
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Ms. Converse,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would like to convey support for the Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) proposal, "*Integrating Landscape Conservation Design into Partner Actions in the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion*," being submitted to the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC).

BLM is a core team partner of the Arid Lands Initiative and supports efforts to integrate the ALI's shared priorities into existing implementation mechanisms of its current and new partners. This particular effort would facilitate conservation efforts on the ground and respond to landscape-scale priorities, contributing to a viable, well-connected system across the Columbia Plateau ecoregion. Coordinating this implementation and ensuring that we leverage existing actions and collaborative mechanisms to efficiently achieve landscape-scale action are critical to success. This would also help to ensure that previous GNLCC investments in science in the Columbia Plateau effectively inform and guide decisions.

We look forward to participating in this coordination by working with colleagues to incorporate shared priorities into our land use planning processes. BLM intends to continue to participate in efforts to share updates on our progress and support efforts to coordinate and collaborate with ALI core team partner to achieve our shared vision for this landscape. At this time, we estimate that BLM participation would lead to an in-kind contribution of approximately \$2500. Any additional support for implementation of coordinated projects will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Thank you for your consideration of our support for this proposal. We look forward to continuing to work with the GNLCC and its Columbia Basin and Sage Steppe partner forums to achieve landscape-scale conservation goals.

Sincerely,

Linda Coates-Markle
Wenatchee Field Manager