



*For Immediate Release*

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## **Funding available to improve habitat for sage grouse populations**

**SPOKANE, Wash. (Dec. 5, 2012)** – Ranchers in central and eastern Washington who want to protect sage grouse habitat and improve range conditions for their livestock can apply for financial assistance through USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) partnership, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced today.

The sign-up deadline for the EQIP/WLFW Sage Grouse Initiative is **December 21, 2012**.

Through the Sage Grouse Initiative, ranchers have multiple options available for grazed ranchlands and expired Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields.

For grazed ranchlands there are two different grazing options. Both grazing options have cost-share funding available for cross-fencing, water developments, and for conducting grazing management for a maximum of three (3) years.

The rest-and-deferment option is to provide optimal cover for nesting hens and brood rearing. There are three components to this option – grazing management, monitoring, and rest-and-deferment. Payment is made for all three components at a rate of \$12.90/acre per year with a possible maximum of \$25,000 each year.

The plant health grazing option is to improve general plant health of ranchlands. There are two components to this option – grazing management and monitoring. The payment rate is based on \$2.04/acre per year. This grazing option is also available on expired CRP fields.

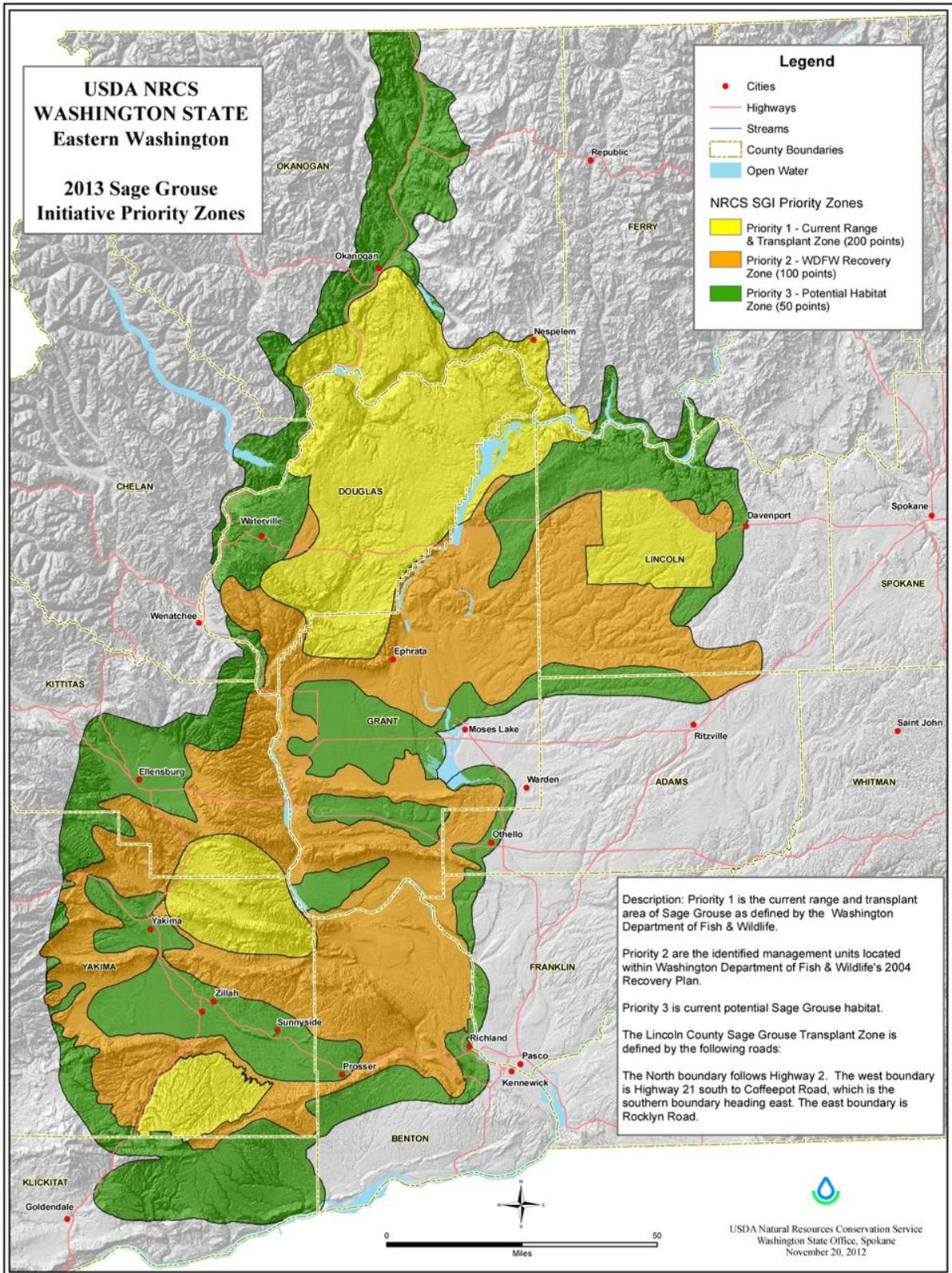
“With NRCS’ Sage Grouse Initiative, precious mating and nesting habitat can be protected through deferred grazing or not grazing areas at all for a year,” said NRCS Asst. State Conservationist Jeff Harlow. “Payments made possible through the Sage Grouse Initiative are designed to offset the costs associated with deferring grazing on that land. When ranchers do the math, I believe they’ll see the value of participating in this initiative.”

Practices to improve sage grouse habitat that may be applied through WLFW or EQIP funding include: Retrofitting existing fences to increase their visibility and reduce sage-grouse mortality; installing escape ramps for wildlife in watering facilities; removal of

obsolete fences used as predator perches; improve poor quality rangeland through seeding; riparian improvement to increase brood survival rates, and reseeding expired CRP fields to diverse, native stands.

The initiative is limited to sage grouse habitat areas of central and eastern Washington. For more information on this and other conservation opportunities, producers are urged to contact their USDA-NRCS Service Center Office.

Sage Grouse Focus Area map for FY13 programs:



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