



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



OAK HABITAT RESTORATION



UNDER THE NEW KLAMATH-ROGUE OAK WOODLAND HEALTH & HABITAT CONSERVATION PROJECT, landowners with oak habitats in Southwest Oregon and Northern California can get financial and technical assistance to enhance wildlife habitat, reduce wildfire risk, and protect and promote oak woodland connectivity. Photo courtesy of Lomakatsi Restoration Project.

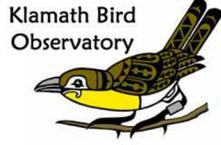
Overview

Oak woodlands and savannas are among the richest wildlife habitats in Oregon and California. Oak habitats provide some degree of food or cover for more than 300 species, such as the acorn woodpecker, Columbia white-tailed deer, and western gray squirrel. They are also among the most threatened ecological communities — current estimates indicate a loss of over 30% of oak woodlands in California and estimates of regional oak habitat losses in Oregon and Washington range from 50% to near total loss since the start of European settlement in the mid-1800s. Many of the remaining oak habitats face a variety of stressors and cannot persist under such conditions. The future of oak habitats is highly dependent on active conservation by private landowners. Incentive programs that provide financial and technical assistance to help landowners make a difference on their lands are available.

Threats to Oak Habitats

Much of the pre-settlement oak habitats have already been cleared to make way for farms, urban areas, and other human developments. In remaining oak habitats, active fire suppression has altered the natural disturbance process of frequent, low-intensity fires that historically helped maintain oak habitat structure. As a result, stands have become greatly overstocked, reducing habitat quality, building fuel loads, and increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Major threats to oak habitat quantity and quality include:

- **Conifer encroachment.** Fire suppression has allowed conifers, like Douglas-fir, to encroach and outcompete oak trees. Oak trees will not tolerate shading.
- **Loss of habitat structure.** Large-diameter oak trees with mushroom-shaped canopies that provide the limb structure, cavities, and acorn production required by many wildlife species have been lost. Remaining oaks are not developing the same structural traits due to overcrowding by young oaks and other trees.
- **Exotic invasive species.** Exotic plant species like Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry, and English hawthorn, have invaded the understory communities, resulting in increased fuel loads and degraded habitat.
- **Land use conversion.** Oak habitats continue to be converted to other uses, such as cropland, vineyards, and residential development.



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What's at Stake?

If our rare oak habitats are not restored, protected and maintained, important ecological functions could be lost forever. With over 300 species of wildlife using oak habitats during their life cycle, continued habitat loss and degradation will result in more of these species becoming imperiled. Currently, 45 of those oak-associated species are already considered to be 'at-risk'. Additionally, overstocked and unmanaged oak stands present an increased risk of catastrophic wildfire. Unnaturally intense wildfires not only result in habitat loss, but they threaten residences and rural communities as well as pose potential harm to threatened and endangered plant species. Because oaks are an extremely slow-growing species, recovery of lost habitats may take several generations. It is critical to act today to reverse these trends.



Oak Titmouse.
Photo by James Livaudais c.2015.

What can landowners do and where can they find help?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Lomakatsi Restoration Project, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Klamath Bird Observatory and others are bringing funding and technical resources together with the singular goal of helping landowners restore, protect and maintain oak habitats. This includes developing a tailored management plan, project implementation, contracting, and monitoring. Restoration practices typically include thinning to reduce encroaching vegetation and tree densities, exotic brush control, prescribed fire and native grass seeding to promote the development of healthy, structurally-diverse oak habitats over time.

Financial Assistance Programs

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The Klamath-Rogue Oak Woodland Health and Habitat Conservation Project is promoting conservation practices that help restore declining oak habitats on private lands. The project is a strategic, landscape-scale effort to focus partner resources on restoring priority oak habitats. Financial assistance for landowners is being provided primarily through the NRCS' Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Landowners who agree to participate and are selected for funding may receive assistance from NRCS and partners to develop restoration and management plans. **Funding Programs:** NRCS Farm Bill Programs: Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP); USFWS: Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

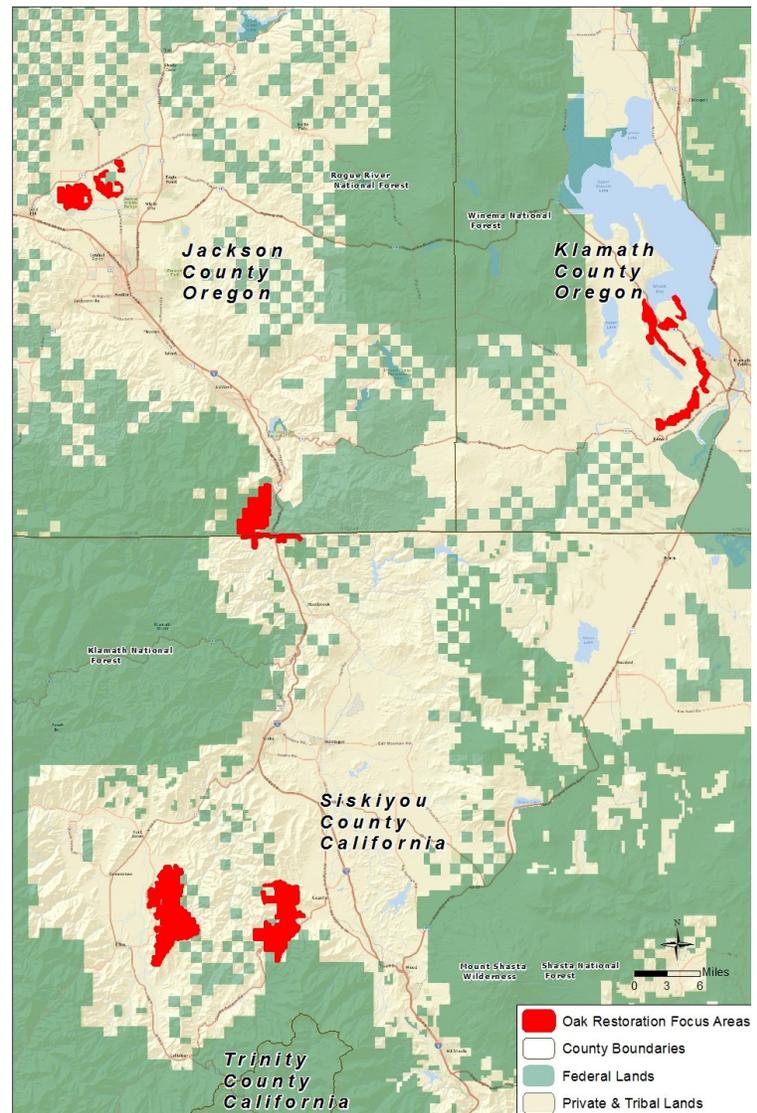
Who to Contact

For more information or to apply for Farm Bill programs contact your local USDA Service Center:

Jackson/Klamath Counties, Oregon: Contact Erin Kurtz
Central Point Service Center. Phone: (541) 423-6173

Siskiyou County, California: Contact Jim Patterson
Yreka Service Center. Phone: (530) 842-6123

Landowners may also contact the lead project sponsor, Lomakatsi Restoration Project. Phone: (541) 488-0208



PROJECT FOCUS AREAS: Applications for funding will be prioritized based on these focus areas.