



Community-Based Conservation Program  
4900 Old Main Hill  
Utah State University  
Logan, UT 84322-4900

## Contact Us!

- Terry Messmer  
Supervisor  
terrym@ext.usu.edu  
435-797-3975
- Dean Mitchell  
Upland Game Program Coordinator  
deanmitchell@utah.gov  
801-538-4786
- Todd Black  
Program Specialist  
tblack@cc.usu.edu  
435-770-9302
- Nicole Frey  
Program Specialist  
frey@suu.edu  
435-586-1924
- Sarah Lupis  
Program Specialist  
sarahl@ext.usu.edu  
435-770-3116
- Rae Ann Hart  
Coordinator  
rangesci@cc.usu.edu  
435-797-3974

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# THE COMMUNICATOR

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January 2007

## Utah to Host Inaugural Sage-grouse Summit

By Todd Black

Utah State University (USU) Extension and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) announce the first ever **Utah Sage-grouse Summit March 13-14, 2007 at the Red Lion Inn** in Salt Lake City. "This Summit will provide a much needed opportunity to have all the key players under one roof to discuss sage-grouse in Utah. The Summit is open to everyone. We hope it becomes an annual event that facilitates an exchange of ideas to promote sage-grouse conservation," says Terry Messmer Extension Wildlife Specialist at USU.

The Summit will include discussion on the status of both the rangewide and Utah's local sage-grouse plans. In addition, federal partners and the UDWR will discuss what these plans mean from a conservation standpoint and the availability of funds to work on habitat improvement projects. Lastly, we will hear from the graduate students on the research being conducted on sage-grouse in various locations throughout the state. Hope to see you there!



SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT  
MARCH 13 - 14, 2007  
RED LION INN  
161 WEST 600 SOUTH  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

REGISTER BY 1 MARCH 07

COST OF REGISTRATION:

\$85.00

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT  
OUR WEBSITE:

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CONTACT RAE ANN HART AT  
[RANGESCI@CC.USU.EDU](mailto:RANGESCI@CC.USU.EDU)

TRAVEL GRANTS WILL BE AVAIL-  
ABLE FOR LWG PARTICIPANTS.

## Dedicated Utah Hunters to Count Sage-grouse

By Todd Black



One of the challenges in Utah's sage-grouse conservation efforts is ensuring every lek gets counted three times every year. "We don't have the resources to accomplish this task," says Dean Mitchell Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)

Upland Game Program Coordinator. The time and effort it takes to count Utah's grouse leks all within a two-month period has been an overwhelming challenge for many years and for many states; not just Utah.

To tackle the problem, Nevada, Montana, and Wyoming are using a program called "Adopt a Lek." This program trains and educates volunteer citizen scientists to count sage-grouse leks helping wildlife agencies in their annual surveys. This year, Utah plans to tap into its huge volun-

teer base of Dedicated Hunters to pilot a similar lek-counting program (see <http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/dh/> for more information on the Dedicated Hunter Program). The UDWR and Utah State University plan to launch this program in northern Utah. Nine dedicated hunters (three in each of Box Elder, Cache, and Rich counties) will be trained in grouse-counting techniques and then head into the field to help UDWR and LWGs collect valuable information on population trends.

The program will be facilitated by Todd Black. Todd will work with Jodie Anderson (UDWR dedicated hunter program coordinator) to develop and implement the program. For more information on how to get involved, contact Jodie at 801-791-8589, email at [Jodie-Anderson@utah.gov](mailto:Jodie-Anderson@utah.gov) or Todd Black at 435-770-9302, email at [tblack@cc.usu.edu](mailto:tblack@cc.usu.edu).



## More Than Sage-grouse: Other Creatures of the Sagebrush-steppe

*Part 2 of a 2-part series*

By Sarah Lupis

It seems that all we've been hearing about lately is sage-grouse. Justified? Perhaps; with several petitions being filed and the risk of an endangered species listing; the species has certainly been on the front burner the past decade. But, there are many other wildlife species that use sagebrush habitat. Some, like sage-grouse, are considered sagebrush obligates—meaning they rely on sagebrush. Lets discuss a few of these critters and what some of the Local Working Groups are doing to learn about, manage, and conserve them.

Let's start with the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*); a small, long-legged owl so named because they live in burrows "borrowed" from other burrowing animals. Another avian species to watch for is the ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) the largest hawk we have in Utah. Like the burrowing

owl, they are not common, but are easily identified by their large white breast, rust colored back and shoulders, and a big yellow stripe for a mouth that extends well beyond the eyes. Keep an eye out for these critters the next time you are in the field. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources tracks, monitors, and records all nesting sites of these species in Utah each year; if you find one—let them know!



## Study Investigates Raptor Perch Deterrents

By Sarah Lupis

The only population of Gunnison sage-grouse in Utah occurs in the extreme southeast corner of the state in San Juan County. Over the past six years there has been a considerable research effort to learn about the ecology of this population. Now, conservation strategies are being applied on the ground and evaluated to determine their potential to mitigate the impacts of identified threats and issues affecting the population. One conservation strategy addresses the potential impact of raptor predation by testing the efficacy of five types of raptor perch discouragers placed on power poles. The power line being used in the study is located along the northern edge of the area where sage-grouse are found. The power line is 7.5 miles long and consists of 84 poles. The

discouragers that are being tested include triangles, spikes, cones, one fire fly (a reflective hazing deterrent), and two fire flies. Over the next two years the power line will be surveyed daily and the number of individuals of each species perched on the poles will be recorded. The resulting data will tell which discourager is most effective on reducing predator perching events. The most successful discourager can then be implemented on vertical structures in other areas inhabited by Gunnison sage-grouse. This work is being conducted by Phoebe Prather, a Utah State University graduate student. She will report her preliminary findings at the Utah Sage-grouse Summit.



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## Gunnison Sage-grouse Listing Decision May be Reversed

Gunnison sage-grouse, a distinct species found only in the Gunnison Basin in Colorado and San Juan County, Utah, were petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2000 and designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a "candidate species." In 2004, the USFWS elevated the "Listing Priority Number" for the species from "5" to "2," which means that threats to the species are considered to be a "high" magnitude and that listing is "imminent." After five years of litigation by petitioners, the USFWS began the process of evaluating the species for listing as "threatened" or "endangered."

In 2005, when the USFWS issued a decision of "not warranted" for listing under the ESA, several conservation groups and scientists started taking a hard look at the agency's evaluation process. They contend that the process was driven by politi-

cal, rather than biological considerations and are now suing to have the decision reversed.

Despite the political wrangling over this issue, LWGs in Utah and Colorado continue to move forward with conservation planning, habitat enhancement projects, and research. "It really doesn't change anything for us," Sarah Lupis, CBCP Program Specialist, told the Salt Lake Tribune (11/01/06). "Many of the groups we work with were formed when the [ESA] petitions went out, and they have continued to operate after the decision not to list was made. Most of the participants in our groups understand there will likely be challenges to these decisions or new petitions. So they know they need to keep developing plans."

*"...agency's evaluation process... driven by political, rather than biological considerations..."*

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*If it's not good for communities, it's not good for wildlife.*

### Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program Mission

Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program is dedicated to promoting natural resource management education and facilitating cooperation between local communities and natural resource management organizations and agencies.

Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran's status. USU's policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic related practices and decisions.

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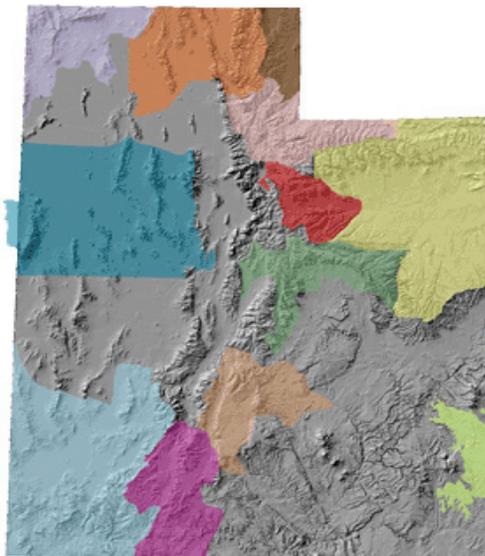
This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work. Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.

## Local Working Group Conservation Plan Update

By Todd Black

Wondering about the status of other local working groups in Utah? How do they shape up compared to yours? Of the 12 sage-grouse local working groups (LWGs) that we now have in Utah, seven have finalized or final draft plans, two have plans in draft stages, and one, the Cache East Box Elder LWG, focusing on sharp-tailed grouse, is just getting up and running. In addition, the Gunnison sage-grouse working group in Monticello recently combined with the LWG in Dove Creek, Colorado. Thanks and kudos to all LWG partners from all of us here in the Community-Based Conservation Program for your hard work and dedication!

Currently we are in the process of completing the 2006 annual report on the activities of all LWGs in the state. Be sure to visit our web page to review this report and the individual plans of the all the LWGs in the state. The web page is in the process of being updated and changes weekly; remember to check often at: <http://www.cnr3.usu.edu/cbcp/>.



Sage-grouse local working group boundaries 01-2007

