Community-Based Conservation Program Business Plan – Plan of Work 2005-2010

Scope:

This document identifies an administrative structure to include personnel roles and responsibilities and proposes a plan for securing long-term funding support for USU Extension's Community-Based Conservation Program **(CCES)**.

Background

Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus spp*.) are restricted to the sagebrush rangelands of western North America. Sage-grouse once inhabited 15 states and 3 Canadian provinces. Currently, populations exist in only 10 states and 1 province. In Utah, sage-grouse inhabit sagebrush habitats of the Colorado Plateau and the Great Basin geographic regions. There are two species of sage-grouse in Utah. All birds located north and west of the Colorado River are known as the Greater Sage-grouse (*C. urophasianus*). A newly described species, the Gunnison Sage-grouse, (*C. minimus*) is found only in San Juan County in southeastern Utah (South and East of the Colorado River). The largest sage-grouse populations in Utah are found in Rich County, the Park Valley area of Box Elder County, on the Diamond and Blue Mountains in Uintah County, and on the Parker Mountain in Wayne County. Other smaller populations are scattered in the central and southern parts of the state.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) estimates that sage-grouse in the state currently occupy less than 50 percent of their previous habitat and are one-half as abundant as they were prior to the 1850s. These declines have been largely attributed to land use practices that reduced, eliminated, or fragmented suitable sagebrush habitats. These population declines have prompted several environmental organizations to threaten to petition the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list the sage-grouse as endangered.

Prior to these petitions, Utah State University Extension (USUEXT) began working with concerned Utah stakeholders to organize working groups to increase local involvement in sage-grouse conservation planning. The working groups will assist state and local governments and private landowners in conserving these species while achieving social and economic objectives. Given the continued decline of sage-grouse populations, and the increased interest of state and local governments and private citizens in species conservation planning, there is a need to expand this process in Utah and the region.

Concomitantly, the UDWR is facilitating Utah Partners for Conservation and Development. (PARTNERSHIP). The purpose of the PARTNERSHIP is to provide coordinated leadership in natural resource management and public service. The PARTNERSHIP will serve as a clearinghouse to coordinate conservation concerns and priorities while supporting regional and local effects to identify and implement solutions. There is a need to increase coordination between the PARTNERSHIP and local working groups.

Species conservation planning efforts are time consuming. The success of the groups is directly related to the involvement of local leaders. However, administrative support is necessary to bring together diverse stakeholders to discuss issues, concerns, strategies, and build consensus. Public

land managers, because of increasing workloads and reduced staffing, may lack the resource needed to establish and facilitate local working groups. Although they must be participate in working groups, their involvement in leadership roles also could be perceived with suspicion by local communities because of their regulatory authority. This perception is not necessarily held about specific individuals, but more so of government in general.

In 2002 Utah State University Extension (USUEXT) entered into a cooperative agreement with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to develop Community-Based Conservation Program to assist local communities in addressing Sage-grouse conservation issues. Under the contract, USU initiated a state-wide sage grouse conservation planning process. This process will culminate in the establishment of local working groups that will prepare sage-grouse conservation plans for designated geographic areas in Utah. These plans will identify strategies to improve overall rangeland habitat and watershed conditions, increase sage-grouse populations, and sustain local economies. Each plan will contain information on the current status of area sage-grouse populations and rangelands, local community issues and concerns, and agreements or actions required to implement management strategies. Working groups will responsible for completing, implementing and monitoring the plans and agreements.

In addition to this effort, the UDWR is facilitating Utah Partners for Conservation and Development. (PARTNERSHIP). The purpose of the PARTNERSHIP is to provide coordinated leadership in natural resource management and public service. The PARTNERSHIP will serve as a clearinghouse to coordinate partner conservation concerns and priorities while supporting regional and local effects to identify and implement solutions of Utah and other public partners Increased communication and coordination with the PARTNERSHIP and local working groups is essential to the success of this process.

Over time, the CCES program will engage hundreds of agricultural producers in working more closely with public and private partners to implement innovative conservation practices to benefit their operations, public land, local economies, sage-grouse, and other sagebrush steppe sensitive species. The process will increase information transfer among producers and public land managers thus enhancing their ability to “blur” jurisdictional boundaries and leverage limited financial resources. Although the program will focus on protecting and enhancing habitat for species with declining sage-grouse populations, we anticipate the process used can be adapted to addressing any natural resource issue or conflict.

Administrative Structure

The CCES program comes under the direction of Dr. Jack Payne, Vice President for University Extension. The program directly supervised by Terry A. Messmer, Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist. The program is being implemented by Todd Black and Nicki Frey, CCES program specialists. These specialists are being supported by Sarah Lupis and Leslie Elmore, CCES technicians and Jamey Anderson, Webmaster. The CCES staff will be assisted by and work with graduate and undergraduate students and seasonal technicians who are hired to evaluate and monitor habitat restoration projects implemented by the LWGs.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Supervisor – Terry A. Messmer

Overall direction, program planning, and program accountability

Fundraising, program grant preparation and management, budgeting, and contracting.

Liaison with USU administration, CCES PARTNERS, the Utah Shrub-Steppe Restoration Core Team

Maintaining communication between CCES Team

Coordination and contact with elected officials and senior agency representatives.

Supervision of graduate students, editing and approving reports and manuscripts for dissemination.

Participation on Utah Partners for Conservation and Develop Core Team

Project Managers

Todd Black

Organize and facilitate community-based conservation working groups to address sage-grouse and other wildlife conservation issues in areas designated by your immediate supervisor. These areas include:

1.) Parker Mountain Adaptive Resource Management Working Group (PARM),
2.) San Juan County Gunnison Sage-grouse Working Group (SWOG),
3.) Strawberry Valley – Wasatch and Duchesne Counties,
4.) Cache-Rich County – Rich, Cache, parts of Weber, Morgan, Wasatch and Summit,
5.)West Desert – Tooele (to include the Goshute Indian Reservation), Milliard and Juab County,
6.) Uintah Basin – Uintah, Daggett, and parts of Summit and Duchesne Counties,
7.) Box Elder – Box Elder, northern Tooele, and parts of Weber, and Davis Counties,
8.) North Central Valley – Salt Lake, Tooele, Utah, Sanpete, and Juab Counties
9.) East Manti and Carbon – Carbon, portions of Emery, Grand, and Sevier Counties.

S. Nicole Frey

Organize and facilitate community-based conservation working groups to address sage-grouse and other wildlife conservation issues in areas designated by your immediate supervisor. These areas include:

1.) Color County – Garfield and Kane counties
2.) Southwest Desert – Beaver, Iron, and Millard counties. Nicki also has other duties as assigned in her job description at SUU.

The project managers will:

1. Coordinate working group activities with other stakeholders. These may include USU Extension specialists, USU Extension county faculty and staff, UDWR, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Services Agency, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Utah Farm Bureau, Utah Woolgrower's Association, Utah Cattlemen's Association, Utah School and Institutional Trustlands Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency Sage-Grouse Working Team, USDA Wildlife Services, Environmental Defense, Natural Conservancy, private landowners, sportsmen organizations, and other interested and identified stakeholders.

2. Work with the Program Supervisor to develop a template, SOP, and annual budgets for organizing, and operating LWGs.

3. Work with the working groups and other partners to develop resource management plans to address issues identified by participants.

4. Work with partners and working groups to identify research needs, assist in preparing proposals and identifying funding partners.

5. Work with partners and working groups to identify rangeland habitat project to address local needs. Assist the working groups in prioritizing these projects and seeking funding to accomplish them. They will work with cooperators to prepare and submit EQIP and WHIP proposals.

6. Work with partners and working groups to implement a program to monitor sagebrush-steppe habitat projects to evaluate the effect of the action on sage-grouse, other wildlife, livestock productivity, community socio-economics, and rangeland health

7. Prepare an annual plan-of-work identifying working group needs and actions that need to be taken to address the needs

8. Schedule meetings with each working group and communicate this schedule to working group members and the project supervisor.

9. Create and maintain a GIS database for each working group area that reflect sage-grouse and other wildlife population status and habitat use, habitat conditions and trends, and project status.

10. Supervise field technicians, provide technical assistance and coordinate activities with graduate students.

11. Work with 4-H and other youth groups to develop programs to increase youth awareness about wildlife and their involvement in local working groups. This could include involving youth in monitoring and habitat projects.

12. Work with faculty and staff affiliated with the USU Extension Rural Development Program.

13. Coordinate efforts with Regional UPCD and Utah Sage-brush Steppe Restoration Initiative Regional Teams.

14. Ensure each working group has a completed the sage-grouse conservation planning process by June 30, 2006. At this time each group will have a completed final draft of a area conservation plan that can be submitted through the UDWR to the US Fish and Wildlife for review and concurrence.

Project Technicians

Sarah Lupis

1. Assist community-based conservation working groups to address sage-grouse and other wildlife conservation issues in areas designated by your immediate supervisor. Sarah works directly with Todd and serves as a co-facilitator for working group areas assigned to Todd. Todd and Sarah may divide the groups up with each taking responsibility for different groups.

2. Assist community-based conservation specialists (CCES) in coordinating working group activities with USU Extension specialists, USU Extension county faculty and staff, UDWR, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Services Agency, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Utah Farm Bureau, Utah Woolgrower's Association, Utah Cattlemen's Association, Utah School and Institutional Trustlands Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency Sage-Grouse Working Team, USDA Wildlife Services, Environmental Defense, Natural Conservancy, private landowners, sportsmen organizations, and other interested and identified stakeholders.

3. Work with project managers to design and implement a management plan template and SOP for community-based conservation working groups.

4. Work with project managers to develop area management plans to address issues identified by participants.

5. Work with project managers to design, implement, and manage wildlife and vegetation monitoring programs for habitat projects.

6. Work with project managers to identify rangeland habitat project to address local needs.

7. Work with project managers to design and implement a program to monitor rangeland habitat projects to evaluate the effect of the action on sage-grouse, other wildlife, and rangeland health.

8. Work with project supervisor, managers, and web master to develop and maintain a CCES web site that reports working group status.

9. Provide technical assistance and field support as needed to graduate students conducting research as part of the community-based conservation program. These requests will be coordinated through the project supervisors or project manager.

10. Work with 4-H and other youth groups to implement programs to increase youth awareness about wildlife and their involvement in local working groups. This could include involving youth in monitoring and habitat projects.

11. Develop extension technical notes/publications on best management practices for sage-grouse and other sagebrush steppe obligates. These publications will discuss the effects of Farm Bill conservation practices (WHIP and EQIP) on sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

12. Take the lead in preparing local working group annual reports by developing a template to standardize reporting.

13. Develop a database and/or program to monitoring sage-grouse population trends in local working group areas following WAFWA guidelines.

Leslie Elmore

1. Assist community-based conservation working groups to address sage-grouse and other wildlife conservation issues in areas requested by the project supervisor and/or managers.

2. Develop and maintain local working group participant/membership databases and manage communication for local working groups.

3. Work with project managers and Sarah Lupis to develop extension technical notes/publications on best management practices for sage-grouse and other sagebrush steppe obligates. These publications will discuss the effects of Farm Bill conservation practices (WHIP and EQIP) on sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

4. Prepare a power-point presentation that can be used for training that is based on technical notes. These presentations will cover upland habitat management, brush management, and the effects of prescribed grazing on sage-grouse and other sagebrush steppe obligates.

5. Work with the project supervisor and manager to schedule training workshops for NRCS and other agency staff, local working members, county extension faculty, and landowners on managing sagebrush steppe for multiple benefits.

6. Work with project supervisor to develop a regional RFP and support materials to evaluate the effects of Farm Bill Conservation Practices on Sage-grouse and other sagebrush steppe obligate species.

7. Provide technical assistance and field support as needed to graduate students conducting research as part of the community-based conservation program. These requests will be coordinated through the project supervisors or project manager. As part of this responsibility, Leslie will also assist the students in ordering and purchasing field equipment.

8. Work with 4-H and other youth groups to implement programs to increase youth awareness about wildlife and their involvement in local working groups. This could include involving youth in monitoring and habitat projects.

9. Work specifically with the Cedar Mountain Science Center and Nicki Frey to develop a pilot project the engages teachers and their students in local working group monitoring activities.

10. Work with project managers, and Sarah Lupis to develop a landscape library for the web site that identifies specific practices that can be and have been used by local working groups to manage for sage-grouse and other sage-brush obligate species. This site will contain actual data from the areas managed and video footage, photographs of the management practices and the sites managed, both before and after.

11. Maintain CCES equipment and vehicle inventories. These will be updated 2 times annually; in the fall after the field season and the spring prior to the field season.

Project Methods

Working Group Development and Facilitation

We believe facilitation of local working groups can best be achieved through an independent program solely dedicated to this effort. This program will be directed by USUEXT. USUEXT is viewed as being non-regulatory and has strong ties to local communities, natural resource agencies, and agricultural producers. Based on past experience, we believe this approach will be perceived as neutral, not representing any specific government agency or mandate, and working to benefit the affected communities as well as the species. Implementation of local plans may mitigate the need for listing a species, assist in recovery if a species is listed.

Because private lands constitute a large component of each geographic region, NRCS Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), UDWR Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) cost-share programs will used to fund priority rangeland habitat projects. Additional funding to implement these projects will come from the PARTNERSHIP and private sources.

Meetings

Local working groups will meet quarterly. The meeting will be scheduled to accommodate working group participant schedules. The quarterly meetings will be scheduled at least a year in advance. A standard, time, and place will scheduled. Meeting participants will be notified by e-mail and letter at least one week prior to the scheduled meeting. The notice will contain another copy of previous meeting minutes to include information on specific tasks to be completed. Meeting minutes will be prepared and distributed no later than one week after the meeting. A list of meeting participants and committee assignments will distributed only to participants. Participants will be invited to meetings through direct mail, phone calls, personal contacts, and public service announcements.

Working Group Chairs and Administration

Local stakeholders **will** chair the groups. USUEXT/CCES faculty and staff will provide administrative support. This includes grant preparation, drafting conservation plans, arranging for meeting room, and providing meals and/or refreshments, etc.

In-service Training

USUEXT/CCES Faculty will receive in-service training on small group facilitation, WHIP, LIP, EQIP cost-share programs, and other public and private programs that are available to support working group efforts. USUEXT faculty also will develop and provide additional in-service training for working groups on federal, state, and private species conservation programs.

Working Group Representation, Subcommittees, and Financial Support

An important component of any community-based conservation program is adequate scoping to identify management, social, and political issues. Because sage-grouse occur in diverse landscapes each exhibiting different land ownership patterns and issues, each geographic area is unique. Thus, each working group will be representative of local stakeholders. Working group will have at least 5-6 representatives of the agricultural community. Subcommittees will be

tasked to complete specific portions of the local plans. Each agency, organization, or group represented by the working group will be requested to provide financial support (actual or in-kind) to support the group. Working group chairs will work with USUEXT faculty to develop an annual budget. Start-up funds needed to operate each group will come from the CPI grant.

Reporting

A web site will developed to report working group meeting minutes and progress reports. This web site will be linked to all project partners' sites. working group conservation plans and habitat projects will be featured on the site. Each working group will complete an annual report. This report will be included in the CPI Project Report and placed on the web site. Working group progress and activities also will be reported in USUEXT newsletters. The groups also will host yearly community forums to discuss activities and progress.

Habitat Projects

Habitat projects will be implemented following the scientific method. Each project's experimental design will ensure the results of the work can be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Each project will include methodology on establishing baseline population and vegetation conditions and assessing the impacts of the project. The results also will be reported in annual reports, on the web site, USU Extension bulletins, and scientific manuscripts.

Conservation Plans

Conservation plans will identify strategies and actions designed to improve habitat quality for sage-grouse and local community economic sustainability. Each plan will contain information on area sage-grouse populations, other sensitive wildlife species, habitat conditions, local community issues and concerns, population and habitat management strategies, schedules, and implementation agreements. The working groups will be responsible for completing, implementing and monitoring local conservation plans.

Monitoring Sage-grouse Populations, Vegetation Conditions, and Responses

Although sage-grouse habitat guidelines have been published, this information may not be directly applicable to certain areas because of climatic and vegetation variation. In many areas our ability to manage sage-grouse may be hampered because no habitat use information exists. Although historical leek counts may provide information about population trends, they often do not provide a true picture of the population status. Consequently, the best way to determine use areas often requires the use of short-term radio-telemetry studies.
The status and response of sage-grouse and other wildlife populations and vegetation to rangeland habitat projects implemented by each working group will be monitored using standard surveys. To determine habitat use and movement patterns of Greater Sage-grouse hens, we will monitor radio-collared hens during nesting and brood rearing seasons. Information obtained on nest site selection, nest success, hen mortality, brood survival, and brood habitat use will be used to develop habitat projects. Vegetation measurements will be taken at all habitat use sites. Lek counts will be conducted to establish baseline populations. Previous research on Parker

Mountain has demonstrated the importance of vegetation diversity in sage-grouse production. We will measure the baseline vegetation composition on rangeland sites that are proposed for habitat improvement projects.

Project Partners

Partners and Roles

Partner	Role
USU Extension	Project Administration, Reporting, Working Group Facilitation and Administration, Monitoring program coordination and implementation
Private Landowners and Local Community	Work group leadership and participation, cost-share, project sites
County Commissioners	Work group support and participation
NRCS	Work group participant, technical assistance, WHIP, EQIP project proposal preparation
BLM	Work group participant, funding support for monitoring and work group operations, project challenge grants, technical assistance, project sites
USFS	Work group participant, funding support for monitoring and work group operations project challenge grants, technical assistance, project sites
UDWR	Work group participant, funding support for monitoring and work group operations, project challenge grants, technical assistance, project sites
Indian Tribes	Work group participant, project sites, cost-share, funding support for monitoring and work group operations
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Work group participation, funding support for projects and monitoring
Utah School and Institutional Trustlands	Work group participants, funding support for operations and monitoring
Utah Farm Bureau	Work group participant, communications with FB membership
Utah Partnership for Conservation and Development	Working group information clearinghouse, project funding
Utah Cattlemen and Woolgrowers	Working group participants, communication with membership
Utah Department of Agriculture and Food	Working group participant, communications, funding support for projects
Utah RC@D	Working group participant, project funding support, communications
Utah Soil Conservation Districts	Working group participation, communications with SCD members, endorsement of projects
Sportsmen Organizations	Working group participants, cost-share to support projects

Conservation/Environmental Organization	Working group participants, funding to support projects and monitoring
USDA Wildlife Services	Working group participant, in-kind support, technical assistance

Personnel	**Responsibility/Contribution**	**Experience/Education**
Dr. Jack Payne	Overall Direction/Integration with USUEXT faculty	Vice President, USUEXT, PhD
Dr. Terry Messmer	Project supervision, in-service, milestones, reporting	Wildlife Specialist, University Professor, PhD
Dr. Nicole Frey	Facilitator, habitat project monitoring, outreach	Extension assistant professor, PhD
Mr. Todd Black	Facilitator, habitat project monitoring, outreach, GIS	Community-based conservation specialist, M.S.
Ms. Leslie Elmore and Ms. Sarah Lupis	Technician, monitoring, data management, GIS database	UDWR Conservation Program Technician, M.S.

Budget – Implementation Phase FY 2005-2015 (Estimated $6 million over 10 years)

Area	**Project Type ***	**Estimated Annual Funding**	**Federal Programs****	**State Programs**	**Other Program**
Parker Mountain	G, M, P, A, F, C, RS,	$90,000	EQIP, WHIP, WS USFS/BLM Challenge Grants	LIP Endangered Species Fund Utah Legislature, SITLA	Environmental Defense, Grazing Association
San Juan County	G, M, P, PJ, F, SP, RS, W, B, E	$90,000	CRP, WHIP, WS	LIP, Endangered Species Funds	Nature Conservancy, Livestock Producers, Sportsmen, Oil and Gas
Strawberry Valley	G, P, FM, B, E, T	$80,000	WHIP, WS	LIP	Friends of Strawberry, Land developers
Southwest Desert	G, M, P, FM, PJ, B, F, RS	$30,000	WS, WHIP, USFS/BLM Challenge Grants	LIP	Grazing Association
Cache-Rich County	G, P, PJ, RS, FM, F, W, E, B, C, M	$40,000	WHIP, EQIP, BLM Challenge Grants, WS	LIP	Nature Conservancy, Livestock producers Foundations, land developers

West Desert	G, M, P, PJ, C, RS, F, W, B	$50,000	BLM Challenge Grants	LIP	Livestock producers, Tribe
Color Country	G, P, PJ, M, C, W, F, B	$50,000	WHIP, EQIP, WS	LIP	Livestock producers, Oil and Gas
Uintah Basin	G, M, P, PJ, FM, C, F, W	$60,000	WHIP, EQIP, WS, BLM/USFS Challenge Grant	LIP	Livestock producers, Oil and Gas, Tribe, land developers
Box Elder	G, M, P, PJ, C, RS, F, W, B	$50,000	WHIP, EQIP, WS, BLM Challenge Grant	LIP	Livestock producers, land developers
North-Central Valley	G, M, P, PJ, C, SP, RS, F, T, W,	$30,000	WHIP, EQIP, WS	LIP	Livestock producers, land developers
East Manti-Carbon	G, M, P, PJ, C, SP, RS, F, T, W	$30000	WHIP, EQIP, WS	LIP	Livestock producers, Coal, Oil and Gas,

* G = grazing management, M = mechanical treatment of sagebrush, P = predation management, A = aspen rejuvenation, PJ = pinion/juniper encroachment, FM = fire management, C = chemical treatment sagebrush, SP = sagebrush planting, RS = range reseeding, F = fencing, T = translocation of sage-grouse, W = water developments, E = conservation easements, and B = buffer areas.

** USDA Wildlife Services will be providing predation management