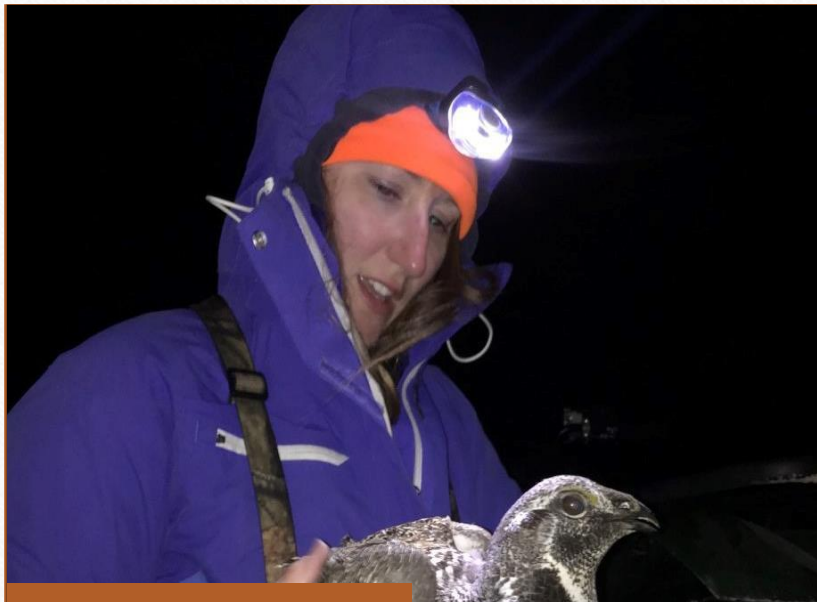


Utah Community-Based Conservation Program  
Adaptive Resource Management/Sage-Grouse Local Working groups

2021-2022 Report- “Celebrating 25 years of community engagement”



*Utah's*  
**Community-Based**  
*Conservation*  
*Program*



## Introduction

The Community-Based Conservation Program, through which Utah's Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) groups are facilitated, turns 25 this year. This report highlights current successes across the state of Utah as the groups, also known as sage-grouse local working groups (LWGs), continue their work through partnerships, research involvement at the local level, providing opportunities for joint learning, planning, and providing feedback and information sharing opportunities during public policy development and decision making. We highlight many of those efforts here, as well as providing a 25-year retrospective on the work done through these groups over the past two and half decades.

## Local Working Group QUICK FACTS

**10** current local working groups

**11** SGMA's

**8 - 25** people attending per meeting

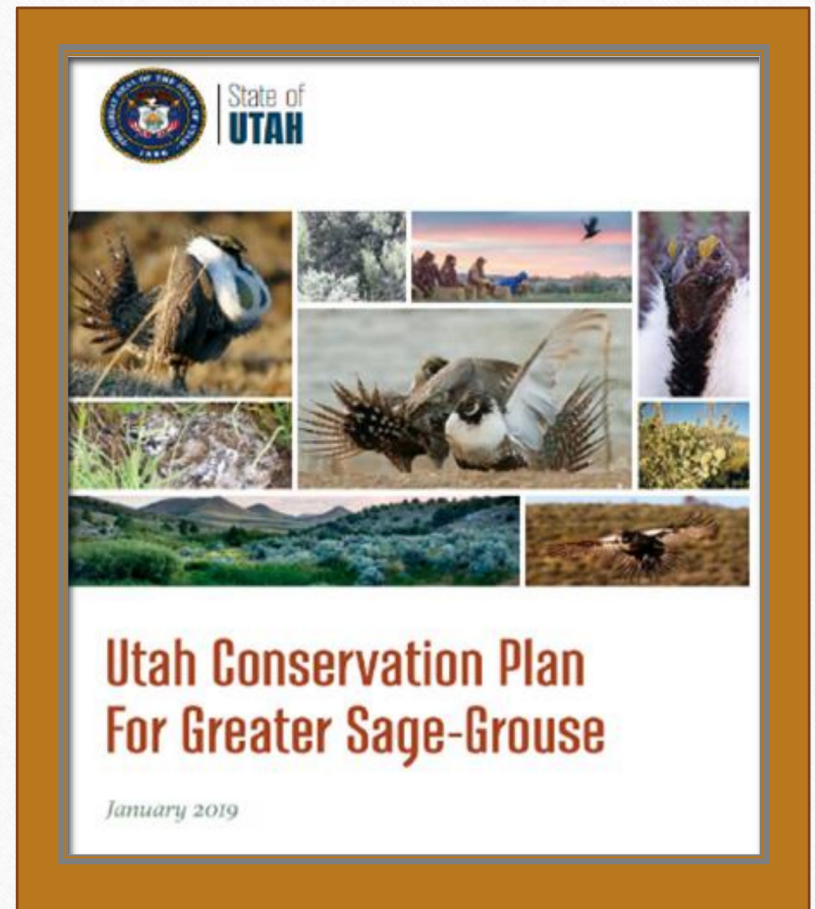
**57 - 130** people on individual groups' email lists

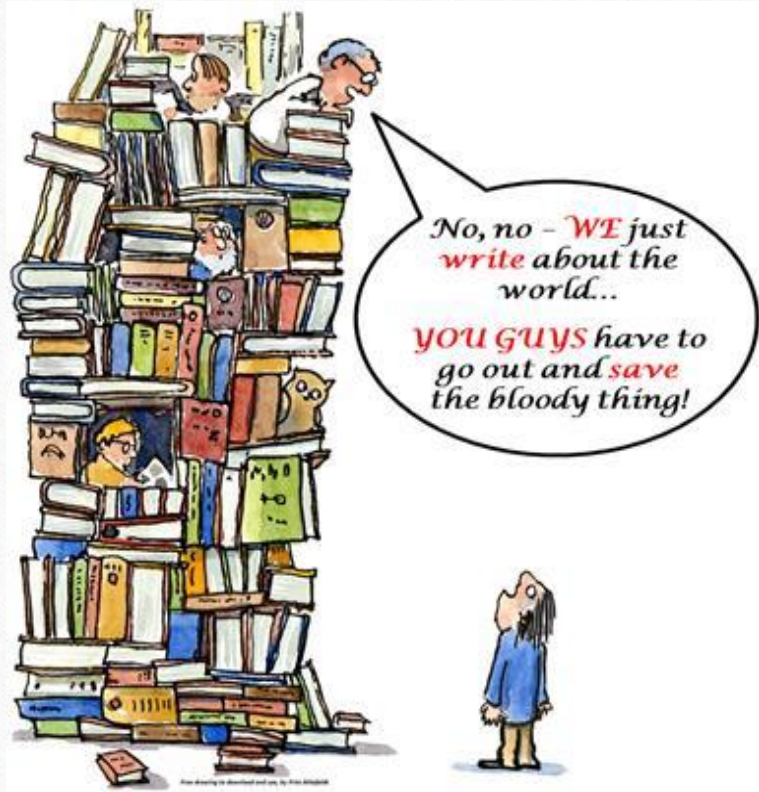
**578** total individuals regularly informed via email

**11** graduate students involved in research with LWGs

In January 1997, Dean Mitchell, DWR, and Terry Messmer, USU extension wildlife specialist, were invited, by Verl Bagley, USU Wayne, and Piute County Extension Agent to meet with the Parker Grazing Association. Grazing association members were concerned about the status of sage-grouse on Parker Mountain and wanted to know more about what they could do. The Association provided a \$3,000 check to purchase the first radio collars deployed on sage-grouse on Parker Mountain. In the 25 years that followed this partnership scenario and community, the connection was replicated 10 times under the Utah Community-based Conservation Program (CBCP) motto “if it’s not good for our communities, it’s not good for wildlife.” The CBCP solidified a role for local communities in developing policies to guide the management of western working landscapes. Concomitantly, the knowledge and values of the affected local communities, and the science and information provided through stakeholder engagement, were increasingly valued by federal and state agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations.

The CBCP process provided the scientific foundation for Utah’s 2019 Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy and BLM and USFS revised resource and land-use management plans. These Plans converged around the CBCP local working group science; the science which was made possible by the sweat equity and resources of local communities, and which reflected local knowledge and the commitment of the partners to the role of community and voluntary incentives in conservation. In May 2019, Utah Governor Gary H. Herbert signed an Executive Order to fully implement “their” Plan.





Each local working group is unique in that they are locally led and adapted to local needs and situations. They unilaterally realized they needed better information to guide their conservation actions. The phrase "best available science" to them meant information used to regulate their livelihoods. Many perceived that others were using science to force a new vision on the west - a vision that did not include them. These perceptions were fueled by the failure of the scientific community to more fully engage stakeholders in the discovery process.

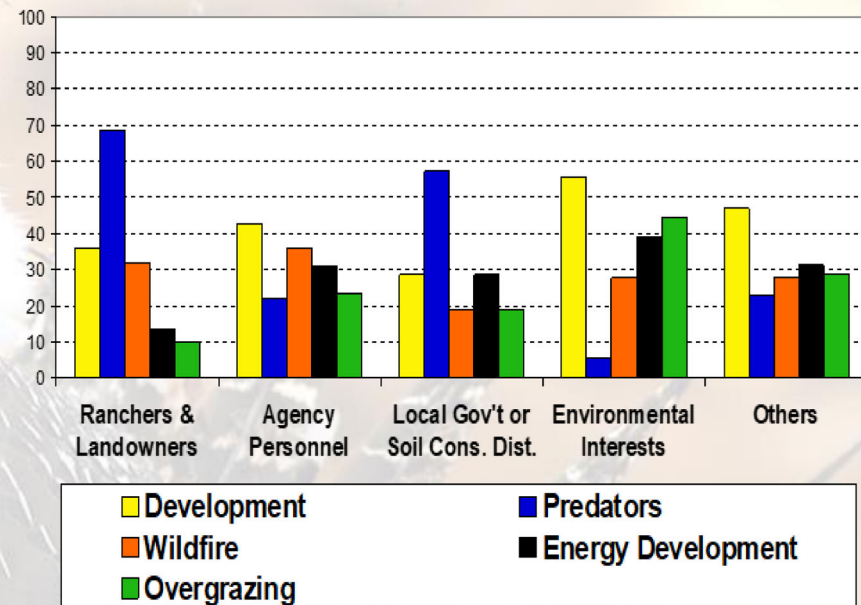
Where there is controversy regarding what constitutes conservation, there are strong stakeholder values. The typical response of the scientific community to mitigate controversy has been "we need more science." However, because stakeholder's values differ, more science may only increase the polarization.

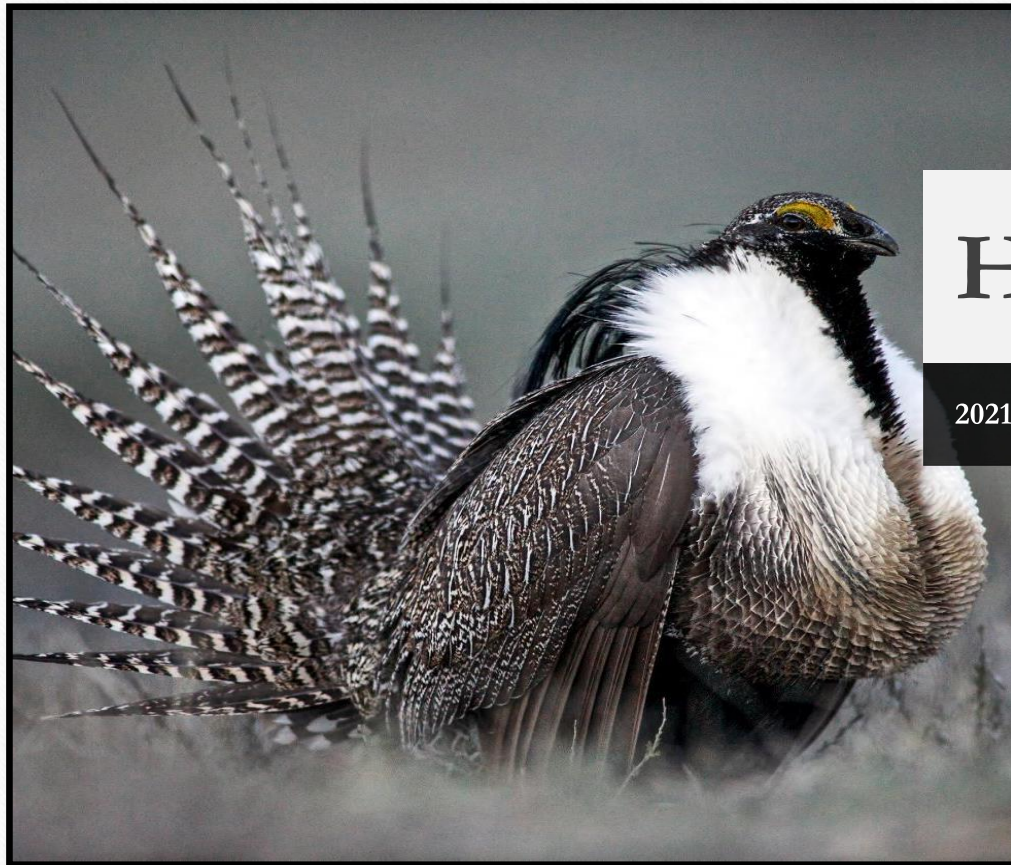
Building trust requires all stakeholders to be fully engaged in processes committed equally to learning about each other and the landscapes while they are actively managing them. When stakeholders are forced to make a choice between taking care of their livelihoods or participating in a meeting about conservation, the livelihood always wins.

Stakeholder perceptions and knowledge of what constitutes a sage-grouse conservation threat depend on perspectives, experiences, and values.

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Percent Citing Factor as "Serious Threat" to Sage-Grouse (by Type of Participant)





# Highlighted Success

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Local working groups focus on different issues each year as issues arise, both locally and nationally. This past year, as we emerged from many of the direct impacts of the pandemic, groups began picking up efforts delayed by the pandemic, such as strategic planning, new research endeavors, and commenting on statewide BLM sage-grouse policy.

- This year has seen a tremendous amount of staffing turnover, including many retirements, in federal and state agencies and other partner organizations. The ongoing LWG process provides an easy forum for individuals new to their positions to engage with, and carry on, partnerships that might otherwise be lost. With introductions beginning each meeting, everyone has a chance to connect new names and faces with positions vacated during the pandemic. From local Forest Service and DWR biologists to USU County Extension agents and state-level coordinators, LWGs provide a critical forum to keep partnership momentum alive. In the Morgan-Summit (MSARM) group, for example, there have been multiple retirements and new hires, and the hybrid meeting in April 2022 allowed for multiple introductions of new personnel. This has been true across nearly every LWG.
- Hybrid meeting formats have allowed greater participation by both local and statewide partners. Local individuals can gather in person, while statewide representatives can avoid significant travel time and cost by attending remotely. This allows more groups to have individual presentations and connect directly with state-level agency personnel, while still focusing the conversation on local needs.

## Partner Engagement and Empowerment

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## Partner Engagement and Empowerment cont....

### PARM

PARM members proposed a large sagebrush treatment project over multiple-year phases that will begin in 2022. Past research has demonstrated the benefits of Spike treatment, if designed appropriately, to benefit sage-grouse. Vegetation response to these treatment areas can also benefit livestock and other wildlife species. While the DWR is heading up this effort, the SITLA manager, livestock producers, and federal agencies have also provided considerable input into the process and have coordinated additional management projects on Parker Mountain. PARM has always provided a place for multiple partners to come together and collaborate with each other to provide natural resource management in the area.

### LWGs

LWGs tours provide a great opportunity for partners to share on-the-ground knowledge. For example, during the Carbon LWGs summer field tour in 2021, Jim Spencer, a biologist with NRCS, provided an impromptu lesson to other agencies and local ranch managers on how to identify and avert potential erosion problem areas in sagebrush meadows.

LWGs provide a space for discussions about potential partnership efforts. Stemming from discussions in 2021 at the MSARM group zoom meetings, local USU Extension staff and the local watershed coordinator led a multi-partner effort to provide private landowners across Morgan, Weber, and Summit counties the opportunity to learn about beaver dam analogs (BDAs) as a way to improve riparian health and forage availability later into the summer. Over 100 people attended the event.

In just one group – the West Desert group that covers the Sheeprocks and Ibapah SGMAs – the list of partners who have been part of the group in recent years include:

- 5 state agencies
- 7 federal agencies
- 3 corporate entities (not including ranching operations)
- 3 universities
- 2 counties
- 1 tribe
- 4 nonprofit organizations
- 2 conservation districts
- Over a dozen private landowners and ranchers





## Local Information Needs Driving Research

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Over the years, questions asked by local working group members have led directly to research projects through both USU and BYU. This has continued in several areas of the state.

Within Rich County, the Three Creeks Project has been approved and implementation has begun. Dr. Terry Messmer and his graduate students have been studying the sage-grouse population in Rich County for several years now. Being able to monitor any changes to the sage-grouse population, their response to the implementation of new grazing regimes, and changes in habitat will provide much-needed information for future management of sage-grouse in Rich County and elsewhere.

In the West Desert, a multi-year Ph.D. project included research on sage-grouse translocations, population dynamics, recreation, predation, and more. The group has been kept apprised of progress, and at times even assisted in the research activities. In 2021-22, the final results have been presented to the group as they become available.

In southern Utah, the local working groups have been conducting research on the southern edge of sage-grouse distribution since 2013. In fact, research around Panguitch was the first to use satellite GPS transmitters on sage-grouse in Utah. The two working groups in southern Utah have determined micro-scale habitat selection in response to heat stress, as well as sage-grouse response to treatments in each valley from Steptoe, Nevada to Sink Valley in Kane County, Utah.

# Opportunities for learning and understanding

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## *Opportunities for learning and understanding*

There is always more to learn: about sage-grouse, about other components of the natural systems they are part of, and about the policy environment that influences their management. LWGs provide a venue for presentations, discussions, and a better understanding of local needs. Example abound:

- In the MSARM group, the Summit Land Conservancy has been proactive in working sage-grouse conservation measures into easement documents. Conversations at meetings allowed them to assess the feasibility of incorporating, or not, certain management stipulations into those plans. Their involvement in the LWG allows sage-grouse management information to reach a wider audience of non-agricultural, conservation-minded landowners in the area.
- In June of 2021 the Rich County CRM combined efforts with Utah’s Chapter of the Society for Range Management for a field tour. All participants toured the management areas within Rich County and were able to consider forest and sagebrush management, along with riparian management. The partners that have monitored the effects of past management were able to share their results with both local partners within the Rich County CRM, but also SRM members attending from across Utah. These combined tours provide a unique learning experience for multiple entities while looking at the very resources being managed.
- In the Carbon and Uintah LWGs, the proposed Uinta Basin Railway has been an ongoing topic of consideration. PLPCO and DWR have been critical partners in keeping both groups up to speed with updates on planning processes, legal challenges, and progress toward mitigation planning. With the ever-evolving situation, regular updates have been helpful for many partners in the region.

- BYU graduate students and professors have been involved in many projects over the years. During 2021-22, both the Strawberry and West Desert meetings included presentations from BYU researchers, including a historical retrospective in Strawberry that was especially appreciated by newer members of the group. The West Desert group heard presentations on graduate student research on grouse in Strawberry and grouse-horse research in the West Desert.

- Hydrology research in the Box Elder and West Desert areas, conducted by Utah Geologic Survey, has helped those LWGs improve their understanding of how hydrology impacts the larger systems that range management and sage-grouse management depend on, and how habitat project and other factors influence hydrology in SGMAs.

- As part of a collaboration between USU and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, we combined data in Ely, Nevada with 8 years of GPS telemetry data from the Southwest Desert and Color Country working groups to determine how sage-grouse select habitat to respond to thermal stress along their southern distribution margin. These data also illustrated the different factors that influence sage-grouse decisions from valley to valley, and also between this population and interior populations.

- Each year, thousands of acres of trees are removed in an attempt to create a sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat. In 2005, we began researching grouse response to a tree removal project in the Panguitch SGMA. In 2020, we returned to the site to gather information as to the response of vegetation 15 years after the treatment, and the sage-grouse use of these past treated areas. This information will be instrumental in helping to assess other past projects.



Cont...Opportunities for learning and understanding

## Supporting planning and innovation

Each LWG responds to local needs and timelines, so there are often planning processes happening in several groups. In this reporting period, both the West Box Elder and Rich County CRM groups made progress on planning.

The *Rich County CRM* is working on a strategic plan for the group as an update to the original plan. While the efforts are still underway, this has given the group a chance to step back and have input from all partners within the group to help prioritize and shape our approach to natural resource management and coordination. We anticipate having the plan completed by 2023.

The *West Box Elder* group, a Coordinated Resource Management group with a considerably broader focus than just sage-grouse, picked up its strategic planning process again in 2021 and 2022. Currently, several subcommittees, headed by local ranchers are working to develop objectives in areas such as local infrastructure needs, range and wildlife concerns, water needs, fire prevention and management, and other topics.

Members from several different local working groups and agencies are working together to support a future workshop on wet meadow restoration techniques, to help in Utah. Identifying areas appropriate for hands-on training presented by the Intermountain West Joint venture (IWJV), as well as working to drive local interest in the need for training in these techniques, spans numerous LWGs.



## A Utah Community-based Conservation Sage-grouse Chronology

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**1996** - Organizational meeting for Gunnison sage-grouse local working group – Monticello, Utah

**1997** – Parker Mountain Grazing Association provides \$3,000 radio collars to deploy on Parker Mountain. Gunnison sage-grouse local working group begins meeting regularly and starts writing local conservation plans.

**1998** – Joel Flory was recruited as the first USU graduate student. Parker Mountain Adaptive Management Resources Sage-grouse Local Working Group organized and hosted the first summer field tour

**1999** – Parker Mountain Adaptive Resources (PARM) Local Working Group begins to meet quarterly. Forty-three male Gunnison sage-grouse were counted on 4 leks in San Juan County.

**2000** - Jay Tanner hosts an organizational meeting for a West Box Elder local working group in Grouse Creek, Utah. The USFWS receives the first petitions to list Gunnison sage-grouse for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Sarah Lupis, recruited as a graduate student to study Gunnison sage-grouse ecology, radio-marks 8 males and 6 female grouse. San Juan County Gunnison Sage-grouse Conservation Plan completed.

**2001** – Todd Black was hired as CBCP local working group facilitator. Dean Mitchell initiates the process to write a Utah sage-grouse conservation plan. Renee Chi was recruited to study sage-grouse ecology and responses to small-scale habitat treatments on Parker Mountain. USFWS receives more petitions to list greater sage-grouse for ESA protection.

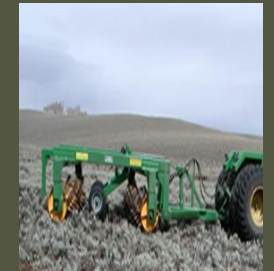
**2002** - Box Elder County Adaptive Resources (BARM) Management Sage-grouse local working group is organized. Utah Wildlife Board approves Utah’s Sage-grouse Strategic Management Plan. Thirty-five Gunnison sage-grouse males counted on leks in San Juan County. Rich County Coordinated Resources Management (CRM) is chartered by Rich County Commission.

# A Utah Community-based Conservation Sage-grouse Chronology

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- **2003** - Utah Gunnison sage-grouse Conservation Plan Update Published. Jan Kneer was recruited as a graduate student to study sage-grouse in West Box Elder County. Sharon Ward was recruited to study Gunnison sage-grouse in San Juan County. Dave Dahlgren was recruited as a graduate student to continue sage-grouse habitat-use studies on Parker Mountain.
- **2004** - Color Country Adaptive Resources Management (CCARM) and Southwest Desert (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Groups organized by Todd Black and Nicki Frey.

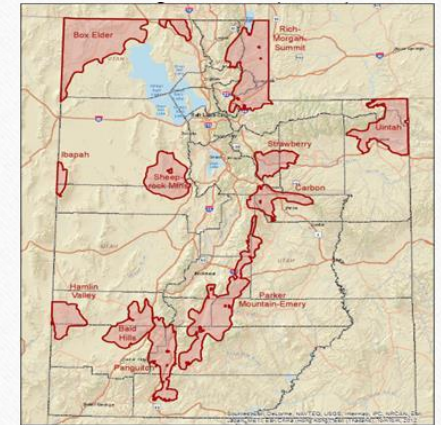
The Parker Mountain local working group identified poor brood habitat as a sage-grouse limiting factor. They initiated a small-scale experimental management project using the Dixie harrow, Lawson aerator, and Spike treatments to open dense sagebrush canopy. Their results suggested a brood-rearing habitat management strategy that, when shrub canopy limits the understory, creates a mosaic of small-scale treatments that maximized edge, creating resource patches that are particularly attractive to sage-grouse broods. (1999)



**2005**- First Utah Community-based Conservation Program Quarterly Newsletter published. Sarah Lupis hired USU local working group facilitator. Castle Country Adaptive Resources (CaCoARM) Management Sage-grouse local working group organized. Morgan-Summit (MSARM) Adaptive Resources Management Sage-grouse local working group organized by Sarah Lupis. Rich CRM Sage-grouse Subcommittee organized and facilitated by Sarah Lupis. The USFWS makes an initial determination that the greater sage-grouse does not warrant listing under the ESA. This finding is later reversed by court order and USFWS is directed to revisit this initial decision. In 2005 Rachel Curtis was hired as a student intern to study the grouse response to pinyon-juniper removal in Alton/Sink Valley in the Panguitch SGMA

**2006** – Peer-reviewed papers published in Wildlife Society Bulletin documenting Gunnison sage-grouse use of agricultural lands in San Juan County enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and greater sage-grouse responses to managing sagebrush on the Parker Mountain. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies publishes the range-wide strategy for conserving the greater sage-grouse. Utah State University (USU) entered into a 5-year agreement with the DWR to support the CBCP. Phoebe Prather is recruited to study Gunnison sage-grouse response to management in San Juan County and the effectiveness of power line raptor perch deterrents. Dave Dahlgren places transmitters on sage-grouse chicks on Parker Mountain to study their survival. Leah Smith is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in UBARM.

**2007** - Conservation plans published for all Utah local working groups. 2006-2007 Utah Adaptive Resources Sage-grouse Local Working Group (LWGs) Accomplishment Report released. Eric Thacker is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to sagebrush management in Grouse Creek. Chris Perkins is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Carbon and Emery County.



The scope and boundaries of the local working groups changed over time to reflect new knowledge. Today they accommodate 7.8 million acres of the best available sage-grouse habitat in 11 sage-grouse management areas.

## A Utah Community-based Conservation Sage-grouse Chronology

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# A Utah Community-based Conservation Sage-grouse Chronology

**2008** – Utah LWGs continue to implement and monitor their conservation plan. The LWGs include representatives from state and federal agencies of land and resource management, non-governmental organizations, private industry, local communities, and private landowners. Michael Guttery is recruited to evaluate sage-grouse responses to strategic grazing by sheep on Parker Mountain.

**2009** – The 2002 Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse is revised by DWR and approved by the Utah Wildlife Board. Lorien Belton completes a range-wide needs assessment of all sage-grouse local working groups. Lorien is recruited to replace Sarah Lupis as a CBCP facilitator. Charles Caudill is recruited to study sage-grouse juvenile survival on the PARM. Natasha Gruber is recruited to study sage-grouse translocations on Anthro Mountain.

**2010** – USFWS announces the listing of greater sage-grouse for ESA protection warranted but precluded. The USFWS identified the primary threat as the loss and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat, coupled with a lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect habitat across the bird's range. Natural Resources Conservation Service launches the Sage-Grouse Initiative to conserve sage-grouse habitat on working lands. Utah Community-based Conservation Program was recognized by the Utah Center for Rural Life at Southern Utah University with a 2010 Utah Rural Honors Award. The award was presented by Gov. Gary Herbert in recognition of the unique partnership for engaging Utah rural communities in proactive efforts to conserve sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species. Cheyenne Burnett was recruited to study the effects of wildfire in the Bald Hills. Heather McPherron was recruited to study grouse use of Hamlin Valley and the effects of fences on grouse movements.

**2011** - The BLM issues the National Technical Team report to provide an initial guide for management actions and policies in developing Resource Management Plans (RMPs) to conserve the greater sage-grouse on BLM-administered lands.

Orrin Duvuvuei is recruited to continue sage-grouse translocation studies on Anthro Mountain. Seth Dettenmaier is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to grazing in Rich County.

**2012** - Governor Gary Herbert of Utah established a committee of stakeholders and agencies to establish a sage grouse management plan. Casey Cardinal is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in the RCRM and Bear Lake Plateau. Stephanie Graham is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to firebreak management in Grouse Creek. Avery Cooke and Brian Wing are recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Box Elder County. Nicki Frey accepted an appointment as Extension Assistant Professor with the USU Extension Service. In addition to new roles and responsibilities, Nicki continued to facilitate the southern Utah LWGs

**2013** - Gov. Gary R. Herbert authorized the Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Utah. It was a detailed, scientifically based plan that established goals and measurable objectives for the conservation of greater sage-grouse in Utah. As a result of that plan and other ongoing conservation efforts — including similar state-led efforts across the West. The BLM and USFS release draft land management plans for federal lands in 10 western states. The USFWS releases the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report, which identifies key threats to remaining greater sage grouse populations across the range. Dave Dahlgren is recruited to replace Todd Black as a CBCP facilitator. Charlie Sanford is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to conifer removal in Box Elder County. Erica Hansen was recruited to study the effects of transmission line construction on grouse.



## A Utah Community-based Conservation Sage-grouse Chronology

**2014** - Congress passes a rider that prohibits USFWS from writing and issuing a proposed listing rule this fiscal year; however, the FWS is not prohibited from deciding whether ESA protection is still warranted or not by the court-ordered deadline. In February 2014, the CBCP organized and conducted a Utah Sage-grouse Summit. Hosted by the DWR in their main auditorium, the Summit drew over 250 participants on-site and another 80 participants range-wide for two days to discuss important conservation issues. The purpose of the Summit was to enhance participants' understanding of the Utah Plan and more specifically the roles they could play in its successful implementation. The Utah CBCP also coordinated the International Sage-grouse Forum which will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from November 13-14, 2014. Over 350 participants from 20 states and three Canadian provinces participated in the forum. In addition, over 1000 people joined the Forum online or viewed the presentations.

**2015** – USFWS found that sage-grouse did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. to review the 2013 Plan. This process ensured that Utah's conservation efforts continue to incorporate recent findings, as well as new and best-available science, data, and knowledge. The CBCP was recognized in 2015 with the Award of Excellence presented by the Western Extension Directors Association for program sustainment and impact. The BLM and the USFS signed the Record of Decision amending Resource Management and Land Use Plans to incorporate actions to migrate sage-grouse conservation threats on public lands. Justin Small is recruited to study greater sage-grouse response to conifer removal as mitigation for anthropogenic disturbances. Brandon Flack is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Morgan and Summit County (MSARM).

**2016** – Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah (Figure 6). The CBCP also developed and released an app based on the publication entitled “Sage-grouse Habitat in Utah: A Guide for Landowners and Managers.” The Wildlife Society recognized the CBCP conservation impacts with its Group Achievement Award.

**2017** – BLM and USFS begin scoping process to revise land and resource management plans. The CBCP conducted a needs assessment of Utah LWG participants. Overall, respondents valued the LWG process and desired more information about sage-grouse responses to management. Over 85% of the respondents liked the idea of scheduling another Utah sage-grouse summit to address LWG participant information needs. The CBCP worked with Utah partners to develop better maps of sage-grouse seasonal habitats in Utah. The maps were updated in 2019, with location data obtained from global positioning satellite transmitters deployed on sage-grouse throughout Utah. Michel Kohl was recruited as a post-doctoral fellow to complete the seasonal maps. Melissa Chelak is recruited to study sage-grouse translocations in WDARM, the Sheeprocks Sage-grouse Management Area. Wayne Smith is recruited to continue sage-grouse responses to grazing studies in Rich County. Aidan Beers was recruited to begin an assessment of 9 years of GPS telemetry data to model grouse use of vegetation treatments along the southern range margin, and response to thermal stress.

**2018** – Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office coordinated planning efforts to revise Utah's Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy.

**2019** – Utah Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy revised plan published by Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office. Governor Gary Herbert signs Executive Order implementing the plan [https://wildlife.utah.gov/sage-grouse/Utah\\_Greater\\_Sage-grouse\\_Plan.pdf](https://wildlife.utah.gov/sage-grouse/Utah_Greater_Sage-grouse_Plan.pdf). The CBCP and its partners hosted Utah All Lands-All Hands Summit to celebrate and recognize the efforts and history of Utah’s wildlife management conservation partners. Hailey Wayment is recruited to continue sage-grouse and livestock grazing studies in Rich County.

**2020** - Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CBCP followed State of Utah guidelines and implemented a virtual LWG meeting format. The Covid-19 pandemic created innumerable complexities, and no doubt slowed some collaborative work due to the difficulty of working in person on planning, particularly at the outset. However, shifting to a virtual format for the year also came with some clear cost savings, shared across the many agencies and individuals who participated. Simona Picardi was recruited as a post-doctoral fellow to continue to support the sage-grouse seasonal mapping project and partner data access needs. USU, BYU, and DWR enter into a cooperative agreement to create and maintain a sage-grouse data repository. This database contains over 800,000 sage-grouse locations. Codi Bracken is recruited to complete sage-grouse and livestock grazing research in Rich County. Ben Donnelly was recruited to revisit the habitat treatment study conducted in Alton in 2005-2009, to determine the long-term success of vegetation treatments for grouse. Zoe Moffett was recruited to study raven predation within habitat treatments for grouse.



The CBCP collaborated with WAFWA and the Great Basin Consortium to host the 2016 Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Conference which was held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from February 22-26, 2016. This Conference drew over 500 participants on-site and another 300 online participants.

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# CBCP

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