

THE COMMUNICATOR

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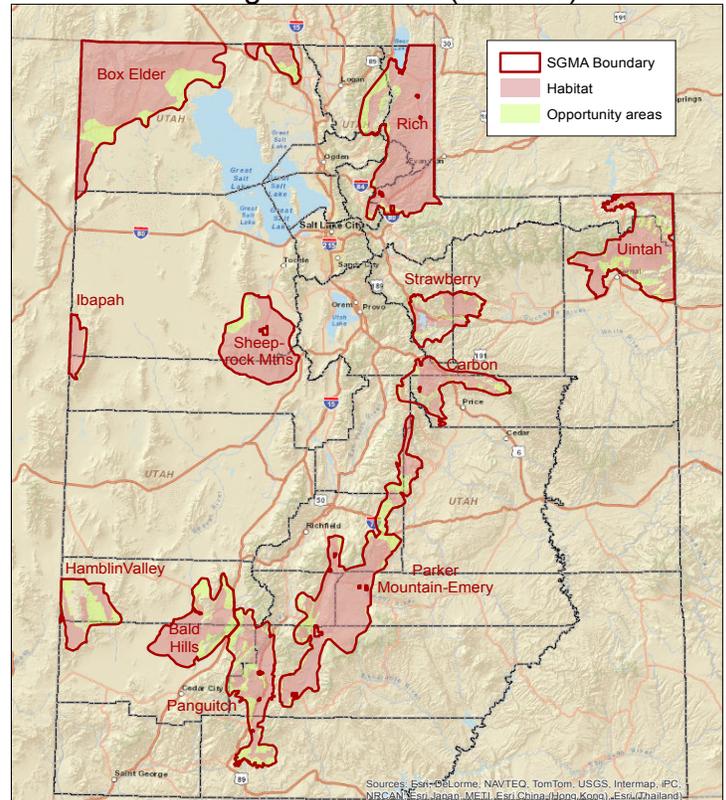
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UTAH GOVERNOR'S PLAN FOR CONSERVING GREATER SAGE-GROUSE: MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; sage-grouse) as a candidate species for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The USFWS based their decision on continued habitat fragmentation and inadequate regulatory mechanisms at the local, state, and federal levels to curtail continued habitat loss or fragmentation. Because sage-grouse are landscape species that inhabit lands owned and managed by multiple jurisdictions, the preservation of large tracts of suitable habitat and the management of these areas to maintain connectivity between populations will be paramount to their conservation.

Utah Sage-grouse Management Areas (SGMAs)
DRAFT Nov 5, 2012



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Within Utah, Governor Gary H. Herbert chartered a Task Force (TF) to develop recommendations for a statewide plan for the conservation of sage-grouse, while also providing for the continued economic health of the state. The TF met in open, public meetings from late February to October of 2012. In addition to the recommendations of the TF, the Governor's Office, through the Public Lands Policy Coordination Office (PLPCO), received comments and advice from other interested parties, including industry, environmental organizations, and county commissioners.

The Strategic Plan for the Conservation of Greater Sage-grouse (Plan) was released for implementation in April 2013. This Plan protects high-



Dave Dahlgren with daughter, Maylee. Photo courtesy of Dave Dahlgren.

This is a re-introduction for Dave Dahlgren. Dave “grew up” as a member of the Utah State University Extension Messmer lab completing both master’s and doctorate degrees, and a post doctoral fellowship, researching the effects of management actions on sage-grouse habitat and ecology. For the last three years he has been working for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism as their upland game specialist, a statewide coordinator position. Pheasants, quail, and prairie chicken management and research have been the primary focus of this position. Dave also fulfilled the duties of an Area Biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The time in Kansas has reemphasized for him the importance of local communities, private producers, and inter-agency coordination. Ultimately, his heart has never left the boomers (sage-grouse) of the wide open sagebrush of Utah nor the people involved. He is happy to be coming home. Since his graduate school days he has added a beautiful wife (Lacey), and two wonderful girls (Maylee – 4; and Adalou – 2). They also are expecting their third baby girl this September. It’s a tightrope balance of blaze orange and bird dogs with pink and princesses (though he maintains there is no evidence he has ever played with Barbies). Dave is excited to build on the solid foundation of those who have gone before on the Community Based Conservation Program (CBCP) team; to facilitate the Local Working Groups (LWGs) in these exciting times; to assist graduate students in their important projects; to become reacquainted with many of you; and to develop new relationships with the rest of you. Dave will join the CBCP team this July and will facilitate the Rich CRM, West Box Elder, and Parker Mountain LWGs. Please join us in welcoming him. Dave can be contacted at dkdbio@gmail.com.

BOX ELDER COUNTY HOSTS LOCAL EFFORT TO LAUNCH UTAH GOVERNORS’ SAGE-GROUSE PLAN



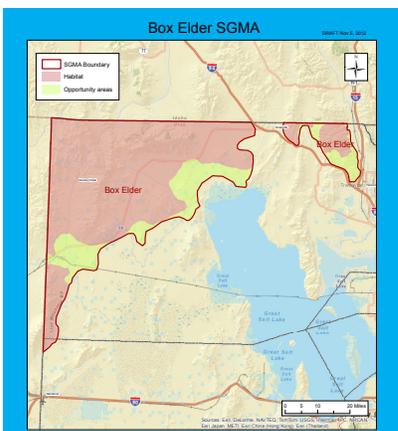
Photo courtesy of Todd Black.

On the evening of April 9, 2013, the historic Box Elder County courthouse was filled with representatives from government agencies, politicians, and interested individuals as West Box Elder County’s Coordinated Resource Management Group (WBECRM) presented Utah’s first pilot program for growing greater sage-grouse in the Grouse Creek Valley of western Box Elder County. The project plans to pinpoint several target concerns. Predator control will be a top priority, including the removal of ravens that destroy nests and eat grouse eggs. Elimination of invasive plants and animals as well as noxious weeds is another priority concern, particularly pinyon-juniper and cheatgrass invasions that have taken over valuable sagebrush habitat. Invasive plants often fuel wildfires that are especially dangerous and can quickly deplete acres of sage-grouse habitat. Reducing the number of catastrophic fires can protect both the birds and their environment. Critical areas have already been identified where firebreaks should be built to help keep large expansions of sagebrush from burning. Efforts to help protect sage-grouse are nothing new for the county. Landowners, both public and private, have already been at work removing pinyon-juniper trees and treating weed invasions.

Commissioner LuAnn Adams, who oversees public lands, has been a driving force in getting this program in place. “I think it is valuable for us as a county commission to be good stewards of the land,” she said. “We should try to improve our resources and make the land better.”

Kathleen Clarke, representing Governor Gary Herbert’s office as director of Public Lands, said the hard work demonstrated by Box Elder’s leadership in pushing forward with the state’s plan is commendable. “They are the first county to move into the implementation stage,” she said. State Representative Rhonda Rudd Menlove also offered her support on what she called a “critical issue that is rippling into grazing and into agriculture, key components in western Box Elder County.”

Continued on Page 3



Rich County through the Coordinated Resources Management (CRM) process has been involved in greater sage-grouse conservation for nearly a decade. The CRM process includes a sage-grouse conservation plan that has been aggressively implemented to restore thousands of acres of habitat as the county works to balance sage-grouse conservation with economic considerations.

To better assist Rich County, local landowners, state and federal land management agencies, the Rich County Board of Commissioners will be working to decide if recommendations should be made to revise or amend the County General Land Use Plan to implement regulatory and incentive actions designed to support and implement the Utah Governor's Plan. After a careful review and a thorough discussion, the Commissioners recommended that any changes/revisions/additions to the county's plan would be subject to and conditioned upon careful review and consideration of public comment. The Commissioners resolved to review the current Land Use plan to identify strategies and actions supportive of Greater sage-grouse and the Utah Plan. Specific actions include:

- 1) Review of the 2006 Greater sage-grouse local working group plan,
- 2) The 2013 Governors' Greater sage-grouse Plan, and
- 3) The 2013 Bureau of Land Management forthcoming Environmental Impact Statement and the alternatives for Greater sage-grouse management.

During this review, the Commission will:

- 1) Evaluate the CRM/local working group process to ensure its purpose and function is recognized by the County as the formal public land management action process.
- 2) Identify the total acres of "priority habitat" and "opportunity area" in the County.
- 3) Determine what new and permanent disturbances are and the amount or percentage of disturbance that should be allowed as well as how to avoid/allow/evaluate/mitigate these disturbances. Such disturbances include transmission lines, Right of Ways, mineral extraction, wind or solar energy development.
- 4) Determine effective use of fires to enhance sage-grouse habitat. Conversely, identify areas where fires are not beneficial and/or detrimental and identify appropriate means to deal with wildlife fires.
- 5) Determine if seasonal restrictions (dates) for landuse purposes need to be adopted to avoid disturbance to important sage-grouse leking, nesting, brooding, and wintering habitat areas.
- 6) Determine and identify effective methods to address predation concerns.
- 7) Determine the effectiveness of invasive weed management within sage-grouse habitats.
- 8) Determine appropriate OHV or other recreation uses and season restrictions within sage-grouse habitat areas.



Photo courtesy of Todd Black.

BOX ELDER COUNTY HOSTS LOCAL EFFORT, CONT.

She complimented the county and specifically the efforts of Adams. "The Utah Legislature appreciates what you are doing," she told the commission. "They like to see this growing from the grassroots."

The Box Elder Adaptive Resource Management local working group (now part of WBECRM) has been working to enhance the local sage-grouse environment for the past 10 years. The Grouse Creek Valley was selected for the pilot program because data for its existing sage-grouse population has already been collected by Utah State University researchers and others through efforts coordinated by the local working group. Putting the new project into action will now take joint cooperation from those entities represented through the WBECRM as they work to save the western bird. The County's pilot program is just one piece in the State of Utah's overall strategy plan.

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

GOSHUTE TRIBE HOSTS SAGE-GROUSE MEETING IN IBAPAH

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

This past April, the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management group (WDARM) met in Ibapah, hosted by the Goshute Tribe at their headquarters building. At least 30 people attended the meeting, including many tribal members, local ranchers, and representatives from local, state, and federal government. The group discussed opportunities for Utah-Nevada collaboration, the State of Utah sage-grouse conservation plan, and resources available and resources still needed. The minutes from the meeting can be found on www.utahcbcp.org.

In addition, several members of the local working group conducted lek counts before the meeting. Although the weather presented some challenges, the recent snowfall allowed us to locate the exact areas where a few males had been strutting. A local rancher in the group located sage-grouse scat indicating that a female had also likely been in the area. Although the group searched for sage-grouse feathers to contribute to the range-wide genetic study of sage-grouse, they did not find any that morning.

The local Natural Resources Conservation Service working group and the Shambip Conservation District also coordinated meetings in the same location, taking advantage of the opportunity to make travel and planning more efficient. The tribe generously provided food for both breakfast and lunch for the meeting attendees!



WDARM members search for feathers and other signs of sage-grouse on a lek near Ibapah. Photos courtesy of Lorien Belton.

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.

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www.utahcbcp.org

UTAH GOVERNOR'S SAGE-GROUSE PLAN, CONT.

quality habitat to support Utah's portion of the range-wide population of sage-grouse necessary to eliminate the need for the listing of the species under the ESA. The Plan identifies strategies to ameliorate the threats facing the sage-grouse while balancing the economic and social needs of the residents of Utah through a coordinated program that included voluntary incentive-based programs for private, local government, and Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration lands with reasonable and cooperative regulatory programs on other state and federally managed lands.

Utah State University Extension (USUEXT) through the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program (CBCP) and in partnership with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) began working with concerned Utah stakeholders in 1996 to organize community-based local sage-grouse working groups. Because of early and ongoing CBCP efforts, the State of Utah was fortunate to have a high level of knowledge about seasonal range, migration routes, and other factors known to be essential to maintenance of the species, all in the context of Utah's unique conditions. The Plan prioritizes conservation efforts in 12 Sage-grouse Management Areas (SGMA; Figure 1 on front page). Objectives of the Utah Plan include: 1) Sustain an average male lek count of 4300 males (based on a five-year rolling average on a minimum of 200 monitored leks) in the SGMAs, and increase the population of males to an average of 5000 (based on the same five-year rolling average on a minimum of 200 monitored leks.) within the SGMA, 2) Protect 10,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on private and SITLA lands annually through conservation covenants, leases, easements or other legal tools, with emphasis on the best-of-the-best populations, 3) Enhance a minimum of 25,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat in SGMAs annually, and 4) Increase the total amount of sage-grouse habitat acreage within SGMA by an average of 1% per year, through management actions focused on Opportunity Areas.

The CBCP will work with LWGs, Utah communities, and counties to develop, implement, document, and evaluate Plan conservation actions within the SGMAs.