

THE COMMUNICATOR

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF UTAH'S COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM



April 2014

Volume 10, Issue 2

UTAH SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT ESTABLISHES COMMON DIALOGUE AND SETS THE STAGE FOR A NATIONAL FORUM ON SAGE-GROUSE LOCAL WORKING GROUPS

Julene Reese and Mary-Ann Muffoletto, Utah State University

More than 250 participants attended the 2014 Utah Sage-grouse Summit held in Salt Lake City Feb. 18 and 19, with the preservation of the sage-grouse species in Utah as the topic of discussion. Another 80 participants joined in on-line, thanks to a live video cast.

The Summit served to establish a common dialogue and provided new information regarding the status of the sage-grouse species and the efforts of Utah partners to implement the Utah plan to conserve the species by addressing the threats identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in their 2010 decision to place greater sage-grouse on the Endangered Species Act candidate species list. The USFWS will decide in late 2015 whether to list the species or remove it from consideration.



Governor Gary Herbert gave the opening comments at Utah's Sage-grouse Summit. Governor Herbert thanked Summit participants for their efforts to achieve sage-grouse conservation through community action and encouraging them to sustain their efforts in these unprecedented times. Photo courtesy of Dennis Hinkamp.

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Utah Gov. Gary Herbert was the Summit keynote speaker. Gov. Herbert thanked the participants for their attendance and the work they have been doing over the past decade to balance species conservation with community and economic sustainability. He urged the participants to maintain their efforts and encouraged them to look for innovative solutions.

In addition to Herbert, speakers included elected officials representing Utah counties, private landowners, land managers, biologists, and researchers representing Utah's Local Working Groups and federal, state and private natural resource agencies. Representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the USFWS addressed Summit participants regarding the current status of the BLM and USFS resource and land use management plan amendments which were undertaken to provide more species conservation certainty.

Terry Messmer, USU Extension wildlife specialist and summit coordinator said the Summit provides a working template for the National Forum on Sage-grouse Local Working Groups, which will be held in Salt Lake City on November 12-13, 2014.

Messmer reported the results of a survey to the Western Association

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SCOTT CHEW RECEIVES CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University



The Utah Chapter of The Wildlife Society recently awarded Scott Chew, a landowner and sheep rancher in the Uintah Basin, a Conservation Achievement Award.

Scott is co-chair of the sage-grouse local working group (the Uintah Basin Adaptive Resource Management group, or UBARM), and has been very active in sage-grouse conservation efforts. After he saw the maps in the state sage-grouse plan, and participated in a discussion about the need to add fine-scale detail into them that would allow for project planning on the ground, Scott jumped right in and offered to do that mapping on Blue Mountain. He pulled together partners at the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to make sure he understood sage-grouse habitat requirements on a fine scale. Then, over the course of several months, he created a map of Blue Mountain that included habitat conditions from a sage-grouse perspective. The map also documented both current and former wet meadows, providing a valuable lens through which to understand changes on the mountain in sage-grouse habitat over time.

In September of 2013, Scott hosted a field tour for the sage-grouse group on Blue Mountain to explain the mapping work and jointly brainstorm some project ideas. The tour brought together Colorado and Utah agency partners, many of whom had not previously met. Then, Scott sat down again with NRCS and DWR to design a suite of strategic projects for sage-grouse on Blue Mountain.

At subsequent UBARM sage-grouse meetings, Scott has presented his projects. He has also taken the presentation to other levels of government within Utah, and he is a voice for proactive conservation among the local landowners and ranchers in the Uintah Basin. He is a strong proponent for reaching across jurisdictions to form partnerships and get things done that benefit both wildlife and local communities.

We commend Scott for his hard work and congratulate him on receiving a well-deserved award.

Scott Chew at the Blue Mountain Tour last September. Photo courtesy of Natasha Gruber.

UTAH SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT, CONT.

of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Sage-grouse Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) in mid March. The EOC is composed of the 11 western state wildlife agency directors, where sage-grouse populations exist, and federal partners.

Summit participants who responded to the survey reported that they found sessions more useful on how best to manage the species and its habitats, the effects of listing the species on current management and land uses, what constitutes disturbance and effective mitigation, and new and emerging research. A steering committee representing diverse interests has been formed and is using Summit participant feed back to develop the program for the national forum.

For those who were unable to attend the event, recordings of the Summit are available at the following sites.

Feb. 18 recordings include: Summit Overview, Purpose and Welcome by Messmer, Sheehan and Gov. Herbert, <https://connect.usu.edu/p2z1syylbw7/>; Making Conservation Count by Ellis and Crist, <https://connect.usu.edu/p6whf1gqhoa/>; BLM Resource Management Planning and USFS Land Use Plans by Palma, Bahr and Iverson, <https://connect.usu.edu/p9hpkmb2i2/>; Utah Plan Topic 1: Habitat Management Strategies by Frey, Clark, Vernon and Burns, <https://connect.usu.edu/p7wa9st1w0k/>; Utah Plan Topic 2: A Basis for the SGMAs by Robinson, Larson and Dahlgren, <https://connect.usu.edu/p9og01vsy72/>; and Utah Plan Topic 3: What is “Protecting the Best of the Best?” by Ellis and Burns, <https://connect.usu.edu/p8kqryn1eg/>.

Feb. 19 recordings include: Mitigation and Disturbance by Messmer, Ginger, Clark, Ramsey and Crist, <https://connect.usu.edu/p5ovt-mcpxd9/>; and Management With or Without a Listing: Process and What to Expect by Messmer, Crist, Sheehan, Palma, Iverson and Burns, <https://connect.usu.edu/p7qm3i2eg2h/>.

For further information on the Utah Sage-grouse Summit, contact Messmer at 435-797-3975 or terry.messmer@usu.edu.

MORE THAN 100 MILES OF FENCE IN UTAH TO BE MARKED TO REDUCE SAGE-GROUSE COLLISIONS

By Casey Burns, NRCS Utah State Biologist

In 2014, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Utah is striving to work with landowners and partners to mark over 100 miles of fences in high sage-grouse collision risk areas around the state. In high-risk areas near leks, up to 1.2 sage-grouse collisions per mile of fence have been documented. Studies have shown up to an 83 percent reduction in sage-grouse collisions following the marking of fences. Fence marking may also reduce collision and entanglement risk of a variety of other wildlife species. This technique is increasing being applied by landowners and land managers as a simple way to reduce a threat to sage-grouse.

Fence marking is done with 3-inch pieces of vinyl undersill house siding clipped onto wire fences. The vinyl undersill is durable and difficult to remove once clipped on. NRCS has acquired 250,000 fence markers, which is enough to mark approximately 128 miles of fencing with a single row of markers. Some fences in areas of lower stature vegetation may need markers on the top and third wires. Ninety percent of the markers are white, and 10 percent are maroon. The maroon markers are intended for areas where winter collision is a concern and the markers may need to stand out in the snow.

NRCS is looking for volunteer efforts to be coordinated through local NRCS offices. Markers have been allocated throughout the state and are primarily intended for use on private land. Fences to be marked should be in high sage-grouse collision risk areas, as designated by the NRCS Fence Collision Risk Tool GIS layer, or in areas known by local biologists to be high-risk. Fences should be necessary for continued management and in good repair. Written permission for access and fence marking must be obtained from the landowner if marking is to be done by outside parties. NRCS will track all marking efforts for a 2014 year-end report.

On March 22, 2014, a volunteer fence marking project was coordinated by Natasha Gruber, Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Biologist with NRCS/Mule Deer Foundation, in Emma Park, Utah. Participants included six people from USU-Price Wildlife Club, 39 local Boy Scouts, and a Dedicated Hunter. Participants split into groups and divided up the fence markers into 5-gallon buckets and marked 10 miles of high collision risk fence in one day.

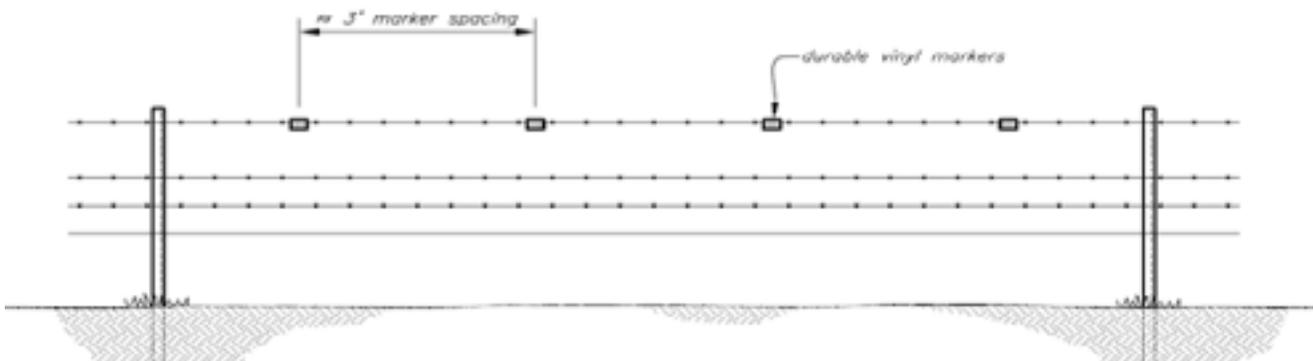
All fence markers are first come, first served, as long as the project areas meet the criteria above. There is no cost for the fence markers. Please contact your local NRCS biologist or discuss potential projects at your Local Working Group meetings.



Sage-grouse photo courtesy of Jeremy R. Roberts. Photos showing fence markers and drawing courtesy of NRCS.



Sage-grouse collision with top wire of fence. Photo courtesy of BLM.



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

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WIN WITH WILDLIFE EDUCATION

By Nicki Frey, Utah State University



Austin Palmer, of Canyon View High School, and Dusty Hone, of Cedar High School, win second place. Photo courtesy of Austin Palmer.

In March, two Iron County students, Austin Palmer and Dusty Hone won second place at the State Agro-Science Fair competition in Logan, Utah. They presented their research on Greater Sage-grouse, conducted as part of the Wildlife Research Education Network.

The Wildlife Research Education Network (WREN) was developed to connect high school students to wildlife research and management on-going in their “backyards.” As part of the pilot of this program, I worked with Jon Burton, a science teacher at Canyon View High School. The classroom portion of WREN was conducted in November and December 2013. Through a four-class module, I taught Mr. Burton’s Agricultural Science class about wildlife ecology, Greater Sage-grouse ecology, and the basics of the scientific method. On their own, the students conducted background research on Greater Sage-grouse. Then, the students worked as teams in the computer lab analyzing data collected via satellite GPS units on Greater Sage-grouse to investigate hypotheses regarding Greater Sage-grouse movements and habitat use. Finally, the students presented the results of their investigations to their classmates using a PowerPoint presentation template.

Two students, Austin Palmer of Canyon View High School, and Dusty Hone, of Cedar High School, were interested in taking their investigation further. The students and I met during lunch time and after school, so that I could instruct them on the basics of ArcGIS, summarizing data, extracting data and many other common tools used by biologists in the wildlife field. Their question was “Does Highway 89 impact Greater Sage-grouse movements, and if so, in what way?” Their hypothesis was that Highway 89 would restrict movements of sage-grouse; possibly by the time of day sage-grouse crossed the highway.

Using ArcGIS, the students determined that one sage-grouse (of six) did cross Highway 89 and hence it was not a barrier to movements. Then Austin and Dusty learned how to isolate the times when sage-grouse crossed the highway, determining how many times it crossed (eight) and what time of day it crossed (always between noon and 6 p.m.). Finally, they created a table to highlight their findings, while I created a map for them. They created a poster presentation of their study to take to the State FFA contest March 13-15, 2014.

At the contest, Austin and Dusty presented their information. They explained their project, the work they conducted to collect the information, and fielded questions posed by the judges. Their hard work and dedication paid off when they won 2nd Place in the Environmental Service/Natural Resource Systems Category.

The WREN program continued this spring with an abbreviated 2-day course in Kanab, Utah, with Barbara Warner. I plan to continue to work with Mr. Burton and Mrs. Warner in the fall of 2014 to continue this fun and exciting program.

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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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, Kenneth L. White, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.