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THE COMMUNICATOR

A Quarterly Publication of Utah's
Community-Based Conservation Program

Printed by the Berryman Institute for Wildlife Damage Management

Volume 2, Issue 3

August 2006

Sage Grouse Restoration Projects Announced

By Terry Messmer

NRCS State Conservationist Sylvia Gillen recently announced that three proposals were selected to receive a total of \$200,000 in funding through the Sage-Grouse Restoration Project (SGRP), a cooperative agreement with Utah State University Extension to help evaluate the effects of Farm Bill conservation practices on private lands on sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife. Gillen said "the projects selected for funding will address critical information needs regarding the management and conservation of both greater and Gunnison-sage grouse species. The information obtained from these projects will be reported on the Sage-grouse Restoration Project web site to assist local sage-grouse working groups implementing their sage-grouse conservation plans."

Over 60 local working groups have been organized throughout the current sage-grouse range. There are 12 groups active in Utah. The efforts of these groups were cited by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in their 2005 decision denying the petition to list greater sage-grouse as an endangered species.

Seven proposals were received from California, Colorado, and Utah. The proposals selected for funding were:

1. "Grazing Sagebrush with Sheep to Enhance Greater Sage-grouse Brood-rearing Habitat." This project will be conducted by Utah State University on Parker Mountain in Garfield, Sevier, Piute and Wayne counties of Utah to determine if sheep grazing can be used to enhance sagebrush

(continued on page 3)

Local Working Groups Finish Plans

By Sarah Lupis

Hats off to the Uinta Basin, Strawberry Valley, and Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Groups (UBARM, SVARM, and MSARM, respectively) for completing their sage-grouse conservation plans. After months and years of meeting, debating, and planning, these groups have each finalized a 10-year plan that evaluates the status of sage-grouse populations and habitats in their local areas, analyzes threats to the population, and recommends strategies that local working group partners can implement to help maintain and enhance the species and its habitats in their local areas. Each group dealt with unique

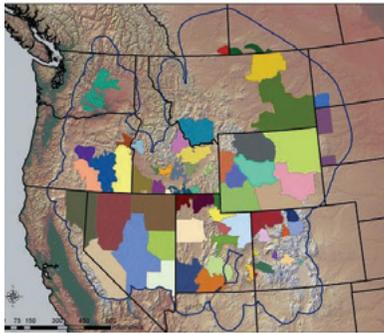


A meeting of the Uinta Basin Adaptive Resource management Local Working Group.

(continued on page 2)

New Web Site Gives A Bird's-Eye View On Local Working Groups

By Lisa Langs-Stoner



Sage-grouse LWGs Range-wide

Big Horn Basin Local Working Group, Wyoming

LWG Overview:
Species: Greater Sage-grouse
Total Area: 32,002 ha.

Ownership:

BLM	1,326,000 ha.	42%
USFS	601,730 ha.	25%
Private	233,740 ha.	25%
State	169,980 ha.	6%
BIA	98,263 ha.	3%
NPS	6,929 ha.	<1%
OOD	1,459 ha.	<1%

Floristic Provinces:

Wyoming Basin	40%
Silver Sagebrush Subdivision	24%

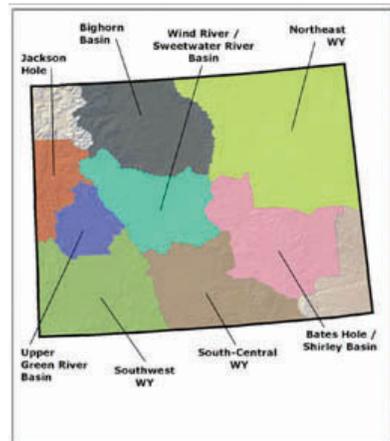
Conservation Planning Efforts:
Lead Agency: WY Dept of Game & Fish
Planning Status: Writing plans, Working on projects
Plan Type: Conservation/Management
Plan Orientation: Tactical
Plan Start Date: Sep 2004 End Date: Dec 2006

LWG Website:
http://of.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/sagegrouse/BigHornBasin/index.a

Local Contact: Genie Hammar WY Dept of Game & Fish Facilitator (307) 527-7125	State Contact: Tom Christensen WY Dept of Game & Fish Sage-grouse Program Coordinator (307) 875-2223
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LWG page includes contact info, conservation planning status, ownership & vegetation descriptions, links to existing LWG web pages.

Sage-grouse local working groups (LWGs) aren't unique to Utah. Throughout the range of sage-grouse (11 western states and two Canadian provinces), there are 63 local working groups engaged in conservation, management, and monitoring of the species and the sagebrush habitats they depend on. The Sage-Grouse Local Working Group Locator, a new web site developed by Utah State University in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Great Basin Information Project,



State page includes state contact info, links to state web-sites and Conservation Plans. Click on a LWG for local details.

provides a geographically-linked database with information about who and where LWGs are, range-wide. The website also provides information about LWGs projects and conservation efforts. The Local Working Group Locator provides a central resource for LWGs and interested stakeholders to facilitate greater connectivity and information exchange. LWGs are in all stages of development as they identify the unique combination of natural resources, habitat threats, and sustainable practices that exist in their area. Many are in the process of writing conservation plans or are working on projects to address local concerns, while other groups have only recently formed. The Locator provides an opportunity for all LWGs to learn from each other, by sharing success stories, accomplishments, and lessons learned. The site will also provide links to new information resources and tools designed for LWGs. Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program is currently working with Lisa and partners to provide a link to LWGs in Utah. To link to your favorite LWG or others throughout the west, go to: <http://greatbasin.nbio.gov/lwg/index.asp>

“Lessons learned, relationships built, and trust developed during the planning process will help groups to be successful in future efforts.”

Local Working Groups Finish Plans, continued

circumstances and situations in coming to a common end. In northeastern Utah, UBARM partners included representatives from oil and gas companies, an important potential threat on the landscape that the group will continue to monitor; SVARM's planning efforts benefited from years of data and information about sage-grouse populations collected by Brigham Young University graduate students; and MSARM, a late-comer to the planning process, faced unique challenges of developing a plan in less than a year.

All of Utah's 12 local working groups are reaching the final planning stages and will soon complete conservation plans and

begin to implement strategies from those plans. In looking forward, groups will face new challenges of prioritizing projects, allocating resources, and monitoring and evaluating progress on plan objectives. Lessons learned, relationships built, and trust developed during the planning process will help groups to be successful in future efforts.

For more information about the status of your local working group, to read conservation plans, or to comment on draft plans, please visit Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program web site at www.cnr.usu.edu/cbcp.

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

Part 1 of a 2-part series

By Todd Black

It seems that all we've been hearing about lately is sage-grouse. Justified? Perhaps. With several petitions filed and the possibility of an ESA listing; sage-grouse have certainly been on the front burner. But, there are many other wildlife species that use sagebrush habitat. In the next two issues of the Communicator, we'll take a look at some of them, starting with the pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*).

The pygmy rabbit might be the next little creature with potential for ESA listing. This species has been petitioned for ESA listed by several environmental groups; a decision is expected soon. Pygmy rabbits are about ½ the size of cottontail rabbits, but lack the cotton tail. Pygmy rabbits have brownish tails, making them often seem tailless, and they have buff colored markings on their ears. Little is known about this "silly little 'wabbit". What we do know is they seem to prefer sagebrush. Pygmy rabbits occur in most of the local working group Resource Areas, except those in eastern Utah (Price/Vernal/Coalville).

Because we don't know a whole lot about

pygmy rabbits, more research is needed to provide information about densities and population distribution, if and how sagebrush treatments maybe effecting population and dispersal, and what effects might current grazing practices have. To address some of these concerns, research is being conducted by Brigham Young University and the UDWR in the Parker Mountain, Box Elder, and Rich County Resource Areas.

Finally, pygmies are protected in the state of Utah and throughout their range. No hunting of these species is allowed, although I'm sure some are accidentally mistaken for a small cottontail. So, next time you tell your friends "Shhhhhhhh, be vewy vewy quiet; I'm hunting wabbits, ehehehehehe."—make sure it's not a pygmy!

The pygmy rabbit has been petitioned for ESA listing by several environmental groups.



Native range of pygmy rabbit



Sage Grouse Restoration Projects, continued

habitat for greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush dependent species while maintaining animal performance.

2.) "Development of a Sagebrush Habitat Improvement Guide for the Gunnison Sage-grouse by Evaluating Recently and Historically Treated Areas within the Gunnison Basin." This project will be conducted by Colorado State University at numerous locations within the Gunnison Basin of western Colorado. This work will evaluate the habitat conditions within recently and historically treated sagebrush areas in the Gunnison Basin and relate those findings to the habitat requirements of sage-grouse as outlined in the Gunnison Sage-grouse Rangewide Conser-

vation Plan.

3.) "Greater Sage-grouse Use of Restored Sagebrush Areas in Rich County Utah." This project will be conducted by the UDWR in Rich County in northeastern Utah. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) will evaluate methods to assess habitat use by greater sage-grouse in areas where sagebrush cover has been managed to benefit the species.

More information about SGRP and these projects can be found on the web site: www.sgrp.usu.edu.

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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.

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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.

USU Awarded Grant to Assess Working Needs

By Terry Messmer

On June 27, 2006- Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced USDA awarded \$1.6 million in competitive grants to develop and evaluate technological tools for fish and wildlife habitat improvements. The Institute for Social Science Research on Natural Resources at Utah State University was awarded a grant to assess the needs of local sage-grouse working groups. The work will be conducted by Dr. Douglas Jackson-Smith and graduate research assistant, Lorien Belton.

Over the last decade, many groups and individuals—from ranchers and Native American tribal representatives to NRCS, the Western Governors' Association and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies—have poured an unprecedented amount of money, time, and energy into sage-grouse management planning. Motivated by a desire to avoid the kind of controversy experienced over the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl as an endangered species, over 60 working groups in 11 western states have been

formed to develop and implement local sage grouse management plans. In Utah 12 local working groups are active. Because regional proactive voluntary efforts to protect potentially threatened wildlife species represent a relatively new approach, the groups have received considerable attention, and many regard them as a model for future species conservation efforts.

This study will provide important information regarding barriers faced by working groups and how they can be overcome. The researchers will use mail surveys, phone contacts, and conduct personal interviews to gather the information needed. This 18-month study will be conducted from August 2006 to January 2008.

We encourage you to participate in this process. The information you provide will help ensure the success of this working group process. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Jackson-Smith at 435-797-0582, e-mail douglasj@hass.usu.edu or Lorien at 435-797-1230 e-mail: lbelton@cc.usu.edu