

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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



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## ECOLOGICAL SITE DESCRIPTION WORKSHOP SETS STAGE FOR NEW DIALOGUE

Over 250 people from 17 states traveled to Park City, Utah, in late October to participate in the first ever regional workshop on Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). Over 80 of those in attendance were members of local sage-grouse working groups in Utah and other western states. The workshop was sponsored by the Western Governor's Association, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Society for Range Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, Utah State University, and The Wildlife Society. The purpose of the workshop was to engage wildlife and range management professionals and members of local working groups in an open dialogue on how ESDs could become a common currency in efforts to manage and restore western ecosystems and the wildlife populations that depend on them.

During the first day of the workshop, attendees heard from experts in the fields of ecology, wildlife habitat, and rangeland management. These speakers provided critical ecological knowledge about our rapidly changing sagebrush ecosystem. They addressed questions relative to the effects of fire, livestock grazing, energy exploration, exurban development, recreational activities, climate change and invasive species on sagebrush systems and the wildlife species that depend on them. Speakers also discussed the role of ESDs as management tools for improving decision making in sagebrush ecosystems.

On the second day, participants were divided into groups representing geographic ranges of sage grouse populations across the western U.S. to review draft ESDs and identify how they could be enhanced to become a common language. These groups were facilitated by specialists with Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program. It was clear from the outcomes of the workgroups that ESDs are an increasingly important tool to inform land management decisions, but their success will hinge on bringing together diverse groups of professionals, representing a wide range of disciplines and expertise, to contribute their knowledge and experience to the further ESD development and implementation. The workshop presentations are available online at [www.rangelands.org/esd\\_presentations.shtml](http://www.rangelands.org/esd_presentations.shtml).

The final half-day consisted of a field trip to view an active sage grouse lek site. The field trip offered the opportunity for researchers, managers, and others to look at a real landscape and discuss the potential, and the limitations, for ESDs in improving sagebrush management decisions. The information collected through the workshop is currently being reviewed by the sponsors for pending action.

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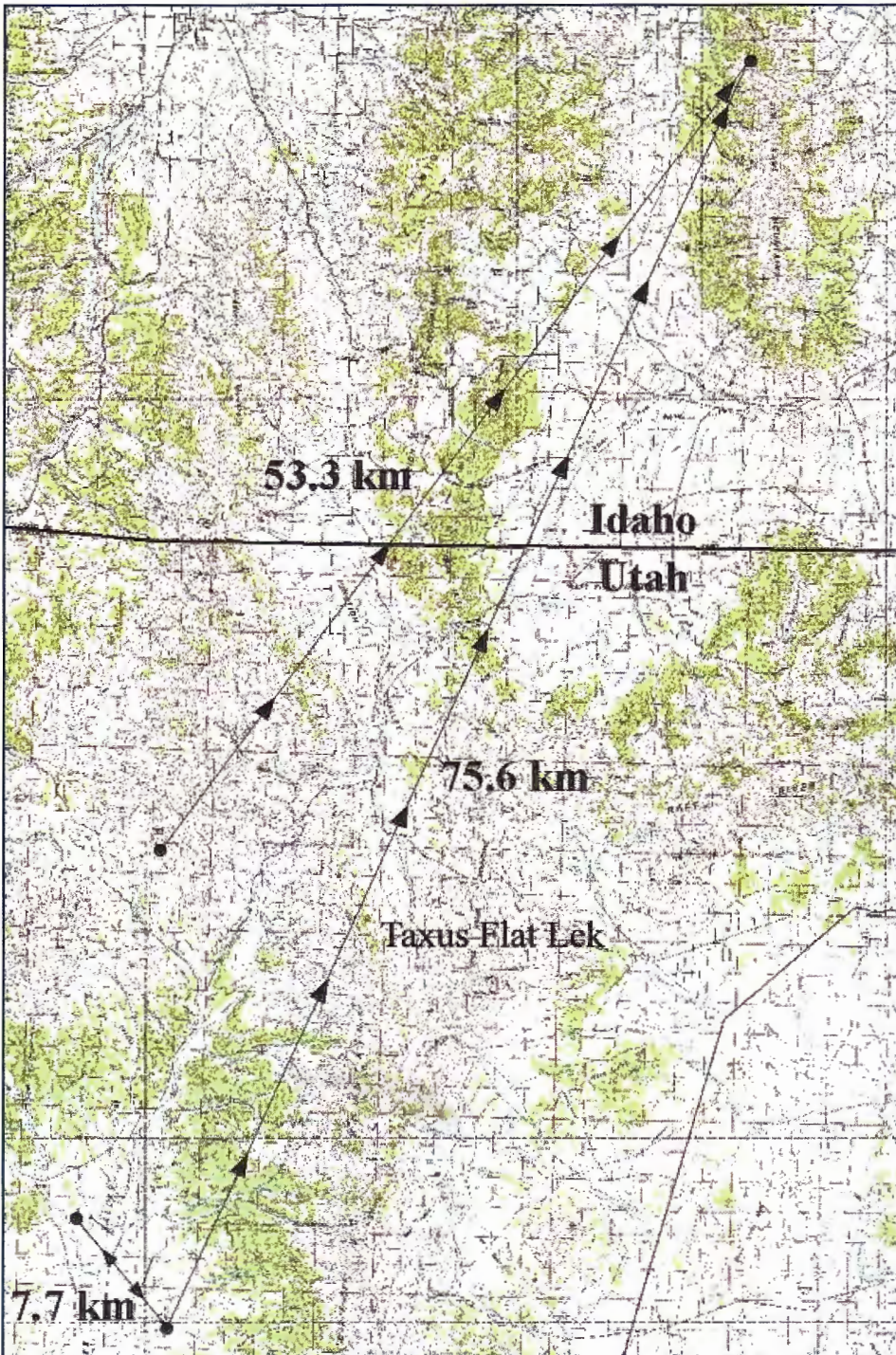
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## GROUSE CREEK MALES ON THE MOVE

Sage-grouse population estimates are based on the number of males present on leks, or strutting grounds, in the spring. Research in several states has shown that some males attend more than one lek each spring. Biologists conducting lek counts in Grouse Creek, Utah noticed that males were first appearing on the low-elevation leks at the southern end of the valley early in the spring. As the snow cleared throughout March and April, birds began attending the higher-elevation, northern leks. The biologists questioned the possibility of males moving north from lek to lek throughout the breeding season.

Researchers at Utah State University trapped and radio-collared 18 male sage-grouse to track their movements throughout the spring. The birds were captured on the Taxus Flat lek complex, the lowest-elevation leks south of Grouse Creek, in March 2006. Birds were then located several times each week until the breeding season ended in May.



*Extreme movement patterns of one male sage-grouse over the course of 10 months trapped in Western Box Elder County, Utah 2006.*

The majority of the radio-collared birds in the study remained at the lower elevation Taxus lek complex throughout the entire spring. Two birds made movements that took them near to other lek sites. One adult male moved about 5 miles northwest to visit another lek further north in Utah. A week later, this bird returned to the Taxus Flat lek complex and remained there until May.

Another adult male traveled 47 miles north to the Jim Sage Mountains in Idaho. This bird was found with another adult male that had been captured the previous spring on a different lek, and had traveled 33 miles to this location. These males were not on a known lek in Idaho when they were located, but were within 5 miles of 7 active leks.

The results of this study indicate that male sage-grouse in Utah do move between lek sites in the spring, although infrequently. In addition, the study illustrates that double-counting males on leks may be an interstate issue. Given that birds in Grouse Creek have been documented to move between states, biologists from Utah and Idaho may need to collaborate to successfully conserve this population into the future.



*An adult male in the spotlight, about to be captured and fitted with a radio-collar in west Box Elder County.*

Two ranching families in Utah were recently honored with awards that recognize their efforts to work collaboratively to promote sustainable rangelands and associated species, as well as on behalf of sustainable livelihoods for range landowners

Alan and Elizabeth Mitchell, recipients of the 2007 Society for Range Management Rancher of the Year award, operate the Bennion Ranch southwest of Vernon, which has been in Elizabeth's family for over 100 years. They were recently honored for extremely active and positive involvement in collaborative efforts for improvement of rangelands in western Utah as well as the management activities they've conducted on their own ranch.

The Mitchells have been very active participants on Utah's Sage-grouse Local Working Groups, serving in leadership roles with the West Desert working group that operates in the southern part of Tooele County. The Mitchells are noteworthy for their proactive approach to sage-grouse management, being among the first to develop a management plan for their own ranch, and for their support of research activities. They also have played an important role in breaking down barriers between private landowner and agency partners in order to enhance the effectiveness of the working group.

Alan Mitchell has served as Central Region co-chair of Utah Partners for Conservation and Development. In cooperation with UPCD they have implemented range treatments in both sagebrush and piñon-juniper communities for benefit of sage-grouse and mule deer habitat as well as improved forage production. They have implemented state-of-the-art grazing systems, new water developments, and activities to protect archaeological resources on their ranch.

The Selman Family, whose ranching operations are located in Cache and Box Elder Counties near Tremonton, were awarded with the \$10,000 Leopold Conservation Award, given by the Wisconsin-based Sand County Foundation, in collaboration with the Utah Farm Bureau Federation and the Utah Cattlemen's Association.

"The Selman Family stands out among the many private landowners in Utah and nationwide who are leading the way in modern conservation. Their ranching operation is a terrific example of how a well-run livestock operation can turn a profit while also protecting wildlife, soils, and other natural resources," said Dr. Brent Haglund, Sand County Foundation President.

The Selman story dates back to the 1940s when Harold and Dorthella Selman began ranching and farming in the Tremonton area. It was then taken over by their son, Fred, and his wife, Laura, who continue to manage the ranch. Their son, Bret, and his wife, Michelle also help on the ranch. The ranch is currently comprised of five main properties, including the 6,700-acre Four Mile Ranch and the Home Ranch, which includes a substantial community garden. Approximately 2,500 head of ewes and 125 head of stock cows are raised annually.

Through four generations, the Selman family has gone out of their way to promote sustainable ranching and farming operations while conserving habitat and implementing model stewardship practices that enhance the riparian, rangeland, and wildlife values on their ranch, including sharp-tailed grouse habitat. The Selman's have also been active participants in the Cache/East Box Elder Sage-grouse Local Working Group. The family's ranching legacy clearly demonstrates how a deeply engrained family stewardship ethic has lead to enhanced efficiency, increased production, and greater profitability.

***"The Mitchells are noteworthy for their proactive approach to sage-grouse management..."***



*The Selman Family by the pond on their ranch.*

*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.

Utah State University is committed to providing an environment free from harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 and older), disability, and veteran's status. USU's policy also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment and academic-related practices and decisions.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status, refuse to hire, discharge, promote, demote, terminate, discriminate in compensation, or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person otherwise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

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 Cockrell, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.

### New Upland Game Coordinator Announced

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Wildlife Section has selected Dave Olsen as their new Upland Game Coordinator. Dave has a long and distinguished career with the Division, working as the pheasant habitat project leader in Logan before he moved to the Vernal office, where he has worked as a biologist and wildlife manager. Dave is passionate about upland game, and he brings a wealth of practical field experience to the Wildlife Section in the Salt Lake office.

In a recent interview, *The Communicator* asked Dave for his impressions of the local working group effort. Dave told us that, "Partnerships formed through working groups and organizations can accomplish tough tasks. They can help people identify shared values, understand common ground and differences and look for ways to compromise or reach a compatible end result. By nature, they are messy and often time consuming. However, they do tend to get people to understand what is at stake and amiable toward finding some resolution."

*The Communicator* also asked Dave about his vision for the Upland Game program. He responded that, "Most sportsmen are introduced to hunting as young folks through upland game outings with family and close friends. When reminded, most older sportsmen can still recall being young and laying awake in their beds at night anticipating the excitement of a rabbit or bird hunt that they were invited to tag along on for the following day. These experiences last a lifetime and initiate young

people to the outdoors and all of the fun and personal friendships that are attached. While the landscape continues to change, hopefully we can find ways to provide these opportunities through partnerships and shared values. Wildlife management relies on hunters and sportsmen, upland game programs help continue the tradition.

Dave began his new assignment on November 17; please stop by the UDWR's Salt Lake Office and welcome him!