

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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## WHY HAVE A SUMMIT ON SAGEBRUSH CONSERVATION?

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

On Feb 5-7, 2019, the Utah All Lands All Hands Summit will convene at the SLC Downtown Radisson Hotel (<https://utahalllandsallhands.org/>). The Utah Community-based Conservation Program in cooperation with its partners has committed to hosting the Summit. The last Summit, known as the Utah Sage-grouse Summit was last held February 2014.

Since 2014, a lot has happened that have affected sage-grouse and the sagebrush working landscape. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that the Bi-State and greater sage-grouse populations did not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the State of Utah, and other states have also revised or are in the process of revising their sage-grouse plans.

In May 2018, a federal judge overturned the USFWS BI-state sage-grouse decision. Also in 2018, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies embarked on a major initiative



More information can be found at:  
[Utah All Lands All Hands](https://utahalllandsallhands.org/)

to develop a comprehensive range-wide sagebrush conservation strategy that focuses on the landscape to preempt repeating the sage-grouse saga for the other 350 species of wildlife that call sagebrush habitat home and the communities and people who also depend on this working landscape.

### Sagebrush is not just for the birds !

In August 2014, a report was released by ECONorthwest that was the first of its kind to examine the economic contributions of recreational spending across the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem on BLM lands in the western United States. Commissioned by the Western Values Project and the Pew Charitable Trust, the report looked at 61 million acres of sagebrush working lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.



Photos courtesy of Nicki Frey.

According to the report, people that visited sagebrush country across 11 states—California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming— generated approximately \$623 million in spending in communities near the recreation sites. These funds circulated through the state and national economies, creating an additional \$562 million contribution to the national gross domestic product and an additional \$1.06 billion to the overall U.S. economy. These expenditures stimulate additional economic activity, supporting incomes and economic output in those local communities and elsewhere.

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# CONSERVATION AND THE WESTERN MIND



Courtesy – Communication and Public Engagement Committee, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

There have been a growing body of surveys, analyses, etc., designed to shine light on the American public's perceptions of conservation. Overall, surveys have consistently shown that Americans support programs that protect fish and wildlife resources, water resources, aquatic habitat, information and education projects, and habitat protection. This research also shows that conservation is universally a popular issue among Americans nationwide, particularly in the West.

Since 2011, the Colorado College's State of the Rockies Project has released the Annual Conservation in the West Poll. The poll conducted across eight western states (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY), sought to capture registered voters opinions regarding conservation, environment, energy, the role of government, trade-offs with economies, and citizen priorities.

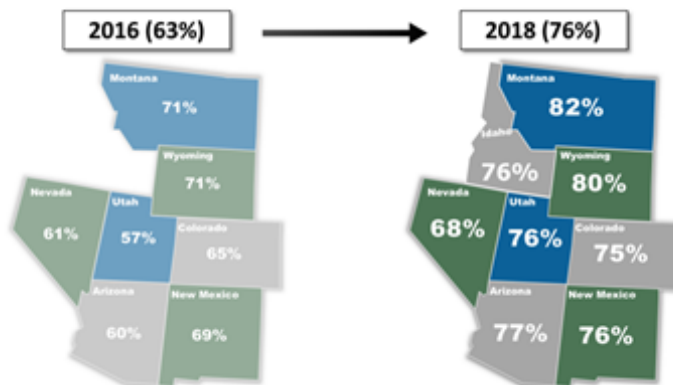
Here are some of the results:

- Nearly 9 in 10 westerners visited national public lands in one year, and 1 in 5 visited more than 20 times.
- 93% view the outdoor recreation economy as important for the economic future of their state.
- Western voters are more likely to identify as a conservationist today than two years ago, with significant increases in every Western state (see figure).

Similarly, three-quarters westerners consider themselves “outdoor recreation enthusiasts,” with small town and rural voters being more likely to describe themselves as such. Voters from across the partisan spectrum view outdoor recreation as important to the economic future and advantageous for the West. The types of outdoor recreation participated in were: hiking (63%), camping (57%), bird watching and wildlife

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## Percent of voters who identify as a conservationist



*Photos courtesy of USU Extension.*



## CONSERVATION AND THE WESTERN MIND, CONT.



viewing (37%), boating (26%), riding off-road vehicles or snowmobiles (23%), and mountain biking (19%).

In addition, Westerners are more likely to consider themselves hunters or anglers when compared to the national average. Western sportsmen/women also visit public lands with the highest frequency, more often than outdoor enthusiasts.

While residents across the Western states rank the clean environment, outdoor lifestyle, and living near public lands as among the most significant reasons they live where they do, millennials stood out. Millennial voters (age 18-32) specifically list the healthy, outdoor lifestyle and the clean air, clean water and environment as significant factors for deciding to live in the West. Millennials report being avid users of public lands, but are concerned that the younger generation is not spending enough time in nature. The problems millennials are most likely to say are extremely or very serious all involve the availability and quality of the water supply in the West.

Millennials' clear passion for spending time outdoors may play a role in their desire to protect public lands and natural areas. For example:

- 85% say protecting and conserving natural areas for future generations is a very important priority when it comes to public lands;
- 79% support BLM protecting sage-grouse habitat
- Two-thirds (68%) feel it is very important that managers have the resources they need to take care of federally managed public lands; and
- They feel strongly that U.S.-managed public lands belong more to the American people as a whole



## WHY HAVE A SUMMIT ON SAGEBRUSH CONSERVATION? CONT.

### Purpose of the Summit

The purpose of the 2019 Summit is to provide an on-going forum for information transfer and continued dialogue to better engage management agencies, scientists, private landowners, industry, regional local working groups, and others in actions to sustain healthy sagebrush ecosystems across all boundaries for multiple-use benefits. The Summit has been designed to address needs identified by the local working groups ([www.utahcbcp.org](http://www.utahcbcp.org)). Updates from federal, state, and private partners, local working groups working in Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, and Idaho, and emerging science and policy are major parts of the program. For more information about the program and to register go to <https://utahalllandsallhands.org/>.

### Session Titles:

National and State Sage-grouse Policy Updates  
Regional and State Updates  
U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Forest Service Science Updates  
The Cow, Plow, and Axe of Sagebrush and Sage-grouse Management  
The New War for the West: Earth, Weeds, and Fire  
Communications  
The Science Says – On-going Research Presentations  
    Management and Policy  
    Managing the Mesic  
    Movement, Migrations, and Space Use  
Local Working Group Brown Bag Forum



**Register Now!**  
**Summit Registration only \$100**

Livestreaming Option for those who cannot attend is \$70.  
See our website for more information.

## PANGUITCH RESIDENTS ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

By Nicki Frey, Utah State University Extension

Within the Panguitch Sage grouse Management Area (PSGMA), thousands of acres of potential habitat have been treated to an effort to restore greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) habitat. These projects include water developments, reseeding post fire, rabbitbrush removal, riparian habitat restoration, and many pinyon and juniper removal projects. The region's largest project, South Canyon, has been implemented annually since 2011, and has treated over 25,000 acres of pinyon and juniper encroachment in areas adjacent to Panguitch and Hatch, Utah.

We investigated to what extent locals living within the Panguitch SGMA understood sage-grouse management and the local habitat treatments, and if they supported these landscape altering projects in their area. Because these residents live in direct proximity to the land management projects, and can see the daily progress of the projects, we hypothesized that they should be aware of the land management projects and have a working knowledge of the purpose of these projects. Our goal was to determine and highlight any information gaps that exist, so that more precise educational materials might be produced to promote these projects in the future.

To investigate the residents within the PSGMAs opinions' of sage-grouse and their management, we initiated survey involving a 12-question questionnaire. We also sent follow-up surveys for additional information. This article only represents a small portion of our study. We'll let you know when you can access the entire report. Here are some preliminary results.

Primarily, we were interested to know to what extent residents valued sage-grouse in their area. We found that most respondents did value sage-grouse as part of the ecosystem as well as a game species (Figure 1). Additionally, in order for residents to take an interest in sage-grouse, they must have exposure to them. Practices that involve residents, such as outings to view sage-grouse leks, can increase their awareness of grouse in their area, and their appreciation for them.

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

Another question asked if residents agreed that pinyon and juniper trees are encroaching into sagebrush habitats, most respondents (51%) strongly agreed or agreed that pinyon and juniper trees were encroaching into sagebrush communities and negatively affecting the habitat for wildlife and livestock; 20% were neutral on the subject and 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Additional analyses suggested that to improve the acceptance of pinyon-juniper treatments, or at least the understanding of their objectives, management actions that improve outreach may impact those 20% of the respondents that were neutral on the subject. Materials that separate the issues may have the greatest influence. One should discuss the degree of woody plant invasion and its impacts on livestock, upland game species, big game species, sagebrush obligate species, and forest species separately.

Keeping the local public in the loop to ensure their knowledge and understanding of management actions is integral for maintaining long-term management goals. We often assume that rural residents understand their natural environment, and have the same goals and objectives as state and federal management agencies. Our results suggest that this may not always be the case. In the future, there is a lot of opportunity to increase outreach and education activities to improve local resident participation and support. We will have much more complete information in the final report.

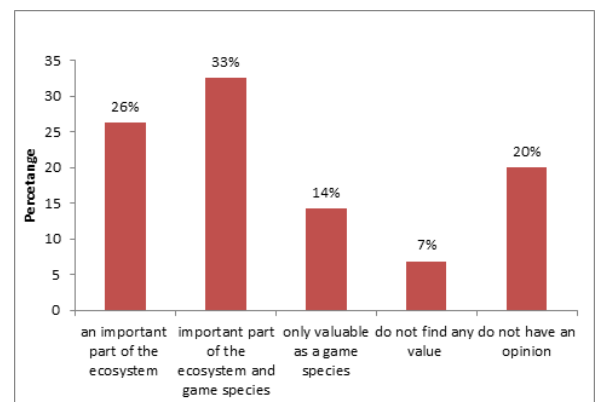


Figure 1: The % of times each response was selected as an answer to Question 1: Which of the following best describes your attitude towards sage-grouse?