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BUILDING INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS: CHILE AND COORDINATED RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

By Stephen Lytle, USU Extension Intern

Conflicts regarding wildlife conservation and traditional land uses know no boundaries. For several decades, Utah landowners, federal, state, private, and university partners have been collaborating to identify and mitigate the conservation threats to the greater sage-grouse which requires habitats on both public and private lands to exist. This partnership has created a new dialogue essential to both species conservation and the economic sustainability of local communities.

This past July, Jay and Diane Tanner, West Box Elder County, Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) and Terry Messmer, Utah State University Extension shared their insights and experiences on collaboration and research with Juliana Torres-Mendoza (ecologist) and Kevin MacLean-Kusanovic (rancher). Juliana and Kevin traveled with others from Chile to the western U.S. to learn more about how partnerships can be forged between landowners and land managers to resolve disputes and ensure conservation of wildlife and the sustainability of working landscapes. Juliana and Kevin were interested in learning about the CRM. They are interested in organizing a similar working group comprised of the ranchers who work the land of Chile's Patagonia region.

Kevin MacLean-Kusanovic and Juliana Torres-Mendoza visit Grouse Creek, Utah, to learn more about the West Box Elder County CRM. Photo courtesy of Juliana Torres-Mendoza.

Juliana works for the Regional Center Foundation (CEQUA). The CEQUA is non-governmental organization that conducts research in the state of Magellan Region of Chile. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting the sustainable use and conservation of resources to improve the overall relationship between the human being and the environment. CEQUA is working with The National Forestry Corporation (CONAF), which is a private entity under the Chilean Ministry of Agriculture. The mission of CONAF is to manage forest policy in Chile and promote the sustainable development and conservation.

CONAF is the Chilean equivalent of the U.S. Forest Service. CONAF is interested in creating a buffer zone around the Torres del

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Payne National Park in southern Chile. Kevin is a one of a hundred-plus landowners and ranchers surrounding the National Park that have expressed concerns about the buffer zone and its effect on their economic sustainability.

Juliana and her team have hosted an initial meeting with some of the landowners to discuss their concerns. "The National Park wants to create a "buffer zone" around the outside of the park," said Juliana. "The buffer zone would allow sustainable activities to happen, and hopefully provide native wildlife a larger area to roam. This zone would have less restriction than the interior of the park and the objectives should be defined by the ranchers themselves," she continued. "The landowners are concerned about increased depredation of their livestock by pumas (mountain lions) and other similar conflicts between conservation and development if the park buffer zone is created. Pumas are protected under Chilean law."

"We hope to facilitate a collective voice to ensure the concerns and ideas of the ranchers can be integrated into future land management issues," said Kevin. "The park buffer zone concept has not been well received by the local landowners and has reopened a wound made by the park's creation, and the resultant conflicts between wildlife and livestock. When the park was created, many ranchers were displaced," he added. "It is easy, therefore, to understand why the ranchers are hesitant to see the buffer zone. Other concerns for the creation of the buffer zone, are to do with the potential rise in Guanaco populations,—a Lama like animal endemic to the area— and subsequently in Puma as well, " he concluded.

"Unlike programs in the U.S., there is no depredation program in Chile to reimburse ranchers for livestock and forage damages created by wildlife," stated Kevin. "The creation of such a program could alleviate the stressors of growing wildlife populations, but until then, it is still an issue to be dealt with," he added. "This is an important issue to address," Juliana replied. "But, before we can address any of the concerns, we will need better information about wildlife migrations, numbers of animals in the park, and how they use and interact with the private land surrounding it," she concluded.

The Tanners, among the original founders of the CRM, have championed their local working group with land managers and the political sphere surrounding land use issues. "Based on our experience, it is important to achieve small objectives before anything else. This way, people will be able to see your progress, which will help increase the involvement of your group's membership," said Jay. "You also need to engage respected members of the community and government to help create excitement and push forward with the group's objectives in the political sphere," he added. Diane agreed. "Every time that you complete an objective, you need to celebrate your achievement, no matter how small," she added.

Terry Messmer discussed the need to also have good information about the issues. "The earlier and more involved the landowners and other partners can be engaged in a discovery process to learn about the issues through research, the greater the likelihood of ownership in the outcome," he said. "Research on conservation issues must not be conducted in a vacuum. Those most affected by the issue must have a place at the table and be willing to support the effort so they can not only understand the process but see how the information obtained can be translated into policy and management," he added.

The informal meeting included a tour of west Box Elder project areas and ended with lunch and continued conversation. All expressed continued interest in maintaining communications. "While we have just taken one small step in the moment toward a collective voice for the ranchers of Patagonia, the insights shared today, have provided us with some important guidance," Juliana concluded.

Kevin MacLean-Kusanovic, Diane Tanner, Jay Tanner and Juliana Torres-Mendoza.
Photo courtesy of Juliana Torres-Mendoza.

The Owl and the Sage-grouse: A Tale of Predation, Persistence, and Recovery

By Brandon Flack, USU Graduate Student

In March I helped Wayne Smith, another USU graduate student who is studying greater sage-grouse response to livestock grazing in Rich County, deploy new global positioning system (GPS) transmitters on female sage-grouse. The GPS transmitters give us up to nine locations a day, 24-7. They are helping us learn more about how sage-grouse see and use the sagebrush landscape.

In late April, Wayne called and told me one of the GPS radio-marked females left Rich County and traveled over 20 miles and was now nesting on my study area in Morgan County. I went out to verify that she was nesting. As I approached the nest location I realized that she was not where Wayne told me I would find her. I followed the transmitter signal another 500 yards to a grove of cottonwood trees.

As I neared the grove, I began seeing clumps of feathers. As the signal got stronger and stronger, I feared the female had become prey. The signal was strongest around a certain group of trees. I searched the area around the trees, occasionally scanning the tree above. The signal was erratic enough that I concentrated my search on the trees. Then, I spotted something...a nest, with a great-horned owl perched there. I raised my antenna and the signal boomed off the charts! I circled the nest and also noticed an owlet in the nest.

Using my binoculars I could see the dead female sage-grouse in the nest and the antenna of the GPS transmitter. Although, I was truly amazed that an owl could carry a sage-grouse that probably weighed more than it did to its nest, I was more concerned about how I was going explain to my boss why I didn't recover a $4,000 GPS transmitter. Noticing the remains of other dead critters on the ground under the nest, I decided to wait and see if the owl would discard the carcass, and the transmitter with it.

I returned early the next day to find the tail end of the sage-grouse carcass on the ground under the owl nest. I searched the area but couldn't find the transmitter. I assumed it was still in the nest and left to work in another area for the day but my mind was preoccupied with how I would get the transmitter out of the nest.

So, I decided to try a 20-foot extension ladder which I borrowed from a friend. That afternoon, I returned to the site of the sage-grouse homicide, with Megan, my trusty technician. We soon realized, we had grossly underestimated the height of the nest. The 20-foot ladder, didn't even reach half way! Arrrrrggghh!!!!

We scanned the nest with our binoculars, and spotted the precious transmitter on top of a pile of loose sticks directly under the nest. After some debate with Megan, we decided to try to dislodge the transmitter by tossing rocks at the sticks. So, I began tossing rocks as the owlet cheered us on.

I started with small rocks, than graduated to softball sized rocks, lobing them underhand to control the speed and accuracy of the throw. After about 45 minutes of warm up, I finally hit the sticks and they came tumbling down, sending us running for cover. Megan and I searched the debris for the transmitter to no avail. Alas, it was still hanging from a branch about 5 feet below the nest, taunting us as the owlet cheered us on. After more rock tosses, I had an epiphany. I need a hook!!!

So, I grabbed the tie-down straps in the truck bed and tied them together. I knew this wasn't going to be long enough so I grabbed our tow strap and attached it to the tie-downs as well. I backed the truck down the small hill to the base of the tree, stood on the cab and began tossing the hooked end of the tow strap toward the branch hoping to hook the base of the branch to shake it or break it off. I got the strap up there several times but couldn't quite get it to hook the branch. I was getting frustrated as the owlet continued to cheer us on.

"...and the owlet cheered us on!!!" Photo by Brandon Flack.

About that time an elderly sheep rancher came by. He stopped and asked what we were trying to catch. I explained what we were doing and pointed out the transmitter hanging from the branch. He promptly asked, "Do you have a gun?" I chuckled and said, "No." He exclaimed, "You can shoot that branch off. I'll be right back," and he walked to his truck. He came back with a .22 revolver and a container of ammunition, placed them on the cab of my truck and said, "I'll be at the ranch house. Just bring those over to me when you're done with them."

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Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program
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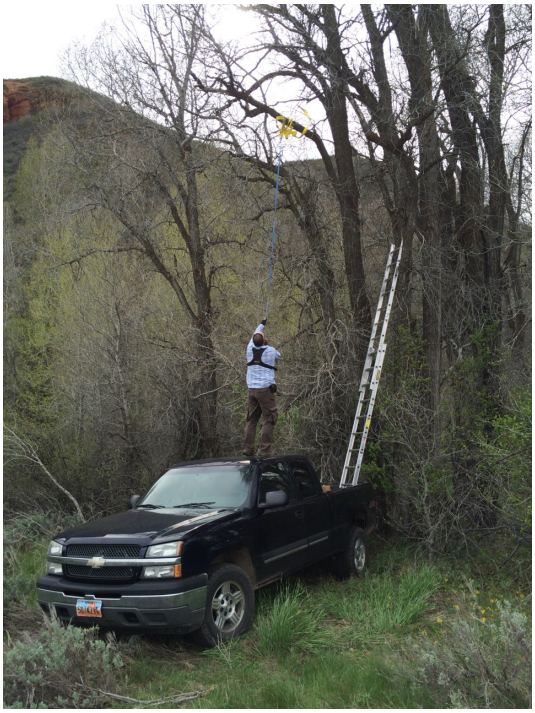
If it's not good for communities, it's not good for wildlife.

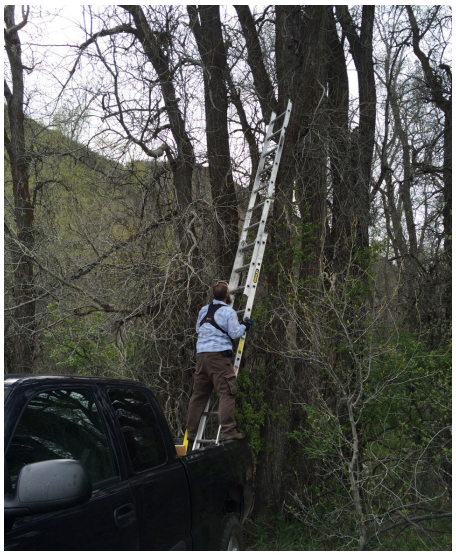
The Owl and the Sage-grouse, cont.

I looked at Megan, wide-eyed and in disbelief, loaded the revolver, laid on the cab of the truck, and carefully took aim at the base of the branch. The angle was such that the owlet was in the clear. I fired six shots, reloaded, and fired six more, as the owlet cheered us on. I hit the branch a couple times but not enough to break it. I fired six more shots and grabbed my make-shift grappling hook.

After a couple attempts the rancher appeared again, carrying a 20-foot long lambing pole with a hook on the end. "Get up that ladder and get that damn thing down. I'll hold the ladder, you climb it," he chuckled. As we placed the ladder in the truck bed and leaned it against the tree, it swayed in the wind, I looked at Megan and pleaded, "Come help him hold this ladder." I climbed up as high as I dared and the rancher handed me the pole.

I reached up and hooked the branch and just as I touched the base it broke free from the tree and fell toward my face with the transmitter in tow. We had done it, thanks to some careful rock tossing, a makeshift grappling hook, a wise rancher and his .22 revolver, a ladder, and a lambing pole. And, that's the truth.





Utah State University's finest trolling for a $4,000 GPS transmitter in a tree using tie down straps … "My advisor never said there would be days like this!!" Photos by Megan Squire.

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.

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.

www.utahcbcp.org

Upcoming Field Tours

CaCoARM (Castle Country) - July 20
CCARM (Color Country) - August 11
PARM (Parker Mountain) - July 27
Rich County CRM - July 21
SWARM (Southwest Desert) - August 11
SVARM (Strawberry Valley) - August 2
WDARM (West Desert) - July 27

For more details, please check the CBCP website or contact your LWG facilitator.

Recent MSARM field tour near Henefer, Utah. Photo courtesy of Lorien Belton.