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COMBINED SAGE-GROUSE TOUR VISITS DOLLAR RIDGE FIRE AREA

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

Over 50 people gathered on the Wildcat Wildlife Management Area on July 8 to tour areas impacted by the Dollar Ridge Fire, which burned last summer, beginning in July, on Twelve-Thousand Dollar Ridge. Derrick Ewell, a biologist with Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) who witnessed the fire first-hand, led the tour.

The tour included members of three of Utah's sage-grouse local working groups: Carbon (based in Price), Strawberry (based in Heber), and Uintah Basin (based in Vernal). The Northeastern Region Watershed Restoration Initiative team, many of whose team members overlap with the Uintah Basin sage-grouse group participants, co-sponsored the tour, and provided lunch. A number of local reporters joined as well.



Continued on page 3.

Derrick Ewell, UDWR, pointing toward sage-grouse habitat in the Wildcat WMA, and the fire scar from the Dollar Ridge fire behind it. Photo courtesy of Lorien Belton.

IN THIS ISSUE

COMBINED SAGE-GROUSE TOUR VISITS DOLLAR RIDGE FIRE AREA.....1

GOOD HABITAT MITIGATES THE EFFECTS OF WIND ENERGY ON COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN IDAHO.....2

USU ALUM RETURNS TO WORK WITH THE BERRYMAN INSTITUTE.....3

COMBINED SAGE-GROUSE TOUR VISITS DOLLAR RIDGE FIRE AREA, CONT.....3

WILD AWARE DAY AT HOGLE ZOO BRINGS AWARENESS TO WILDLIFE ISSUES4

RETROSPECTIVE ON THE UTAH ALL LANDS - ALL HANDS SUMMIT IN FEBRUARY.....5

CBCP MISSION STATEMENT.....6

Private Lands Partners Day 2019

Bringing Together Private Landowner Leaders and Partners

Hosted by Partners for Conservation

September 24-26, 2019

Ogden Eccles Conference Center in Ogden, Utah

Private Lands Partners Day brings together private landowner leaders and partners, typically from more than 30 states, to share their experiences with efforts to conserve rural working landscapes for both people and nature. The conference includes presentations, field trip, and networking opportunities.

Meeting information, agenda, and registration link can be found at <https://www.partnersforconservation.org/ourwork/private-lands-partners-day/>

GOOD HABITAT MITIGATES THE EFFECTS OF WIND ENERGY ON COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN IDAHO

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (CSTG) is one of six subspecies of sharp-tailed grouse found in North America. It inhabits shrub-steppe, grassland, mountain shrub, and riparian plant communities in western North America to include areas in Idaho and northern Utah. The subspecies currently occupies <10% of its historical range and has been petitioned twice for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Declines in Columbian sharp-tailed grouse populations are attributed to habitat loss resulting from conversion of native land cover types to croplands and other uses. Until recently, energy development affected <1% of the occupied range.

Wind power is one of the fastest growing sources of electricity supply in the United States. The Department of Energy predicted wind power could supply 35% of electricity in the United States by 2050. Much of the research published regarding the responses of grouse to wind development has focused on greater sage-grouse and the greater prairie-chicken.

In Wyoming, researchers found that sage-grouse nest-site selection was not influenced by proximity to turbines, but nest survival decreased in habitats closer to turbines. However, they concluded that neither nest-site selection nor nest survival was influenced by wind energy in a longer-term study at the same wind-energy facility. Others reported that proximity to turbines did not negatively affect greater prairie-chicken nest-site selection or nest survival in fragmented grasslands in Kansas and unfragmented grasslands in Nebraska. To date, no published studies have addressed the potential effects of wind-energy development on CSTG.

To address information void, researchers from the Jack H. Berryman Institute, Utah State University, and the Idaho Game and Fish Department studied CSTG nesting ecology across restored grasslands in eastern Idaho where a 215-turbine wind-energy complex had been developed. They monitored 147 nests to evaluate the influence of wind-energy nest survival. The results of the study were recently published in the Journal of Wildlife Management (Proett et al. 2019 and can be found at <http://www.utahcbcp.org/publications/>).

They reported that most importantly, CSTG access to good quality habitat mitigated the previously reported negative effects of wind energy development on other grouse species. Nest survival was best predicted by nest site concealment and the amount of restored grassland containing >30% forb cover within the nesting area. They recommended that wildlife managers continue to implement management practices that will provide grass-dominated areas in restored grasslands programs like the Conservation Reserve Program.



Photo shows windmills on a grassland landscape. Courtesy of BP Wind Energy/Marc Morrison.

USU ALUM RETURNS TO WORK WITH THE BERRYMAN INSTITUTE



Photo courtesy of Jessica Tegt.

The Jack H. Berryman Institute (BI) at Utah State University (USU) recently hired Dr. Jessica Tegt as the Engagement and Outreach Coordinator. Jessica will work to build partnerships and products to help fulfill the BI mission of improving human-wildlife relationships by resolving human-wildlife conflicts. Jessica comes to USU after 13 years of working for Mississippi State University as both the Berryman Institute National Outreach Coordinator and an Assistant Extension Professor of Human-Wildlife Conflicts. Jessica is a 2004 graduate of USU in Wildland Resources where she conducted predator ecology research partially funded through the Berryman Institute and later worked on human-wildlife conflict related public service videos through a grant provided by the Berryman Institute.

Jessica is excited to return to the human dimensions side of human-wildlife conflict research and outreach, and especially looks forward to building and enhancing partnerships with local, state, and federal organizations interested in strategic mitigation. “I really believe in the values and mission of the Berryman Institute and am motivated to cultivate new collaborations as well as enhance existing ones. The Berryman has always had a strength in building rapport with partners and tackling the tough issues regarding human-wildlife interactions and I’m excited to be a part of this team again,” Tegt said.

Jessica returns to Logan with her family; husband AJ, 16 year old son Jacob, 18 year old daughter Madeline (who will be a freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Madison this fall), and German Shepherd, Otto.

To contact Jessica email jessica.tegt@usu.edu or call 435-797-0570.

COMBINED SAGE-GROUSE TOUR VISITS DOLLAR RIDGE FIRE AREA, CONT.

The majority of the tour took place at higher elevations, in sage-grouse habitat on flatter areas. Those areas were blooming with stunning numbers of wildflowers. The flowers, including penstemons, globe mallow, paintbrush, and sego lilies, were still blooming both due to the late spring and the post-fire recovery. Those areas are recovering well and in many ways the fire will likely benefit the local wildlife. The tour also passed by much steeper slopes that were burned in the fire, where erosion problems are severe, and rain events cause the destabilized soil and ash to wash into streams and rivers. The contrast between the positive effects of the fire in some areas and the negative impacts on downstream fisheries and riparian areas was remarkable. The tour was unable to visit the riparian areas due to the logistics of taking a large tour to washed out areas, but biologists helped explain the impacts at overlooks where the eroded slopes were visible from afar. Team members also spoke about restoration efforts in the area.

The tour provided an excellent opportunity for people with different areas of expertise to join and learn from one another, including individuals with expertise in drinking water safety, weed management, local government, wildlife and habitat management, and many others.



Steep hillsides burned in the Dollar Ridge Fire are contributing problematic amounts of sediment into riparian areas. Photo courtesy of Lorien Belton.

The Dollar Ridge fire started July 1, 2018, approximately 8 miles southwest of Duchesne, Utah. It eventually burned almost 69,000 acres.

WILD AWARE DAY AT HOGLE ZOO BRINGS AWARENESS TO WILDLIFE ISSUES

By Jessica Tegt, Utah State University

As the human population in Utah continues to grow, so does the potential for interactions, and especially conflicts with wildlife species. Wild Aware Utah (WAU) is a non-advocacy collaboration between Utah State University Extension, the Jack H. Berryman Institute (BI), Utah's Hogle Zoo, and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to provide proactive education that aids in the minimization of conflicts between people and wild animals.

On July 6, 2019, the first ever Wild Aware Day between the partners of WAU took place at the Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City. The goal of this event was to support the mission of WAU: creating public awareness that fosters positive attitudes and behaviors toward safe co-existence with wildlife. Each partner created a display and demonstration that illustrated a potential situation for human-wildlife conflict specifically around the home, in the woods, and while camping.

The Hogle Zoo displayed a house frame and educated visitors on home exclusion techniques as well repairs to prevent wildlife access into structures and buildings. They highlighted wildlife deterrents for species such as rodents, racoons, squirrels, birds, and bats that commonly inhabit human structures, particularly in urban areas. The zoo also displayed life-size wildlife cutouts of animals that might be encountered in Utah hiking areas and offered tips on safety while on the trail.

UDWR exhibited a large interactive game on wildlife identification using tracks, skulls, and scat to help zoo visitors become familiar with commonly encountered specimens in the wood and to build awareness for signs of wildlife presence.

Utah State University Extension and BI created a ¼ acre interactive demonstration on bear safety. Participants were invited to “hike” through camping areas and learn about the correct and incorrect ways to store food, dispose of trash, and set up a tent to prevent attracting bears to a campsite. There was specific emphasis on investing in bear-proof containers for food storage and to keep all food-related items, even dishes and paper products, at least 100 feet from a tent. Zoo visitors also learned the correct way to protect food in a bear bag that is hung on a smaller limb at least 10 feet high, and 10 feet out from the trunk of a tree and could practice tying slip knots to raise and lower the bag.

Pet safety while camping and hiking was another focus of the demonstration area in which guests learned that pets should be on a leash at all times and in the direct supervision of owners, not tethered to a tree, tent, or table. Pet food as well as pet waste that can be an attractant to bears should be stored in odor-proof bags or containers to minimize interactions with wildlife. The bear aware demonstration also allowed zoo visitors the chance to identify bear presence through specimens such as fur, tracks, skulls, and scat. Literature on bear deterrents and tips on avoiding bear encounters were also distributed to participants.

In total, over 2,000 zoo visitors participated in learning about wildlife awareness and received education and tips for safe home ownership, camping and hiking in Utah. WAU partners plan to hold several events throughout the year to promote safety around wildlife as well as foster behaviors that result in fewer conflicts with Utah's wildlife. To learn more about WAU and to gain valuable downloadable information on living with wildlife, visit www.wildawareutah.org.



Photos showing displays at Wild Aware Day on July 6, 2019. Courtesy of Jessica Tegt, USU.



wildawareutah.org

RETROSPECTIVE ON THE UTAH ALL LANDS - ALL HANDS SUMMIT IN FEBRUARY

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

It's easy to go to conferences, hear great ideas, have great conversations, take lots of notes, and then set them aside when you get back to the office and the regular day-to-day demands of our work lives.

It's been almost 6 months since over 180 people gathered for the *Utah All Lands - All Hands Summit* in Salt Lake City, Utah. Because the conference occurred on the heels of the government reopening post shut-down, and in the middle of an intense snow storm, not everyone who had hoped to attend in person was able to! However, all the sessions were streamed live and recorded for later viewing, giving everyone the chance to access the information eventually. Sessions were live-streamed to over 30 locations in Utah and 6 other states.

The topics covered included:

- Utah and national policy updates
- U.S. Geological Survey science updates
- Grazing
- Sagebrush management
- Fire
- Management and policy
- Managing the mesic
- Movement, migrations, and space use
- Local working groups



What sessions were particularly interesting to you? Were you inspired to learn about sage-grouse group efforts in other states? Glad to hear about federal grazing policy updates? Did you plan to follow up and learn more about stream channel restoration, seed selection tools for sagebrush restoration, fire models, or sage-grouse translocation lessons learned?

Our post-conference survey asked what topic people had been most pleased to have included in the presentations. Grazing was at the top of the list, with fire, sagebrush management, and local working group topics also in the running for popular topics. Many people indicated that the information on sagebrush systems and management was the most helpful topic for their own work.

Not only are conferences like *Utah All Lands - All Hands* a great way to learn what new tools and information is out there, they also provide space to reconnect with colleagues and develop new ideas. These conferences are part information and part networking. Of 50 people who shared with us how important networking at these kinds of events is to them, 38 (76%) said it was extremely or very important to them.

Who did you mean to follow up with? Whose presentation did you think might be worth sharing with a colleague? If you attended, we encourage you to dig down a little bit in that stack of papers on your desk and find your notes. If you were not able to attend, please visit our website, <https://utahallandsallhands.org/Livestream.cfm> to view the conference presentations. The password to access the videos is SAGE2019. Enjoy!



*Top photo courtesy of Eric Thacker.
Bottom photo courtesy of Nicki Frey.*



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.

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