



# THE COMMUNICATOR

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

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## UTAH'S COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM: CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

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In September 1996, Dean Mitchell, former Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) Upland Game Coordinator, and I jumped into his 1990 UDWR Ford Bronco and drove to Dove Creek, Colorado to attend a Gunnison local sage-grouse local working group meeting hosted by Clait Braun. Clait Braun was a Colorado Department of Wildlife (CDW) biologist. We had contacted Clait regarding his efforts to connect with local communities to engage them in efforts to conserve the newly-identified Gunnison sage-grouse and he invited us to a meeting in Dove Creek, Colorado.

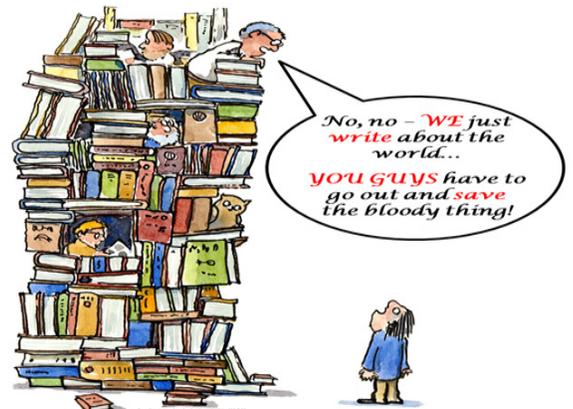


Figure 1. Where there is controversy regarding what actually constitutes conservation, there are strong stakeholder values. The typical response of the scientific community to mitigate controversy has been “we need more science.” However, because stakeholder’s values differ, more science may only increase the polarization.

The mid-morning meeting was fairly well attended with a mix of agency personnel and private landowners. Clait discussed the status of the birds, the importance of private land in the species conservation, and how CDW might be able to help provide cost-share for management. After the meeting, Dean and I met with Clait to pick his brain. We were interested in having him assist us in starting a similar type of group based in Monticello, Utah.

At that time Clait gave us probably the best, but least unexpected advice, he told us “we are on our own!” Some might consider his comment to fall into the category of “tough love. “Looking back 25 years later, it was sage advice. For local working groups to function and achieve their purpose, they have to be tailored to meet the needs of those most affected by species conservation policies. What might work in Dove Creek, Colorado, may not work in Monticello, Utah (Figure 1).

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In January 1997, Dean and I were invited, by Verl Bagley, USU Wayne, and Piute County Extension Agent to meet with the Parker Grazing Association, at the winter meeting in Loa. We joined Verl and Leon at the county courthouse where the grazing association had assembled. The meeting was chaired by Gary Hallows and Andy Taft and attended by over 70 members. Leon and Dean presented information on sage-grouse, and Andy and Verl moderated the discussion. Grazing association members were concerned about the status of sage-grouse on the Parker and wanted to know more about what they could do. I spoke briefly about the possibility of radio-marking some sage-grouse and monitoring them to learn more about how they used the area, nest, and brood success, and how they responded to livestock grazing.

After our presentations, the Association convened its business meeting. Dean and I were visiting with Verl and Leon in the hallway when Andy approached us and gave us a check for \$3,000 to purchase radio collars to deploy on sage grouse on the Parker Mountain. In the months that followed, we leveraged that \$3,000 twenty times over and raised enough to support the first graduate student to study sage-grouse habitat use on the Parker. The partners include the UDWR, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), NRCS, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Over the next 25 years, this partnership scenario and community connection were replicated 10 times under the Utah Community-based Conservation Program (CBCP) motto "if it's not good for our communities, it's not good for wildlife." The CBCP sought to fully engage community stakeholders in the process of conservation. By fully engaging the stakeholders most affected by human and natural resource conservation decisions in discovery, research, and management, the CBCP solidified a role for local communities in developing policies to guide the management of western working landscapes.

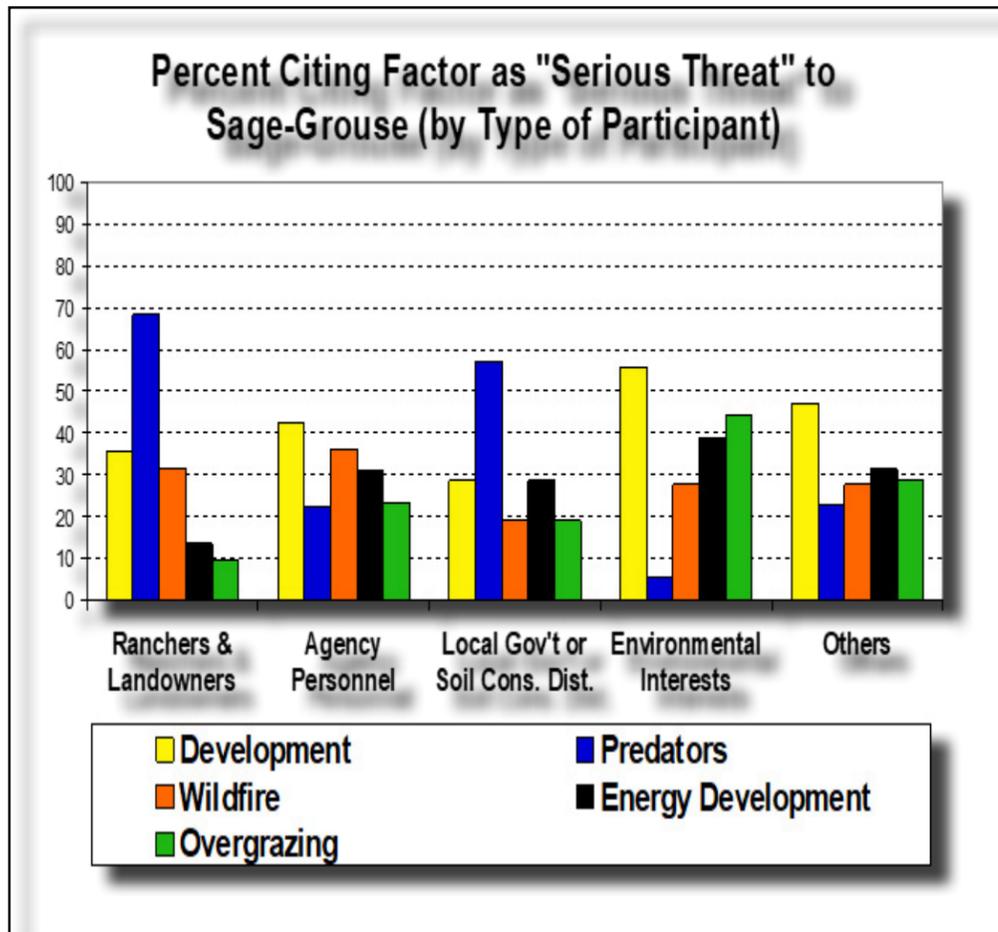


Figure 2. Stakeholder perceptions and knowledge of what constitutes a sage-grouse conservation threat depends on perspectives, experiences, and values.

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Concomitantly, the knowledge and values of the affected local communities, and the science and information provided through stakeholder engagement, were increasingly valued by federal and state agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations.

Each local working group was unique in that they were locally led and adapted to local needs and situations. But, they unilaterally realized they needed better information to guide their conservation actions. Most did not trust the published research on sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem, the scientists doing it, and more specifically, the decision-makers using it to set conservation policies. The phrase "best available science" to them meant information used to regulate their livelihoods. Many perceived that outsiders were using science to force a new vision on the west - a vision that did not include them. These perceptions were fueled by the failure of the scientific community to more fully engage stakeholders in the discovery process. Thus, there was little capacity to develop the trust needed to move conservation forward.

Building trust requires all stakeholders to be fully engaged in processes committed equally to learning about each other and the landscapes while they are actively managing them. When stakeholders are forced to choose between taking care of their livelihoods or participating in a meeting about conservation, the livelihood always wins (Figure 3).

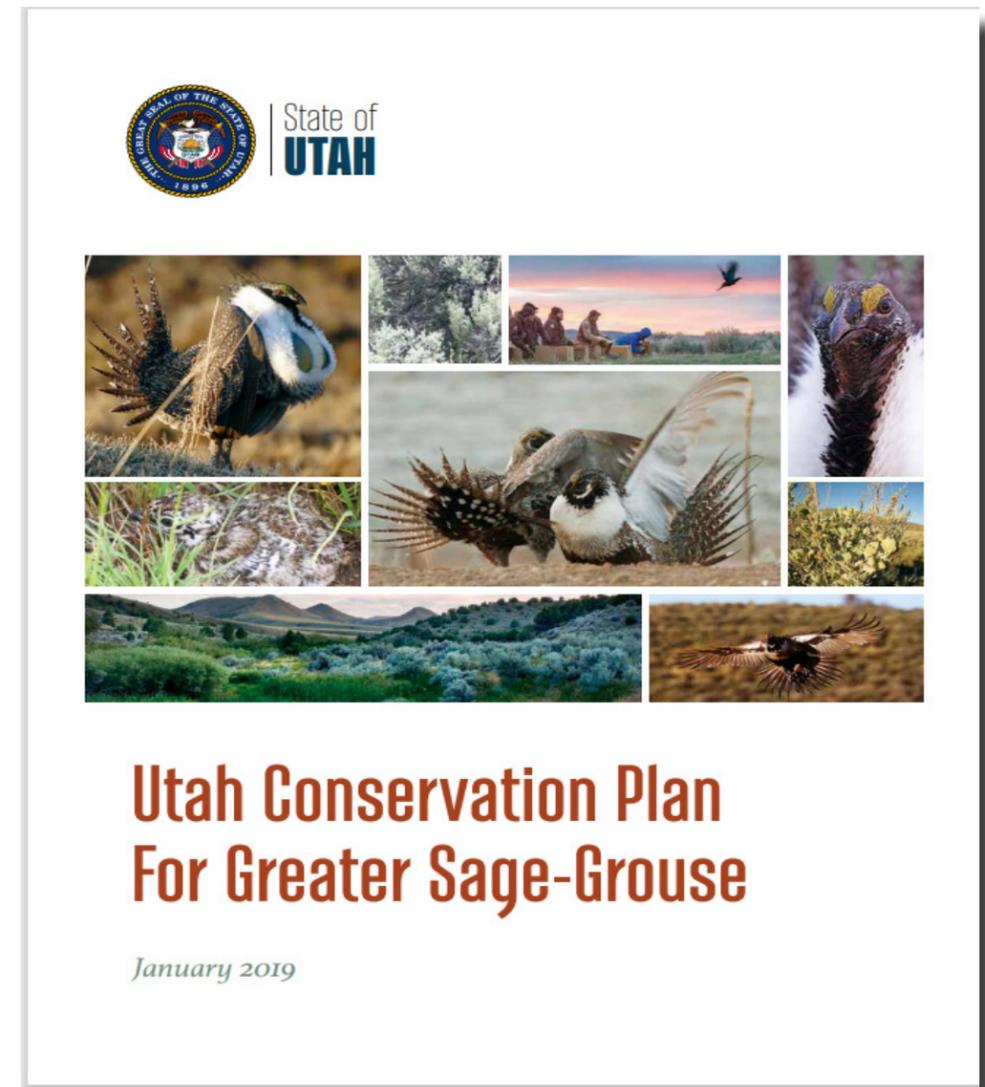


Figure 3. The CBCP process provided the scientific foundation for Utah's 2019 Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy and BLM and USFS revised resource and land-use management plans. These Plans converged around the CBCP local working group science; science which was made possible by the sweat equity and resources of local communities, and which reflected local knowledge and the commitment of the partners to the role of community and voluntary incentives in conservation. In May 2019, Utah Governor Gary H. Herbert signed an Executive Order to fully implement "their" Plan.

Terry A. Messmer, Utah State University

1996 - Organizational meeting for Gunnison sage-grouse local working group – Monticello, Utah

1997 – Parker Mountain Grazing Association provides \$3,000 radio collars to deploy on Parker Mountain. Gunnison sage-grouse local working group begins meeting regularly and starts writing local conservation plans.



1998 – Joel Flory was recruited as the first USU graduate student. Parker Mountain Adaptive Management Resources Sage-grouse Local Working Group organized and hosted the first summer field tour (Figure 1).

1999 – Parker Mountain Adaptive Resources (PARM) Local Working Group begins to meet quarterly. Forty-three male Gunnison sage-grouse were counted on 4 leks in San Juan County.

2000 - Jay Tanner hosts an organizational meeting for a West Box Elder local working group in Grouse Creek, Utah. The USFWS receives the first petitions to list Gunnison sage-grouse for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Sarah Lupis, recruited as a graduate student to study Gunnison sage-grouse ecology, radio-



Figure 1. The Parker Mountain local working group identified poor brood habitat as a sage-grouse limiting factor. They initiated a small-scale experimental management project using the Dixie harrow, Lawson aerator and Spike treatments to open dense sagebrush canopy. Their results suggested a brood-rearing habitat management strategy that, when shrub canopy limits the understory, creates a mosaic of small-scale treatments that maximized edge, creating resource patches that are particularly attractive to sage-grouse broods.

marks 8 males and 6 female grouse. San Juan County Gunnison Sage-grouse Conservation Plan completed.

2001 – Todd Black was hired as CBCP local working group facilitator. Dean Mitchell initiates the process to write a Utah sage-grouse conservation plan. Renee Chi was recruited to study sage-grouse ecology and responses to small-scale habitat treatments on Parker Mountain. US-FWS receives more petitions to list greater sage-grouse for ESA protection.



2002 - Box Elder County Adaptive Resources (BARM) Management Sage-grouse local working group is organized. Utah Wildlife Board approves Utah's Sage-grouse Strategic Management Plan. Thirty-five Gunnison sage-grouse males counted on leks in San Juan County. Rich County Coordinated Resources Management (CRM) is chartered by Rich County Commission.

2003 - Utah Gunnison sage-grouse Conservation Plan Update Published. Jan Kneer was recruited as a graduate student to study sage-grouse in West Box Elder County. Sharon Ward was recruited to study Gunnison sage-grouse in San Juan County. Dave Dahlgren was recruited as a graduate student to continue sage-grouse habitat-use studies on the Parker Mountain

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2004 – Color Country Adaptive Resources Management (CCARM) and Southwest Desert (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Groups organized by Todd Black and Nicki Frey. Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resources (SVARM) and Uintah Basin Adaptive Resources (UBARM) Management Sage-grouse Local Working Group organized by Todd Black and Sarah Lupis. West Desert Adaptive Resources (WDARM) Local Working Group organized by Scott Pratt and Sarah Lupis. Jason Robinson was recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in WDARM (Figure 2).

2005 – First Utah Community-based Conservation Program Quarterly Newsletter published. Sarah Lupis hired USU local working group facilitator. Castle Country Adaptive Resources (CaCoARM) Management Sage-grouse local working group organized. Morgan-Summit (MSARM) Adaptive Resources Management Sage-grouse local working group organized by Sarah Lupis. Rich CRM Sage-grouse Subcommittee organized and facilitated by Sarah Lupis. The USFWS makes an initial determination that the greater sage-grouse does not warrant listing under the ESA. This finding is later reversed by court order and USFWS is directed to revisit this initial decision.

2006 – Peer-reviewed papers published in Wildlife Society Bulletin documenting Gunnison sage-grouse use of agricultural

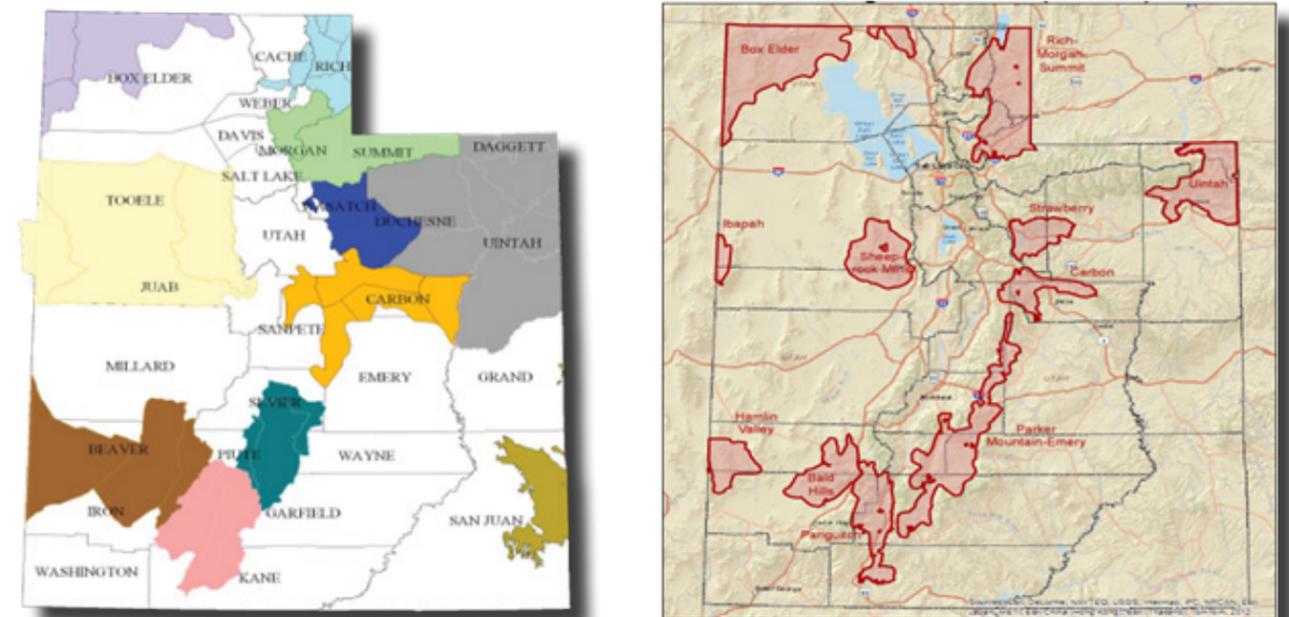


Figure 2. The scope and boundaries of the local working groups changed over time to reflect new knowledge. Today they accommodate 7.8 million acres of the best available sage-grouse habitat 11 sage-grouse management areas.

lands in San Juan County enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program and greater sage-grouse responses to managing sagebrush on the Parker Mountain. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies publishes the range-wide strategy for conserving the greater sage-grouse. Utah State University (USU) entered into a 5-year agreement with the UDWR to support the CBCP. Phoebe Prather is recruited to study Gunnison sage-grouse response to management in San Juan County and the effectiveness of power line raptor perch deterrents. Dave Dahlgren places transmitters on sage-grouse chicks on the Parker Mountain to study their survival. Leah Smith is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in UBARM.

2007– Conservation plans published for all Utah local working groups. 2006-2007 Utah Adaptive Resources Sage-grouse Local Working Group (LWGs) Accomplishment Report released. Eric Thacker is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to sagebrush management in Grouse Creek. Chris Perkins is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Carbon and Emery County.

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**2008** – Utah LWGs continue to implement and monitor their conservation plan. The LWGs include representatives from state and federal agencies of land and resource management, non-governmental organizations, private industry, local communities, and private landowners. Michael Guttery is recruited to evaluate sage-grouse responses to strategic grazing by sheep on Parker Mountain.

**2009** – The 2002 Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse is revised by UDWR and approved by the Utah Wildlife Board. Lorien Belton completes a range-wide needs assessment of all sage-grouse local working groups. Lorien is recruited to replace Sarah Lupis as a CBCP facilitator. Charles Caudill is recruited to study sage-grouse juvenile survival on the PARM. Natasha Gruber is recruited to study sage-grouse translocations on Anthro Mountain.

**2010** – USFWS announces the listing of greater sage-grouse for ESA protection warranted but precluded. The USFWS identified the primary threat as the loss and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat, coupled with a lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect habitat across the bird's range. Natural Resources Conservation Service launches the Sage-Grouse Initiative to conserve sage-grouse habitat on working lands. Utah Community-based Conservation Program was recognized by the Utah Center for Rural Life at Southern Utah University with a 2010 Utah Rural Honors Award. The award was presented by Gov. Gary Herbert in recognition of the unique partnership for engaging Utah rural communities in proactive efforts to conserve sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

**2011** - The BLM issues the National Technical Team report to provide an initial guide for management actions and policies in developing Resource Management Plans (RMPs) to conserve the greater sage-grouse on BLM-administered lands. Orrin Duvuvuei is recruited to continue sage-grouse translocation studies on Antro Mountain. Seth Dettenmaier is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to grazing in Rich County.

**2012** - Governor Gary Herbert of Utah established a committee of stakeholders and agencies to establish a sage grouse management plan. Casey Cardinal is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in the RCRM and Bear Lake Plateau. Stephanie Graham is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to firebreak management in Grouse Creek. Avery Cooke and Brian Wing are recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Box Elder County.

**2013** - Gov. Gary R. Herbert authorized the Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Utah. It was a detailed, scientifically based plan that established goals and measurable objectives for the conservation of greater sage grouse in Utah. As a result of that plan and other ongoing conservation efforts — including similar state-led efforts across the West. The BLM and USFS) release draft land management plans for federal lands in 10 western states. The USFWS releases the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report, which identifies key threats to remaining greater sage grouse populations across the range. Dave Dahlgren is recruited to replace Todd Black as a CBCP facilitator. Nicki Frey accepted an appointment as Extension Assistant Professor with the USU Extension Service. In addition to new roles and responsibilities, Nicki continued to facilitate the southern Utah LWGs. Charlie Sanford is recruited to study sage-grouse responses to conifer removal in Box Elder County.

**2014** - Congress passes a rider that prohibits USFWS from writing and issuing a proposed listing rule this fiscal year; however, the FWS is not prohibited from deciding whether ESA protection is still warranted or not by the court-ordered deadline. In February 2014, the CBCP organized and conducted a Utah Sage-grouse Summit. Hosted by the UDWR in their main auditorium, the Summit drew over 250 participants on-site and another 80 participants range-wide for two days to discuss important conservation issues. The purpose of the Summit was to enhance participants' understanding of the Utah Plan and more specifically the roles they could play in its successful implementation. The Utah CBCP also coordinated the International Sage-grouse Forum which will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from November 13-14, 2014. Over 350 participants from 20 states and three Canadian provinces participated in the forum. In addition, over 1000 people joined the Forum online or viewed the presentations.

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**2015** – USFWS found that sage-grouse did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. to review the 2013 Plan. This process ensured that Utah's conservation efforts continue to incorporate recent findings, as well as new and best-available science, data and knowledge. The CBCP was recognized in 2015 with the Award of Excellence presented by the Western Extension Directors Association for program sustainment and impacts. The BLM and the USFS signed the Record of Decision amending Resource Management and Land Use Plans to incorporate actions to migrate sage-grouse conservation threats on public lands. Justin Small is recruited to study greater sage-grouse response to conifer removal as mitigation for anthropogenic disturbances. Brandon Flack is recruited to study sage-grouse ecology in Morgan and Summit County (MSARM).

**2016** – Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah, February 22-26. The CBCP also developed and released an app based on the publication entitled “Sage grouse Habitat in Utah: A Guide for Landowners and Managers.” The Wildlife Society recognized the CBCP conservation impacts with its Group Achievement Award (Figure 3).



*Figure 3. The CBCP collaborated with WAFWA and the Great Basin Consortium to host the 2016 Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Conference which was held in Salt Lake City, Utah, February 22-26, 2016. This Conference drew over 500 participants on-site and another 300 on-line participants.*

**2017** – BLM and USFS begin scoping process to revise land and resource management plans. The CBCP conducted a needs assessment of Utah LWG participants. Overall, respondents valued the LWG process and desired more information about sage-grouse. responses to management. Over 85% of the respondents liked the idea of scheduling another Utah sage-grouse summit to address LWG participant information needs. The CBCP worked with Utah partners to develop better maps of sage-grouse seasonal habitats in Utah. The maps were updated in 2019, with location data obtained from global positioning satellite transmitters deployed on sage-grouse throughout Utah. Michel Kohl was recruited as a post-doctoral fellow to complete the seasonal maps. Melissa Chelak is recruited to study sage-grouse translocations in WDARM, the Sheeprocks Sage-grouse Management Area. Wayne Smith is recruited to continue sage-grouse responses to grazing studies in Rich County.

**2018** – Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office coordinated planning efforts to revise Utah's Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy.

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2019 – Utah Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy revised plan published by Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office. Governor Gary Herbert signs Executive Order implementing the plan [https://wildlife.utah.gov/sage-grouse/Utah\\_Greater\\_Sage-grouse\\_Plan.pdf](https://wildlife.utah.gov/sage-grouse/Utah_Greater_Sage-grouse_Plan.pdf). The CBCP and its partners hosted Utah All Lands-All Hands Summit to celebrate and recognize the efforts and history of Utah’s wildlife management conservation partners. Hailey Wayment is recruited to continue sage-grouse and livestock grazing studies in Rich County.

2020 - Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CBCP followed State of Utah guidelines and implemented a virtual LWG meeting format. The Covid-19 pandemic created innumerable complexities, and no doubt slowed some collaborative work due to the difficulty of working in person on planning, particularly at the outset. However, shifting to a virtual format for the year also came with some clear cost savings, shared across the many agencies and individuals who participated. Simona Picardi was recruited as a post-doctoral fellow to continue to support the sage-grouse seasonal mapping project and partner data access needs. USU, BYU, and UDWR enter into a cooperative agreement to create and maintain a sage-grouse data repository. This database contains over 800,000 sage-grouse locations. Codi Backen is recruited to complete sage-grouse and livestock grazing research in Rich County and was used to create unified maps of suitable sage grouse habitats (Figure 4).

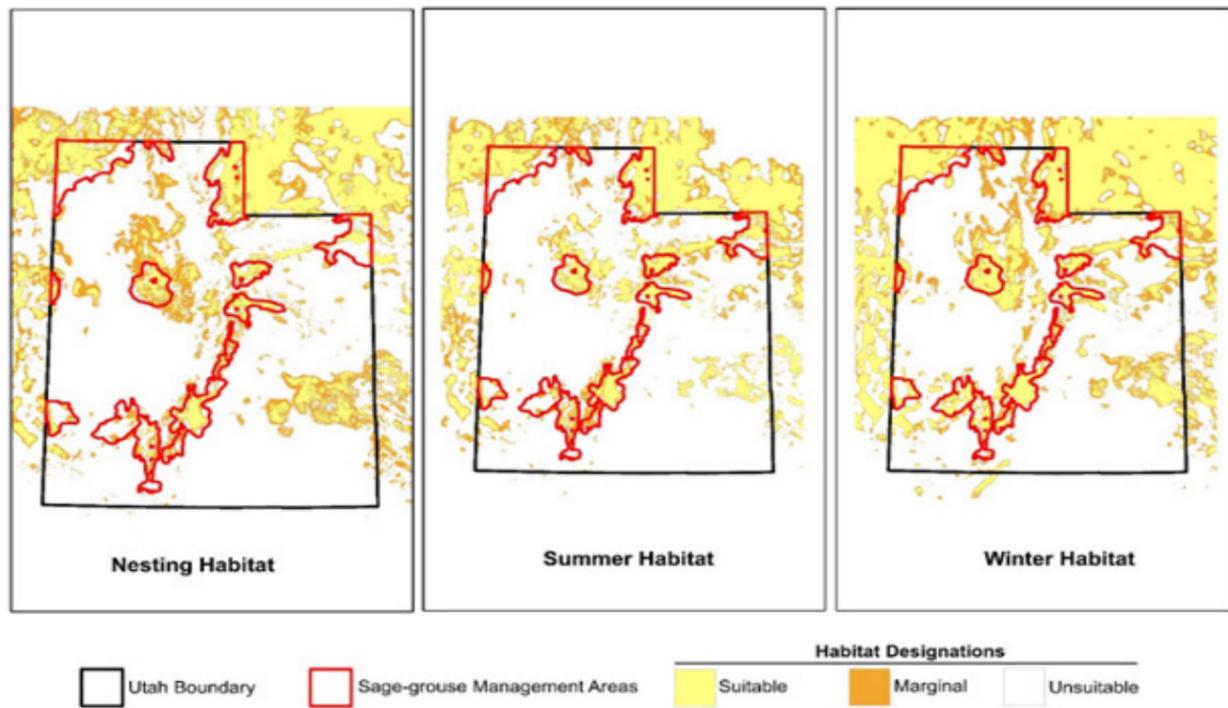


Figure 4. We used spatial location data of sage-grouse in Utah between April 1998 and February 2019 from a database maintained by Utah State University’s (USU) Community-Based Conservation Program to create one map that can be used by all to guide management. Telemetry locations were collected by researchers at USU, Brigham Young University (BYU), and UDWR. During these studies, sage-grouse were captured, fitted with 22g necklace style very-high frequency (VHF) radio-collar or rump-mounted 22g Solar Argos global positioning system (GPS) Platform Terminal Transmitter (PTT) transmitter, and routinely monitored to assess vital rates and habitat use using standardized protocols. Field protocols for each study were reviewed and approved by the USU or BYU Institutional Animal Use and Care Committees. Animal handling permits associated with animal capture, radio-marking, and monitoring were provided by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources participants.

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**If it’s not good for communities,  
it’s not good for wildlife.**

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE BROOD RESPONSES TO LIVESTOCK GRAZING IN SAGEBRUSH RANGELANDS  
BY HAILEY WAYMENT, UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY



**Greater Sage-Grouse Brood Responses to Livestock Grazing in Sagebrush Rangelands**

[https://extension.usu.edu/utahcbcp/files/greatersagegrouse\\_broodresponse\\_byhaileywayment.pdf](https://extension.usu.edu/utahcbcp/files/greatersagegrouse_broodresponse_byhaileywayment.pdf)



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