

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



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## OLD SAGE-GROUSERS NEVER DIE, THEY JUST FIND BETTER SAGEBRUSH

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

Effective 1 December, Todd Black will become the new wildlife manager for Deseret Land and Livestock (DLL), Woodruff, Utah. Todd has been a long-time stalwart and founding member of the Utah Community Based Conservation Program (CBCP). During his time at Utah State University (USU), Todd has assisted 25 different graduate students with project implementation and contract obligations, trapping and collaring grouse, and field work. As importantly, he has worked closely with Dr. Terry Messmer to implement the CBCP and the sage-grouse local working group process. This process has been instrumental in the development and implementation of over a decade of voluntary conservation actions to benefit local communities and Utah sage-grouse populations.

During this time, Todd has also worked closely with and has become an important key player in Utah's Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit (CWMU) program and CWMU Association. He worked tirelessly to shape many of the positive aspects of the program



Todd Black

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while working with landowners and public as a whole to provide many outreach and education opportunities. Todd developed a knack for working in this arena where he both broke bread and rubbed shoulders with many of Utah's landowners. Todd particularly enjoyed talking to them about wildlife and range sciences and principles and how wildlife could be viewed as an asset to their overall program rather than a liability.

Todd now takes his skills and expertise and the next 20 some odd years of his career to AgReserves Inc. (commonly referred to DLL) where he will be stationed on the DLL Ranch south of Woodruff, Utah. Here he will work with owners and employees with DLL's holdings to implement wildlife management programs and develop wildlife recreational opportunities on several different ranches throughout the west. However to our benefit, Todd will continue to assist in the facilitation of the Rich County and West Box Elder County CRM groups and provide administrative and leadership the CWMU Association.

Here is what Todd had to say about the past challenges and the new opportunities that await him. "I'm sitting here reflecting on the past 20 plus years at USU. I don't know if it's because I'm getting older (I notice my dad is more emotional about things these days) or if I am just "getting in touch with my feminine" side but I would be lying if I

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By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

There's a lot to keep track of right now when it comes to sage-grouse! Below is an overview of upcoming dates related to the many parallel processes happening with sage-grouse policy and project management in Utah.

## Utah Governor's Greater Sage-grouse Plan

December 2012

The Utah Governor's Sage-grouse Working Group met on October 22, 2012, after a two month hiatus. The group spent the meeting reviewing submitted comments to the draft recommendations. The recommendations have not been submitted to Governor Gary Herbert. It is anticipated that the recommendations will be on the Governors' desk in mid-November. The Governor's Office will review the recommendations and use them as the basis for a Utah plan. Once the Governor's Plan is finalized, it is anticipated it will be released for public comment in early December. Keep an eye out for emails through your LWG with information about comment periods. If accepted by the USFWS, this plan will replace the interim guidelines currently in use by the BLM. It will also become one of the alternatives that will be considered by the BLM in their planning for long-term land-use plan amendments.

## Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI) Project Funding Signups

Ongoing

Contact your local SGI biologist, or visit your local NRCS office to learn more about the programs. Consider implementing a pinyon-juniper project, or improving sage-grouse habitat on your land in other ways. Visit <http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/> for more information, or contact Natasha Gruber (northeastern and southern Utah: 435-722-4621), Taylor Payne (Rich County: 435-757-6115), or Tammy Koldyke (Northern and Western Utah: 801-629-0580 x 123).

## Local Working Group Meetings

Fall 2012/Winter 2012

Local working group (LWG) meetings will include the most recent updates for all these processes, in addition to regular project planning and research updates. Check the LWG website for times and locations: [utahcbcp.org](http://utahcbcp.org).

Box Elder County (Grouse Creek)  
Carbon/Emery (Price)  
Southwest Desert (Cedar City)  
Color Country (Panguitch)  
Morgan-Summit (Wanship/Coalville)  
Parker (Loa)

Rich County (Randolph)  
San Juan/Monticello – Gunnison sage-grouse (Blanding)  
Strawberry Valley (Heber City)  
Uintah Basin (Vernal)  
West Desert (Tooele)

## Watershed Restoration Initiative Project Proposals Due

December 2012

Many projects valuable to sage-grouse in Utah can be funded in part by the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI), through the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) regional teams. Project proposals need to be entered into the WRI online system in December at the latest – preferably earlier so they can be reviewed more thoroughly by the regional teams – to receive funding consideration. If you are new to the process, contact members of your LWG, or a regional UPCD chair for guidance on proposal submission. See <http://wri.utah.gov/wri/> for more info.

## USFWS Decision on Gunnison Sage-Grouse Listing

December 30, 2012

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has revised the timetable for releasing the draft rules governing the proposed listing of Gunnison sage-grouse for protection under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Gunnison sage-grouse, which occur in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah, are currently designated as a candidate species for listing. The

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USFWS is expected to release its guidance regarding the proposed rules for listing the species on 30 December 2012. The draft rules will undoubtedly provide some insights as to how the USFWS will address issue regarding species take and critical habitat designations on privately-owned land. The draft rules will be open for public comment throughout most of 2013, with the final rules to be issued in late 2013.

### **BLM Draft EIS (for public comment)**

**December 2012**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently working to amend all land use plans (Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and others) to include sage-grouse protections. One step in this process is to write an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that considers different alternatives for what the new regulations would look like. An initial draft of the EIS was developed and circulated to cooperating agencies this summer. Currently, the BLM is incorporating these comments and will have a version out for public comment in the upcoming months.

### **BLM RMP Publication**

**Fall 2014**

The BLM process explained above is on a timeline to finish Land Use Plan (LUP) amendments two years from now, in the fall of 2014. This will give the USFWS time to consider the amendments in its 2015 decision regarding the ESA status of greater sage-grouse.

### **USFWS Decision on Greater Sage-grouse Listing**

**March 2015**

The USFWS will again consider whether greater sage-grouse should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. In March of 2010, the bird was added to the list of “Candidate” species, based in part on the lack of adequate regulatory mechanisms to protect the bird and concerns about habitat fragmentation. This new decision will take into account the many ongoing planning processes, such as Utah’s state plan, BLM land-use plan amendments, and any county or other local level regulations to protect the bird.

## SWARM OPEN HOUSE

By Nicki Frey, Utah State University

On October 9th, the Southwest Desert Local Working Group hosted an open house for the first time in a few years. We had wonderful attendance, with 40 participants joining us for dinner and presentations. Dinner was provided by the UACD, the local grazing boards, and Beaver and Iron County Cooperative Extension. After dinner, we heard presentations from Nile Sorenson about the NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative. Mr. Sorenson provided updates on several projects that have occurred in Hamlin Valley as well as information on how local landowners can participate in this program. Vicki Tyler, of Cedar City Bureau of Land Management then provided the group with maps of where fires occurred in our region this summer. She distributed packets of information about the size of the fires, and the recovery strategies and actions that will help restore these lands for greater sage-grouse, big game, and grazing livestock. Next, Nicki Frey presented research results from the Bald Hills research project, highlighting the hotspot maps created by Cheyenne Burnett. Heather McPherron drove down from Logan to present her research results on Hamlin Valley sage-grouse use, fence line mortality, and avian predator use of fence lines. We concluded the presentations with an overview of the Governor’s Office Task Force status on providing recommendations for sage-grouse management in Utah. As a surprise, the Beaver Soil Conservation District provided door prizes to several lucky open house participants. All in all, it was a great time. Thanks to all who attended and volunteered their time to make it a success.



*Photos courtesy of Mark Nelson*

## *If it's not good for communities, it's not good for wildlife.*

### OLD SAGE-GROUSERS NEVER DIE, THEY JUST FIND BETTER SAGEBRUSH, CONT.

didn't say I'm just a bit emotional as I think and ponder on the past. I have some very fond memories and certainly experiences that I will never forget. Some have really helped to shape and define who I am and where I fit into this field of wildlife/range management today."

"I first came to USU with my family in 1991 to start graduate school. There was this new thing called Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and I thought it a neat/cool tool that a biologist could use for wildlife management and thought I should learn more about it so I decided to get an advanced degree in Remote Sensing and GIS the Geography Dept. at USU. At the time, my wife and I had no intentions of staying here and were not even thinking about Cache Valley being our home. Things changed over the next few years and we quickly felt like this was a great place to raise a family and we now call it home. We have made lasting acquaintances and friendships living here the past 20+ years and we/I will have a hard time leaving the valley. When I started here at USU, I was a non-matriculated graduate student and had to finish up a few classes at BYU to graduate there before starting grad school here. While in grad program here, I met Dr. Terry Messmer who needed help with some help with a wildlife mapping project. A few years later I started working part time with Dr. Messmer on the Gunnison sage-grouse (back then they were not officially Gunnison's) and a few mule deer projects doing mapping and GIS things for him. It wasn't too long after that that I started helping many of his graduate students trapping and doing other GIS and mapping projects and soon it worked into a full time job. Since that time, Terry and I have developed a friendship and a working relationship that works well for what we do. I don't think I could have worked for anyone better who understood my need to be in the outdoors, the need to take time off in the fall, and who would allow me to work odd hours so that I could spend time with my family and hobbies."

"That was 1995. Since that time, I have been a part of the growing research efforts at USU with Dr. Messmer and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources working with Utah's sage-grouse populations and have been a part of most if not all of them. Just this past year I sat down and went through my field note books and figured I have visited/counted nearly 150 different sage-grouse leks and I'm pretty sure no one person at least in Utah has held more sage-grouse in their hands than I have. These have truly been some very memorable experiences for me, maybe even life changing."

#### Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program Mission

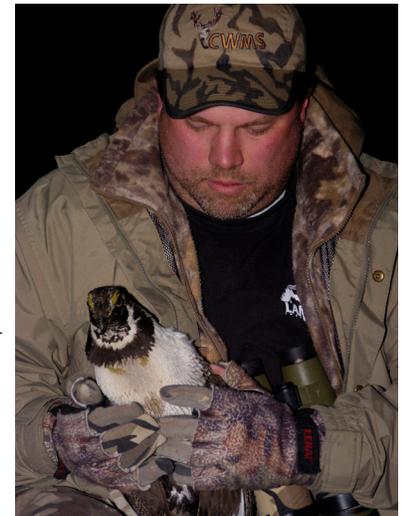
Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program is dedicated to promoting natural resource management education and facilitating cooperation between local communities and natural resource management organizations and agencies.

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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[www.utahcbcp.org](http://www.utahcbcp.org)



"Amidst all of these memories and experiences I have experienced, I think the fondest are all of those where I had opportunities to meet, work with, and rub shoulders with each of you. I have never considered myself a social butterfly but I really have enjoyed getting to know many of you. Many of whom I would have never figured or considered friends are now good friends, colleagues, and associates. I thank each of you for these lasting memories and friendships. I always hate saying good bye, so long, farewell, and adieu but as they say, all good things must come to an end and thus ends my career at USU. I realize some of you, I will likely never see or associate with again, while others I suspect our friendship and working together will continue unchanged and I will see and communicate with you on a regular basis. It has been a pleasure."

Now it is my turn:

There is no simple way to measure Todd's contribution to sage-grouse conservation in Utah. His impact in terms of the relationships he has built and the conservation partnerships will continue to provide Utah stakeholders with benefits for years to come. I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to know and work with Todd. It has been one heck-of-a-ride, and I can hardly wait for the great things yet to come.