

THE COMMUNICATOR

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UTAH'S COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM RECEIVES UTAH RURAL SUMMIT AWARD

Text adapted from 2010 Utah Rural Summit Award Presentation

What do BARMs, SWARMs, PARMs, UBARMs and SWOGs all have in common? Not much, unless you're familiar with sage-grouse and their habitat needs. From Box Elder County, to the Southwest Desert, to Parker Mountain, the Uintah Basin, and down to San Juan County—in fact, covering all of Utah's sage-grouse habitat—the eleven Adaptive Resource Management Local Sage-grouse Working Groups found across the state comprise the highly-successful and ground-breaking Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program. A partnership between Utah State University (USU) Extension and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR), along with stakeholders that include local governments, other state and federal agencies, Tribal Governments, private industry, and numerous non-governmental organizations, Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program's mission is:



Pictured from left to right: Wes Curtis, Chuck Gay, Terry Messmer, Nicki Frey, Bruce Bonebreak, Gov. Gary Herbert, Kim Kristy, Kevin Williams, Mike Styler, Lt. Gov. Greg Bell. Photo courtesy of Jim Belliston.

- To implement a process that enhances coordination and communication between community-based adaptive resource management working groups, private and public partners.
- And to develop “seamless” plans for designated Utah geographic areas that contribute to the conservation of sage-grouse and other wildlife species that inhabit Utah's sagebrush-steppe ecosystems and enhance the economic sustainability of local communities.

With the assistance of USU Extension and DWR personnel, along with USU graduate students, local working groups are implementing conservation plans that benefit their communities, sage-grouse and other wildlife species that depend on sagebrush habitats. These local plans conserve sage-grouse as well as support the farmers and ranchers working to improve range conditions.

As sage-grouse continue to decline throughout the West, and petitions and lawsuits to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mount to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act, Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program offers a compelling alternative. An Endangered Species Act listing could alter the management and use of western rangelands. This Program is leading the way—a tried and true way of communication, coordination and collaboration—to maintain the sage-grouse and what is, for many rural Utahns, their western way of life. The program has remained true to its motto: “if it's not good for communities, it's not good for wildlife.” For this, Utah's Community-Based Conservation Program is truly deserving of the Utah Center for Rural Life's 2010 Rural Honors Award.

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GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE, A CANDIDATE FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION



On 27 September, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced that the Gunnison sage-grouse warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but that proposing the species for protection is precluded by the need to address other higher priority species. The USFWS will add the Gunnison sage-grouse to its list of candidate species and review its status annually. When a “warranted but precluded” finding is made for a species, the Service classifies it as a candidate for addition to the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

The Gunnison sage-grouse currently exists in seven populations, six in Colorado and one in both Colorado and Utah. These include the Gunnison Basin, San Miguel Basin, Monticello-Dove Creek, Pinon Mesa, Crawford, Cerro Summit-Cimarron-Sims Mesa, and Poncha Pass populations.

The remaining 4,000 to 4,500 Gunnison sage-grouse currently occupy approximately 940,000 acres scattered across the seven isolated populations. The Gunnison Basin population encompasses approximately 590,000 acres and over 87 percent of the species’ total number of birds. The remaining six populations contain highly fragmented patches of sagebrush habitat, from 10 to approximately 200 birds each.

In April 2006, the Service had published a finding that listing the Gunnison sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species was not warranted. At that time, the USFWS determined that the range-wide population of the Gunnison sage-grouse was stable and threats to the species were not significant to current, known populations. Since that time the USFWS felt that threats to the species have increased, especially habitat fragmentation.

The USFWS acknowledged the efforts of state, federal, and local working group partners as well as private landowners for their ongoing and proposed conservation efforts across the range of the Gunnison sage-grouse. All parties were commended for their conservation efforts and are encouraged to continue these efforts. Although the local working groups have developed and are implementing conservation plans, the USFWS stated they did not believe the efforts are adequate to address the primary threat of habitat fragmentation in a manner that effectively reduces or eliminates the most significant contributors to this threat. All of the conservation efforts are limited in size and have not been implemented at the scale (even when considered cumulatively) that would be required to effectively reduce the threats to the species across its range.

This finding is available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket Number FWS-R6-ES-2009-0080.

All parties were commended for their conservation efforts and are encouraged to continue these efforts.



LANDOWNERS SUPPORT RESEARCH EFFORTS ON DIAMOND MOUNTAIN

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

Local landowners have played a crucial role in some important new sage-grouse research being conducted on Diamond Mountain. Several students from Brigham Young University are involved in research collaring and tracking sage-grouse. Local landowners and ranchers Mitch Hacking and Brad Horrocks stepped up to the plate, graciously offering to allow the students to stay in their hunting lodge, “2 Dog Huntin,” in the area. In addition to reducing project costs for housing the students, being able to stay at the lodge significantly reduced fuel costs for the students, who would otherwise have needed to drive back down the mountain every night.

According to Josh Kaze, one of the BYU students, these same landowners were also extremely helpful when it came to contacting other landowners on Diamond Mountain. “Mitch and Brad acted as advocates for the sage-grouse project and opened many doors, or gates, for us, without which we may never had been able to attain permission” to access the land. The students expressed their thanks to the many ranchers who gave them permission to conduct their research on their land. Access can be

Continued on page 3



Student taking vegetation measurements on Diamond Mountain. Photo courtesy of Josh Kaze.

FINAL REPORT RELEASED: CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH NEEDS REGARDING THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF TALL STRUCTURES ON SAGE-GROUSE (*CENTROCERCUS* SPP.)

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

Contemporary transmission of energy relies largely on above ground electric-utility structures and transmission lines. In 2005, the Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Range-wide Issues Forum (Forum), sponsored by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), was convened to engage a diverse group of stakeholders. Forum participants identified a need to better understand the effects of tall structures on sage-grouse as well as strategies to address species conservation issues identified by Connelly et al. (2004). The Forum recommended compiling and evaluating existing published research on the effects of tall structures on greater sage-grouse. They believed a literature synthesis would facilitate the development of research protocols for conducting new studies to assess direct impacts of tall structures on greater sage-grouse and implementation of effective best management practices (BMPs) that would minimize negative impacts on the species.

The Utah Wildlife in Need (UWIN) in cooperation with Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) completed a process to synthesize stakeholder contemporary knowledge regarding the effects of tall structures on sage-grouse. For the purpose of this report tall structures include distribution power poles and lines, electric transmission lines, wind turbines, and associated structures. The project assessed the adequacy of existing information to predict and mitigate the potential impacts of tall structures on sage-grouse, identified information gaps and needs, and prioritized research needed to provide new knowledge for policy development. The project combined a public input process (workshops) with a synthesis of published and unpublished information.

Participants recommended that research be implemented to address their concerns and should include:

- 1) a rigorous, replicable research protocol developed by a committee of experts
- 2) a BACI experimental research platform
- 3) adequate replication representative of the sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) landscapes currently inhabited by sage-grouse
- 4) current industry technology
- 5) current research technology including the use of GPS transmitters
- 6) “court” defensible results
- 7) experimental designs that simultaneously address multiple knowledge gaps
- 8) metrics assessing individual and cumulative impacts of each tall structure type
- 9) a collaborative process
- 10) mechanisms that allow preliminary results to be employed in an adaptive management approach leading to the refinement of effective BMPs
- 11) transparency and open dialogue with frequent partnership updates
- 12) industry incentives to include mitigation credits for proactive funding of identified research.

The complete report can be accessed at www.utahcbcp.org.

LANDOWNERS SUPPORT RESEARCH EFFORTS ON DIAMOND MOUNTAIN (CONT.)

critical, and a major challenge, when students are tracking radio-collared grouse. Because so many different landowners in the area have been supportive, the research has been very successful to date.

The students have captured and radio-collared 30 sage-grouse in the area, and are tracking them to better understand how the grouse use the landscape. They have also taken vegetation measurements and are keeping track of sage-grouse breeding activity, such as nest success. The results of their research will contribute substantially to our understanding of sage-grouse on Diamond Mountain.

Josh Kaze has learned something about the ranchers, too. “From our experience,” says Kaze, “the ranchers on Diamond Mountain understand the sensitive ecological relationships on the sage brush steppe and are willing to work together on managing the land for multiple uses in a healthy way.” The UBARM group is delighted to be able to celebrate this combination of positive relationships and good science. The ranchers and researchers were commended during the field tour in September for the great job they are doing.



Student taking vegetation measurements on Diamond Mountain research project. Photo courtesy of Josh Kaze.

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

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, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.

www.utahcbcp.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Box Elder County LWG meeting November 11, 2010, at 6:30 PM at the Park Valley Elementary School.

Carbon - Emery Counties LWG meeting November 9, 2010, at 5:00 PM at the UDWR/NR Building Price River Dr., Price.

Color Country LWG meeting tentatively scheduled for Dec. 15.

Monticello / Dove Creek LWG meeting to be announced.

Morgan - Summit Counties LWG meeting to be determined during November/December.

Parker Mountain: LWG meeting November 9, 2010, at 10:00 AM at the County Building in Loa

Rich County CRM meeting November 11, 2010, at 6 PM at the Randolph Senior Center.

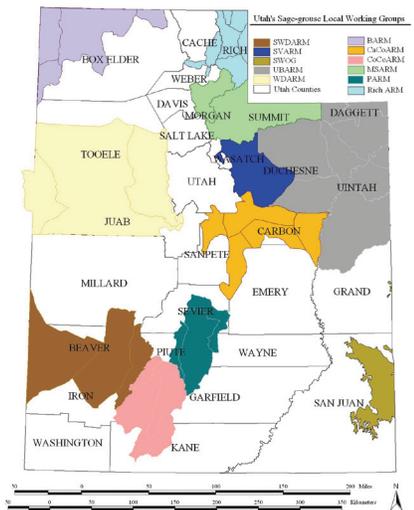
Southwest Desert LWG meeting to be announced.

Strawberry Valley LWG to be determined during November.

Uintah Basin LWG meeting November 16, 2010 at 10 AM at the County Building in Vernal.

West Desert LWG meeting to be determined during November/December.

For current schedule or meeting changes go online to www.utahcbcp.org



Map courtesy of Todd Black.