

THE COMMUNICATOR

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WEST BOX ELDER CRM WINS THE BLM SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT STEWARDSHIP COLLABORATIVE GROUP AWARD

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced its Rangeland Stewardship Awards for 2016, given in recognition of the recipients' dedication to the health and productivity of public rangelands under BLM management.

"These awards honor excellence in management practices that benefit America's public rangelands," said BLM Deputy Director Steve Ellis in a statement issued from Washington, D.C. "Today the BLM proudly commends these public land stewards for their commitment to protecting rangeland resources for current and future generations."

The presentation of the awards took place at the annual fall meeting of the rancher-based Public Lands Council. The awards were presented by Joe Tague, Chief of the BLM's Division for Forest, Rangeland, Riparian, and Plant Conservation.



Jeff Hatfield, Box Elder County Commissioner, and Clint Hill, Conservation District Manager, receiving the award on behalf of the West Box Elder CRMC. Photo courtesy of BLM.

The Sage-grouse Habitat Stewardship Collaborative Group Award went to the West Box Elder County Coordinated Resource Management Group (WBE CRMC), which the BLM commended as an ideal example of a community-based land stewardship organization that is committed, engaged, and active across land ownership boundaries.

The WBE CRMC is the epitome of what willingness and ability to work within a diverse group means. Its members include a true cross-section of the stakeholders in West Box Elder County and beyond. The WBE CRMC is stepping forward to make significant improvements in the landscape conservation and management of sage-grouse habitat. They are providing a forum for the BLM to reach small communities in the county.

There is not a more deserving group to showcase how much can be accomplished when people foster partnerships in a common cause. Thanks to the members of the WBE CRMC, the future for BLM landscape stewardship in northwestern Utah is bright.

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UTAH COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM RECOGNIZED BY THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY WITH 2016 GROUP ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



By Shelby Ruud, Utah State University

On October 18, 2016, The Wildlife Society (TWS) presented the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program (CBCP) with its 2016 Group Achievement Award at its 23rd Annual Conference that was held in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Group Achievement Award recognizes an organization for outstanding wildlife achievement that advances professional wildlife management.

The CBCP nomination package was submitted by Kathleen Clarke, Director, Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office, and contained letters of support from Jay and Diane Tanner, Della Ranches, and Dr. Ken White, Vice President for Agriculture and Extension, Utah State University.

“As the director of the Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office, I and my staff have worked closely with Dr. Messmer and the CBCP staff for several years to develop a process to engage Utah, and regional stakeholders in the conservation and management of the greater sage-grouse and its habitats,” wrote Director Clarke. “Because of CBCP research efforts, the State of Utah was fortunate to have unparalleled knowledge about the factors es-

Terry Messmer and Nicki Frey represent Community-Based Conservation Program members in accepting the Group Achievement Award from Gary Potts, TWS President. Photo courtesy of Carson Maness, TWS .

sential to species conservation. The CBCP provided expertise in facilitating and evaluating the process, conducting and reporting ecological and human dimensions research, and organizing and facilitating state, regional, and international meetings and forums to maximize both process and content delivery. Their efforts and impacts range-wide were showcased at the International Sage-grouse Forum and more recently in the 2016 Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Conference which was held in SLC, February 2016. The CBCP process has translated conservation planning into management, and management into population change. Since 1996, the Utah’s LWGs and their partners have restored over 500,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat and protected over 94% of the state’s sage-grouse populations on 7.5 million acres in 11 sage-grouse management areas. Utah Governor Gary H. Herbert credited the CBCP for demonstrating that community-based conservation strategies and working landscapes are essential components of a range wide species conservation effort.”

Jay and Diane Tanner are 5th generation ranchers and part of a legacy of over 130 years of Tanners ranching in the Grouse Creek Valley in Box Elder County. “The CBCP is the embodiment of Aldo Leopold’s vision of a land-grant university system that not only conducts the research most needed, but is also able to create ownership in the outcome and applications. Their work is the premier example of Extension’s ability to provide relevant and current research-based information to people to help them resolve issues that affect people and their communities. Terry and his colleagues, and graduate students have had a tremendous impact locally, statewide, and throughout the region. They have worked tirelessly to map the ecology of sage-grouse in Utah, and along the way have actively engaged local communities, state and federal agencies, ranchers, and elected officials in the process. One of the biggest and most unsung contributions of the CBCP is the long list of graduate and undergraduate students who have been part of the program. We have hosted dozens of these ‘Aldo Leopold’ ambassadors over the years. We have welcomed them into our homes and broke bread with them on countless occasions. Thanks to the CBCP, these students have developed a deeper appreciation of the role of private lands as part of the working landscapes so essential for conservation. Thanks to them we have also developed a deeper appreciation of professional wildlife management. Many of these students are now employed in positions at state, federal, and academics institutions throughout North America. All continue to remain true to Aldo Leopold’s land ethics and the role of private land in wildlife conservation.”

“The CBCP is an integral part of Utah State University Extension,” wrote Dr. White. “The CBCP program is the very embodiment of Aldo Leopold’s vision for the hope and future of wildlife conservation in North America. Allow me to quote from the Sand County Almanac - ‘Conservation will ultimately boil down to rewarding the private landowner who conserves the public interest.’ The CBCP has enhanced communication among private stakeholders, local, regional and state governments, and state and federal management agencies and increased implementation of voluntary incentive-based collaborative conservation management practices.”

“Terry and his colleagues are making a tremendous impact in Utah and across the region. Their work is a great example of how Extension’s ability to get up-to-date, research-based information to people can help resolve issues that affect people and their communities. I believe Aldo Leopold, as the first extension wildlife specialist at the University of Wisconsin, would have been truly proud of their accomplishments.”

THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT RELEASES ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON SAGE-GROUSE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

In September 2016, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released seven documents referred to as Instructional Memoranda (IMs) which provide additional detail about how BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendments for greater sage-grouse may be implemented. The RMP plan amendments were released in September 2015 prior to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's determination not to list the greater sage-grouse for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The RMPs provided general guidance regarding how greater sage-grouse habitat needs would be more fully considered in future BLM land management decisions. The seven IM's provide additional detail. We have invited BLM representatives to attend local working group meetings in the near future to more fully explain the IM's and how they may be used to provide field managers with additional RMP plan amendment guidance.

The released IM's include:

- **“Oil and gas leasing and development:** This IM provides guidance on how the BLM will prioritize oil and gas leasing and development in relation to habitat management areas, consistent with its sage-grouse conservation strategy and Greater Sage-grouse land use plans.
- **Grazing permit review priorities:** The BLM's land use plans commit the BLM to prioritize the review of grazing permits that are located within areas that were identified by a team of state and federal wildlife biologists as the highest quality habitat for breeding populations of sage-grouse. This policy provides further guidance on the considerations and process that should inform that prioritization.
- **Grazing management thresholds and responses:** Under the Greater Sage-grouse land use plans, the NEPA analysis for renewals or modification of grazing permits in priority habitat management areas must consider and may incorporate specific indicators of land health, as well as grazing management responses. This policy provides further guidance as to how and when thresholds and responses should be considered and implemented.
- **Adaptive management triggers:** Most plans contain triggers developed with state wildlife agency experts that require the agency to take pre-defined management actions in response to changes in habitat or populations. This policy details how the BLM will proceed with notification and implementation of identified management actions if triggers have been exceeded.
- **Disturbance tracking:** The land use plans commit the BLM to tracking disturbance and reclamation of sagebrush habitat. This policy guides the use of tracking tools to help ensure the consistent reporting of habitat disturbances and reclamation success across the Greater Sage-grouse range.
- **Effectiveness monitoring:** This policy explains how data gathered using the BLM's Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) strategy will be pooled to assess how well the BLM is achieving its goals in the land use plans. These reports will use the data gathered under the AIM strategy and disturbance tracking policies and associated monitoring efforts.
- **Habitat assessment framework:** Under this policy, the BLM will use Habitat Assessment Reports to gather information about the Greater Sage-grouse and the health of its habitat into a single report that allows managers to make accurate assessments of habitat conditions at local, regional and range-wide scales.”

For anyone interested in reading the complete IM text, the documents (IM numbers 2016-139 through 2016-145) can be downloaded as PDFs from http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse/documents_and_resources.html .

The dates for upcoming LWGs are provided in this newsletter. For additional information please check our website at <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups>. If you are not currently on the email announcement listserv for the LWG in your area, contact the facilitator for that group or e-mail Rae Ann Hart at raeann.hart@usu.edu.

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

THE OWL AND THE SAGE-GROUSE: REVISITED

Brandon Flack, USU Graduate Student

In the last issue of *The Communicator*, I penned a tongue-and-check article entitled, "The Owl and the Sage-grouse: A tale of predation, persistence, and recovery." This article chronicled my experiences in trying to recover a \$4,000 global positioning system (GPS) transmitter from below an active great-horned owl nest. We had deployed the GPS transmitter on a female sage-grouse in Rich County in the spring. The female flew over 30 miles to nest in Morgan County. She was subsequently killed by the owl, her carcass along with the GPS transmitter attached was carried by the owl to a nest which was located in a 40-foot tall cottonwood tree. The owl eventually discarded the carcass and the transmitter, but the transmitter harness became entangled in a branch located beneath the nest. The nest was occupied also by an owlet. Although our actions may have been entertaining for those who read the article, and we exercised extreme caution not to harm the owl and the owlet, our actions did not fall in line with federal regulations, particularly the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The MBTA prohibits the take of migratory birds, their parts, nests, eggs, and nestlings. Take is any attempt at hunting, pursuing, wounding, killing, possessing, or transporting any migratory bird, nest, egg, or part thereof. Take of migratory birds is illegal and prosecutable by law. There are additional protections for bald and golden eagles under the Bald and Golden Eagle Act (BGEPA). The definition of take under BGEPA includes the terms pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest, or disturb.

There are special considerations for raptors due to population status, long lifespans with slow reproductive rates, and sensitivity to disturbance. Thus, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recommends using spatial and temporal buffers outlined in Utah Field Office Guidelines for Raptor Protection from Human and Land Use Disturbances be followed to reduce potential for take of raptors.

When projects that could have potential impacts to migratory birds are being planned, to include recovering GPS transmitters from below a raptor nest, the USFWS recommends that activities avoid the nesting season. In Utah, the peak breeding season is April

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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through July. The entire nesting season is January through August. Take permits are available for qualified applicants through the Office of Migratory Birds. Applications are available for the following types of activities: falconry, raptor propagation, scientific collecting, rehabilitation, conservation education, migratory game bird propagation, salvage, depredation control, taxidermy, and waterfowl sale and disposal.

Thus in the case of the sage-grouse GPS transmitter recovery, the best measure would have been to wait until the owlet fledged and was no longer dependent on the nest. Shooting, throwing rocks, and causing other disturbance may have negative impacts on the owls. There was the potential that the nest would be affected and the owlet could have been directly hit or nest removed. The adults could also abandon the nest due to disturbance. In this case, although neither situation occurred, we were in error to attempt the recovery without receiving the proper authorization. We encourage others to learn from our mistake.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Castle Country (CaCoARM)	Nov. 16, beginning at 6:30 PM
Color Country (CCARM)	Dec. 7, beginning at 11 AM
East Box Elder (EBARM)	TBA
Morgan-Summit (MSARM)	Oct. 25, beginning at 1 PM
Parker Mountain (PARM)	Oct. 25, beginning at 1 PM
Rich County CRM	Oct. 26, beginning at 1 PM
Southwest Desert (SWARM)	Dec. 6, beginning at 10 AM
Strawberry Valley (SVARM)	Nov. 1, beginning at 10 AM
Uintah Basin (UBARM)	Dec. 6, beginning at 1:30 PM
West Box Elder CRM	Nov. 15, beginning at 6 PM
West Desert (WDARM)	TBA early December

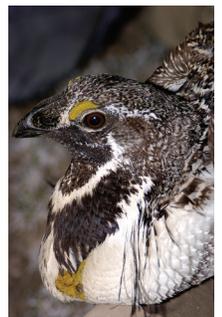


Photo courtesy of Todd Black.