

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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

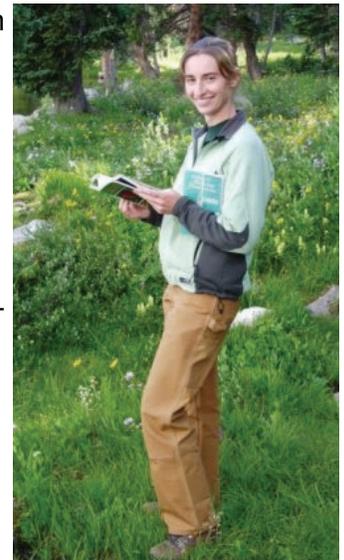


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## NEW EXTENSION SPECIALIST JOINS COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM

In May 2008, Lorien Belton joined the staff of the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program as an Extension Specialist. Based in Logan, she filled the position recently vacated by Sarah Lupis. Lorien received her master's degree in Sociology of Natural Resources from Utah State University earlier this year. Her thesis, drawn from a survey of sage-grouse local working groups range-wide, focused on the concept of "ownership" of individuals in the work of these groups. Prior to coming to Utah, she received her undergraduate degree in Earth Systems from Stanford University, where her senior project focused on fire ecology and greater sage-grouse in the Great Basin. She also worked for 5 years at Rare, an organization in Arlington, Virginia, which focuses on linking conservation goals to community benefit in countries around the world. Lorien grew up in northern Wyoming, and is very happy to be back in the West! In her free time, she cares for a small farm in Richmond, Utah, with several sheep and many chickens. She looks forward to working with many of the local working groups in Utah. Lorien can be contacted at [Lorien.Belton@usu.edu](mailto:Lorien.Belton@usu.edu), or on her cell at 435-770-2413.



Lorien Belton

IN THIS ISSUE

NEW EXTENSION SPECIALIST JOINS COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION PROGRAM.....	1
JASON ROBINSON HIRED AS NEW Upland Game Project LEADER.....	1
NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD THEIR CAPACITIES .....	2
JASON ROBINSON, CONTINUED .....	2
UTAH'S RESPONSE TO THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE CALL FOR DATA.....	3
STRAWBERRY VALLEY FIELD TOUR.....	3
2008 INTERAGENCY MOU REAFFIRMS THE ROLE OF LOCAL WORKING GROUPS IN SAGE-GROUSE AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION .....	4
CBCP MISSION STATEMENT.....	4

## Jason Robinson Hired as New Upland Game Project Leader

In April, 2008, Jason D. Robinson was hired to fill a new position with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR). The title of the position is Upland Game Project Leader. The position covers all of Utah's upland game species, but with special interest in the state's two species of sage-grouse. He will be assisting with upland game program planning and management throughout the state. Special assignments include preparing data for Utah to provide to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the review process of a greater sage-grouse petition, and revision of the Utah Strategic Management Plan for sage-grouse.

Jason was born in Utah and has lived here his entire life -- a 6th generation family member of Pleasant Grove. He always wanted to be a biologist. At the age of 10, he had a kid's sized pool in the backyard where he raised bluegill and would take weekly measurements to see how fast they grew. In 5th grade he wrote a fictional paper on pheasant and chicken hybrids causing problems for local farmers.

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# NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD THEIR CAPACITIES

By Lorien Belton

In 2007, researchers at Utah State University (USU) conducted a needs assessment survey of Sage-Grouse Local Working Groups (LWGs) range-wide. Over 700 working group attendees (57%) from nine states returned the survey. Overall, 26% of respondents indicated that they were federal employees; 22% were state agency staff. Ranchers and farmers made up almost a third of participants, and an additional 9% identified themselves as non-agricultural rural landowners. Remaining participants include conservation, industry and tribal interests. Approximately 72% of rancher/landowners reported having sage-grouse on land they own or manage. About 45% of our respondents no longer attend LWG meetings. Of those still attending the meetings, 64% are paid to attend.

The follow points are excerpted from a summary of recommendations submitted to the Western Governor's Association in July 2008.

## Research and Project Needs

- Some respondents (29%) felt that their LWGs lacked adequate access to funding. This suggests that supporting agencies should work to **make information on funding sources more available** as well as help LWGs apply for project implementation funds.
- When asked where additional funding would be most helpful, a majority of LWGs participants identified **support for on-the-ground habitat improvement projects and research** (on sage-grouse populations and other topics) as top priorities.
- Perceptions of key threats to sage-grouse varied by state and by the organizational affiliation of survey respondents. Most noticeably, perceptions of the importance of predator threats varied dramatically between agricultural producers and agency wildlife managers. Landowner participation in the LWGs might be enhanced in some states if agencies would **increase support for research on topics of concern to landowners**, such as the impacts of predation.

## Information Priorities

- LWG participants cited information on **protection for landowners if the species were listed** as the top information need.
- Overall, state wildlife agencies and university scientists were the most trusted entities with regard to information about sage grouse. Landowners and agricultural producers, however, trusted the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) more than any other government entity. This indicates the potential value of **increased coordination** between NRCS and university or agency sage-grouse researchers when designing research to evaluate LWGs' management actions, particularly on private land.
- When seeking information, **LWG participants clearly preferred personal interactions to published documents or online resources.**

In addition to an NRCS technical report with full project results, we plan to present state-specific findings to relevant teams within each state. For inquiries or for a copy of the final technical report, please e-mail [Lorien.Belton@usu.edu](mailto:Lorien.Belton@usu.edu).

## JASON ROBINSON, CONTINUED



Jason Robinson

After graduating from Pleasant Grove High in Utah County, he attended Snow College for 2 years and received an associate's degree in Biology. Jason then attended Utah State University (USU) for two years and received a bachelors degree in Fisheries and Wildlife. He then pursued a master's degree from Utah State University under the direction of Dr. Terry Messmer. Jason conducted a 3-year telemetry study in Tooele and Juab counties on the ecology of greater sage-grouse in two distinct populations. Jason has also worked as a wildland firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) for three summers, and as a technician for USU and USFS conducting northern goshawk, three-toed woodpecker, beaver, neotropical migrant, and small rodent surveys. Jason has been married to Emily for nearly 7 years. They don't have any kids, but plan to in the future. Jason is passionate about hunting and the outdoors and enjoys hunting, shooting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, reading, and any other outdoor related activities. Join us in welcoming Jason. He can be reached by e-mail at [jasonrobinson@utah.gov](mailto:jasonrobinson@utah.gov) or by phone at 801-707-1508.

By Jason Robinson

In the last Communicator newsletter, we provided a notice regarding a federal judge's ruling in December 2007 to overturn the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) 2005 decision not to list greater sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species. In response to this decision, all western states with greater sage-grouse were asked to assemble information on conservation efforts conducted to benefit the species in their states. Each western state established an Interagency (IA) Team to accomplish this task. Utah's IA Team began meeting in March 2008 to collect information to report to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Groups represented on the Utah IA Team included the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Utah Farm Bureau, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Utah Partners for Conservation and Development, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), private landowners, Utah State and Institutional Trustlands Administration, Utah State University (USU), and USFWS. Jason Robinson (UDWR) was appointed by the IA Team and is responsible for entering and submitting the database to USFWS.

In late June 2008, Utah's IA Team submitted two products to USFWS: a database containing all the projects/actions Utah has completed or planned for the benefit of greater sage-grouse and a letter outlining all the activities not covered by the database. The USFWS state representative also submitted a spreadsheet covering large scale impacts to greater sage-grouse; included were large scale fires, habitat loss, development, etc. Utah reported 271 projects/actions encompassing nearly 1.3 million acres of greater sage-grouse habitat in Utah. In addition, over 87,000 acres have been placed within conservation easements since November 2004. Since 2004, over 236,000 acres of habitat had been improved to benefit greater sage-grouse by Utah partners.

The IA Team also submitted a letter to document actions not captured by the project database. One of the major components missing was the research being conducted to evaluate the effect of management actions on sage-grouse throughout the state and the efforts of Utah's 12 local working groups (LWGs). USU, Brigham Young University, and Southern Utah University are heavily involved in these evaluations to support LWGs as they implement their conservation plans. USFWS anticipates a 6-month review process, with a decision coming out in December.

## STRAWBERRY VALLEY FIELD TOUR

By Lorien Belton and Michael Bornstein

On July 11, 2008, the Strawberry Valley Local Working Group (SVARM) held a summer field tour. About 20 individuals attended, including several members of the Wasatch County Coordinated Weed Management Area (CWMA).

One of the highlights of the tour was a stop at Trout Creek. The Trout Creek sage-grouse habitat improvement project is located immediately north of Strawberry Reservoir, and approximately 6 miles north of the lek site. The goal of this project was to improve sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat. The project area exhibited almost 50% mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata vaseyana*) canopy with little vegetation understory prior to treatment. In August and September 2007, through using a combination of mowing with a brush-hog, and one-pass and two-pass Dixie-harrowing, approximately 168 acres were treated in a mosaic pattern, with no-treatment 50' buffers along perennial and intermittent streams, and additional untreated areas. Seeding with native forbs occurred simultaneously with the treatments. The post-treatment estimated sagebrush canopy cover was reduced to 15-25%, and forbs appear to have flourished as a result of both seeding and opening up the sagebrush canopy. A radio-collared sage-grouse was found in the treatment area 3 weeks after treatment.

The tour also stopped at Windy Ridge to look out over three planned sagebrush treatments at Chicken Spring Ridge, Road Hollow Ridge, and Sage Creek Bay. NEPA is ongoing for these treatments, which are planned to be done over the next several years.



Photo by Les Flake

Participants on the July 11th Strawberry Valley field tour stand in a mowing treatment area in the Trout Creek area. The edge of the mowed area can be seen directly behind the line of people. Tour participants were pleased with the grass and forb response from the August 2007 treatment, designed to help augment brood rearing habitat in the area.

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

### 2008 INTERAGENCY MOU REAFFIRMS THE ROLE OF LOCAL WORKING GROUPS IN SAGE-GROUSE AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION

In 1999 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by states participating in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) provided the basis for cooperative actions in the conservation and management of Greater sage-grouse populations and their habitats in the western United States and Canada. The MOU was later extended to include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. A major focus of this MOU was conservation planning for sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats.

Although work still is continuing, the completion of the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy in 2006 marked a region wide transition from planning to project implementation. The basis of this implementation can be found in conservation strategies and actions identified in the completed local sage-grouse working group (LWGs) plans. A report on Utah's LWGs sage-grouse conservation plans can be found on the Utah Community-Based Conservation Web site at <http://utahcbcp.org/files/uploads/2008LWGPECEReportFINAL.pdf>.

A new MOU signed July 2008 included former partners and added the U.S. Geological Survey, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency. This MOU also recognized and reaffirmed the role of local sage-grouse working groups in developing and implementing local, state, and regional conservation plans. The new MOU stresses using adaptive resource management (ARM) to address threats to sage-grouse conservation and community socio-economic sustainability.

Adaptive resources management has been long embraced by Utah's LWGs. In fact, each of Utah's LWGs uses the term to define themselves. For example the Parker Mountain Sage-grouse LWG is actually the Parker Mountain Adaptive Resources Management Local Working Group. As such, these groups have recognized that if they are to be successful, they must be willing to learn together and also use what they learn to manage the landscape. Thus the essence of ARM is monitoring, evaluation, and application of what was learned in the past to guide future actions.