

Date: April 15, 2016

To: Sheeprack Sage-grouse Management Area Sage-grouse (SGMA) Translocation Partners

From: Melissa Chelak, Graduate Research Associate, and Terry A. Messmer, Utah State University

RE: Translocation Status and Monthly Research Update

We have successfully translocated sage-grouse that were captured and radio-marked in Park Valley (Box Elder SGMA) and Parker Mountain (Parker Mountain SGMA) to the Sheeprack SGMA. The goal for the 2016 translocation was to move 40 sage-grouse this spring into the Sheeprack SGMA -- 30 females and 10 males—split between the Box Elder and Parker Mountain SGMA. The goal was achieved on April 8, 2016, with the release of radio-marked sage-grouse that had been captured on the Parker Mountain SGMA. The number of sage-grouse by sex to be translocated in 2016 was approved by the Utah Wildlife Board.

Park Valley Translocation (Box Elder SGMA) Summary

On March 9th and 10th, 20 sage-grouse were captured from the two nights of trapping (11 females and 9 males). Of the 11 females captured, 9 were fitted with very high frequency (VHF) necklace-style radio-collars and 2 with a global positioning system (GPS) GSM back-pack style transmitter. Of the 9 males captured, 6 were fitted with VHF radio-collars and 3 with GPS back packs. Upon release, two GPS backpacks fell off of two males, noted below. The radio-marked birds were released on the Government Creek lek at approximately 0700. Resident males were observed strutting on the lek at the time of the release.

One male had to be euthanized because of a broken wing. The male that had to be euthanized because of the broken wing was a large adult bird. The bird was extremely aggressive and repeatedly attempted to escape the capture box during transport. We suspect the bird broke its wrist joint while attempting to break out of the box. Because he was not released, he was not counted out of the total 40 birds to be captured.

This left 17 marked sage-grouse that were released on the SGMA. Teams representing the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Utah State University (USU) convened on the evenings of March 9-10, 2016 in Park Valley to begin spring trapping of greater sage-grouse for translocation to the Sheeprack SGMA. The captures were coordinated by Avery Cook, DWR.

The two males who lost the GPS transmitters, again were large birds. We suspect, they were able to work themselves out of the transmitters while being transported. To mitigate the risk of this occurring in the future, all males that will be selected for GPS marking, will be fitted with the transmitters prior to release.

Parker Mountain SGMA Translocation Summary

On April 8th, the translocation effort on Parker Mountain yielded 21 birds—19 females and 2 males. Because we wanted to augment two separate leks on the Sheeprock SGMA - McIntyre and Benmore - the radio-marked birds were released as follows : 7 birds—1 male and 6 females—were released on the Benmore lek, and 14 birds—1 male and 13 females—were released McIntyre. Of the 19 females captured, 6 were fitted with GPS PTT transmitters and the rest were fitted with VHF transmitters.

Of the males, 1 was fitted with a GPS PTT transmitter and the other was fitted with a VHF transmitter. There were two females released into McIntyre without VHF collars. We are monitoring the survival and location of the translocated birds on a weekly basis.

As of April 6th, 7 of the 14 previously-released birds fitted with VHF collars have been relocated near the Government Creek lek. The 3 that carry the GPS GSM transmitters have not been located as the data has not been uploaded through cellular coverage. No mortalities have been detected.

Resident Sage-grouse Captures and Radio-marking

Of the 10 resident birds needed, 1 female has been fitted with a VHF transmitter. We will attempt to capture and radio-marked sage-grouse through April to reach the goal of 10 birds. Given the low population numbers as indicated by the recent lek counts, we may not be able to reach this goal before we suspend captures.

Lastly and most importantly, we thank the landowners who allowed us access to their properties to capture birds. We also are indebted to the dozens of volunteers who have helped with the translocation effort. We particularly thank Jason Robinson and Avery Cook, DWR, for coordinating the effort through the public review process and the logistics required to complete the translocation. We also thank the Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office, BLM, West Box Elder CRM, Parker Mountain and West Desert Adaptive Resources Management Local Working Groups, Jack H. Berryman Institute, Quinney Professorship for Wildlife Conflict Management, DWR, and US Geological Service for funding, encouragement, and project support.