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GREATER SAGE-GROUSE, HUNTING, AND THE UTAH SPORTSMEN: A CALL TO CONSERVATION

By Terry Messmer

In the past several years, because of declining sage-grouse numbers, several organizations have petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife to afford the species protection under the Endangered Species Act. If the species was listed, hunting would most likely be prohibited. Given this possibility, others are also asking why Utah still hunts greater sage-grouse.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) has been collecting harvest information on greater sage-grouse from hunters since 1951. These data have provided managers valuable information about sage-grouse in the state. In 1979 the UDWR estimated that Utah hunters harvested over 28,000 greater sage-grouse. However in 2000, because of declining populations, greater sage-grouse hunting was restricted to only four areas in Utah and hunters had to apply for a free permit. This new requirement decreased hunter participation and the harvest to less than 1500 birds. Since 2000, both

Table 1. Responses of Utah hunters in 2008 regarding why they hunt greater sage-grouse.

Why Hunters Hunt Sage-grouse	Primary Reason	Secondary Reason
View as a Trophy	21.7%	10.7%
Tradition	31.1%	20.0%
Harvest before listed	6.6%	10.2%
New to Upland, Wanted to Try	11.6%	10.7%
Meat	25.2%	43.6%
Other	3.8%	4.9%

the number of sage-grouse hunters and birds harvested has stabilized. Because of the permit system, UDWR biologists are also able to get better information about the harvest by conducting telephone surveys. In 2008, the UDWR issued 1,120 2-bird permits on a first come first served basis. These permits were gone during the first few hours they were available suggesting that there still exists a high demand for sage-grouse hunting in Utah. In 2008, to find why the demand is so strong, the UDWR surveyed a random sample of hunters (Table 1). What was interesting about the survey is that many of the hunters who participated also commented that they do so because of a family tradition. For several of the respondents, the sage-grouse season offered an opportunity for them to hunt with and/or introduce their children to hunting.

From a biological standpoint, there is no evidence to suggest that regulated hunting has been responsible for the observed population declines. Additionally, harvesting greater sage-grouse continues to provide important population data. What may be even more important is that it continues to foster a constituency of hunters to conserve the species. Hunters have clearly demonstrated they are willing to work for wildlife species conservation. However, issues faced by sage-grouse are more complex than any previously encountered. To better prepare Utah sportsmen to assist in sage-grouse conservation, Utah's 10 local working groups (LWGs) will soon be sending them personal invitations to join the LWGs in implementing local conservation plans. With the increased involvement of sportsmen who would work with landowners and other LWG partners, the future of sage-grouse in Utah will be assured.

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DAVE DAHLGREN HIRED AS POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW

By Dave Dahlgren



David Dahlgren



You may notice a familiar face this winter if you visit the Parker Mountain Research Area. Dave Dahlgren has recently been hired to conduct postdoctoral research on Parker Mountain and Desert Land and Livestock (Rich County) on sage-grouse population estimation. Currently, there is no reliable way to use lek count data to estimate sage-grouse population numbers. He will use male lek attendance rates (how often does a marked male attend a lek?), lek count error rates (How many males do the biologists miss on a lek?), and sex ratios (How many females per male occur in the population?) to develop new methods to better estimate population trends. This is a two-year study funded by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Bureau of Land Management, Jack H. Berryman Institute, and USU Extension.

Dave started field work on Parker Mountain in 2002, studying sage-grouse reproductive ecology and response to sagebrush management. He completed his M.S. degree in 2005. The research showed that sage-grouse broods preferred treated areas during the late brood-rearing period, and that the Tebuthiuron (Spike) treatment was the most preferred. Dave's Masters degree sparked his interest in sage-grouse and research. Dave continued on for a PhD degree working on sage-grouse juvenile survival and more population dynamics research. He was awarded his PhD degree from Utah State University early in May 2009.

Dave's career aspirations were guided by his grandfather's (Robert Dahlgren) career as a research biologist. He never thought he would get the chance to work with native grouse, and feels extremely lucky to have spent so much time in the field, learning, growing, and using his pointing dogs as part of his research. He has also thoroughly enjoyed the relationships he has built with landowners, ranchers, agency biologists, and other associates in his field.

Dave currently lives in Logan, Utah, with his wife, Lacy, and daughter. When he isn't working, Dave enjoys spending time with his family, most outdoor pursuits (except rock climbing...vertigo!), and most especially chasing upland game birds with his dogs in the fall.

SAGEBRUSH RANGELAND RESTORATION DVD AVAILABLE

By Summer Olsen

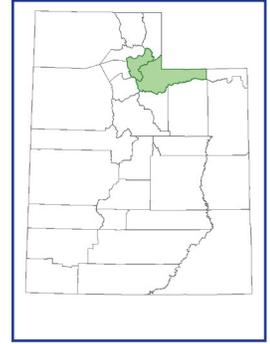


Are you interested in learning more about threats to sagebrush rangelands in the Great Basin, along with ideas and suggestions to help with successful planning of restoration treatments? Then you may be interested in viewing the DVD *Restoring Sagebrush Rangelands in the Great Basin: An Introduction to Alternative Land Management Practices*. The DVD was produced by the Sagebrush Steppe Treatment Evaluation Project (SageSTEP) outreach program. The DVD provides a simple, easy, and entertaining way to learn more about threats to sagebrush rangelands, along with information to get you started on the path towards restoration.

The DVD's feature focuses on ecological threats including juniper encroachment, cheatgrass invasion and the resulting changes in Great Basin fire patterns, as well as information about potential land management treatments that can be implemented to encourage the restoration leading to healthier systems. The feature is directed towards individuals with a beginning to intermediate knowledge of these issues, and the disc includes bonus tracks with additional information for those with a more advanced knowledge and those who want more detail. Each DVD comes with a booklet insert that provides information about the disc contents and how to use them, as well as information about the SageSTEP study. For a complete table of contents, please visit <http://www.sagestep.org/pubs/DVD.html>. If you are interested in obtaining a free copy of the DVD, send an email to summer.c.olsen@usu.edu with your name, mailing address, and the number of copies you would like.

By Lorien Belton

The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) group recently got off to a great fresh start. After several years of low activity, the group got started again with a well-attended meeting that included regional and state DWR staff, NRCS and Conservation District employees, a landowner, and a representative of the Quality Resource Management (QRM) group in the area. During the meeting, the group identified several high priority needs for sage-grouse in the two-county area, including more detailed knowledge on grouse use of key areas and a flagship project to improve local habitat for sage-grouse. The group plans to hold its next meeting in Coalville on the evening of November 18th. All individuals interested in updates on local and regional sage-grouse issues are invited to attend. Speakers will provide information and address questions about sage-grouse biology, habitat use, listing petition updates and ways to help the species. Travel assistance to meetings for private landowners is available through USU Extension. Contact Lorien Belton at (435) 770-2413 or Lorien.Belton@usu.edu for details. For more information about the meeting, contact Lorien Belton, or the co-chairs Danny McBride (NRCS) and Scott Walker (UDWR).



Morgan Summit Resource Area

SWARM SUMMER FIELD TOUR

By Vicki Tyler

The Southwest Adaptive Resource Management Working Group (SWARM) toured the Bald Hills area this past summer to discuss sage-grouse lek counts, future sage-grouse management and BLM/private land project work. Twenty people attended the August 18 field trip including representatives from Bureau of Land Management, Utah State University Extension, Division of Wildlife Resources, Southern Utah University, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Resource Conservation and Development, and Farm Bureau Federation. Several members of the SWARM working group visited with Dr. Jim Bowns to identify native/non native grasses and forbs as part of the Summer Field Trip (see photo). While much of the discussion focused on spring sage grouse lek counts, the group also discussed upcoming research proposals within the Bald Hills/Parowan Gap area, the difference in plant response from chained/unchained burned areas (chained areas had greater success), fence mortality on sage grouse and projects to make fences more visible with reflectors and white-top t-posts, and the need to provide more connectivity between sage grouse lek areas and other travel corridors. The group was also interested in the upcoming Greenville Bench burn and range issues related to fire.



Members of the SWARM working group visit with Dr. Jim Bowns to identify native/non native grasses and forbs.

The SWARM working group, as well as the Color Country Adaptive Resource Management Working Group (CCARM), continue to coordinate with state/private and federal agencies to implement projects to benefit sage-grouse in southern Utah. For more information on SWARM or CCARM, see our Web site or contact Dr. Nicki Frey at 435-586-1924 or nicki.frey@usu.edu.



SWARM members visited a site just North of Chalk Hollow Pond. Photos courtesy of Vicki Tyler.

Fall/Winter LWG Meetings

Group	Date	Time	Location
BARM	Nov. 19	6:30 pm	Park Valley
CaCoARM	Nov. 18	5:30 pm	Price
CCARM	Oct. 21	10:00 am	Panguitch
MSARM	Nov. 18	6:00 pm	Wanship
PARM	Nov. 17	10:00 am	Loa
RICHCO	Jan. 7	6:00 pm	Randolph
SVARM	Nov. 16	1:00 pm	Heber City
SWARM	Oct. 20	10:00 am	Cedar City
SWOG	Jan. 6	2:00 pm	Dove Creek
UBARM	Nov. 17	9:30 am	Vernal
WDARM	Nov. 2	2:00 pm	Tooele

For detailed information on upcoming meetings, visit our Web site:
www.utahcbcp.org
 Follow the Local Working Group Link

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.

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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

ANOTHER TOOL IN HABITAT TREATMENTS

By Lorien Belton

The Strawberry Valley field tour on September 15th included a visit to a habitat treatment in progress. The group observed as a very large tractor pulled an Ely chain, attached to either end of a modified 28-foot Dixie harrow bar, over sagebrush in the Chicken Springs area near Strawberry Reservoir. Biologists involved with the project noted that the Ely chain allowed for a more efficient treatment than Dixie Harrow pipes, as the brush did not build up and drag behind the tractor using this design. Several hundred acres of treated areas within a mosaic pattern were marked off by UDWR biologists prior to the treatment, and the group was able to observe as the contractor negotiated the flagged areas. The double-pass treatment is being done to improve sage-grouse habitat in the area by thinning existing sagebrush in a mosaic pattern. New forb and grass growth is expected to result from the disturbance and the reduction in sagebrush cover. For additional information on the treatment or the equipment used, please contact Mark Farmer at markfarmer@utah.gov.



Photos courtesy of Lorien Belton.