

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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



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## UTAH SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

The Utah Sage-grouse Summit has been scheduled for February 18 and 19, 2014, and will be held at the Utah Department of Natural Resources Auditorium (1594 West North Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah). The agenda is listed at the end of the newsletter. Registration is required before February 7 so that we can make room and food arrangements. Please click on the registration link on our website [www.utahcbcp.org](http://www.utahcbcp.org). If you have problems with registration, contact Rae Ann Hart at [raeann.hart@usu.edu](mailto:raeann.hart@usu.edu).

We wish to thank all our sponsors. Because of their kind and generous support, we will not have to charge registration fees (but we do need all to register).



*Please register before February 7, 2014, by clicking the registration link on [www.utahcbcp.org](http://www.utahcbcp.org).*

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- Jack H. Berryman Institute, Utah State University
- Western Rural Development Center

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## WEST BOX ELDER CRM RECEIVES LANDSCAPE STEWARDSHIP AWARD

With recommendation from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Public Lands Foundation has given its 2013 Landscape Stewardship Award to the West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management (WBECRM) group. This award is in recognition of the group's planning and projects for natural resources in the Great Basin ecosystem. Projects have been coordinated across large landscapes.

Box Elder County comprises multiple land ownerships including BLM, state, and private property. The WBECRM has provided critical coordination for planning and project execution across these boundaries. Juniper encroachment is one of the key issues in the area, and through the efforts of those involved in the WBECRM many acres have already received treatment, with many more planned projects in the future. These efforts will improve habitat for sage-grouse and other sensitive species while also providing range improvement for livestock grazing.

WBECRM has truly shown the landscape stewardship vision and cooperation necessary for success in local natural resource conservation efforts.



*Photo from Utah's Public Land's Foundation website showing some members of the WBECRM.*

## OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT: DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ON SAGE-GROUSE IN UTAH

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

In early November, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) jointly released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding greater sage-grouse management in Utah. The document was written in response to concerns that the "regulatory mechanisms" in BLM and USFS plans were not adequate to protect greater sage-grouse. These concerns came from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which said that the "inadequate regulatory mechanisms" were one reason that sage-grouse might need to be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The text and maps in the DEIS present several options, called "Alternatives," for what kinds of stipulations could be added to current land management plans, so sage-grouse would be better protected. If the new regulations can be made to protect sage-grouse adequately, then the concern of "inadequate regulatory mechanisms" would not be such a large problem anymore.

Once comments have been received from the public, a final decision will be made about which stipulations to include. Those new rules will then be added (as amendments) to BLM Resource Management Plans and USFS Forest Plans.

The draft EIS can be downloaded here: [http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/prog/planning/SG\\_RMP\\_rev/deis.html](http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/prog/planning/SG_RMP_rev/deis.html). This document applies only to Utah. Other areas have similar documents, many of which were released in November also.

Each of the alternatives is presented so you can compare what each one says about a specific topic; for example: map boundaries, what counts as disturbance, grazing changes, how energy extraction in sage-grouse habitat might be affected, etc.

There are five alternatives presented. Chapter 2 of the DEIS compares these alternatives.

- Alternative A is "no action." This would mean that existing regulations and processes would not change. We know that this does not meet the USFWS's requirements for "adequate regulatory mechanisms," but it is useful as a point of comparison

on specific strategies within the document, such as how many acres are currently open or closed to certain uses now, as compared with the other alternatives.

- Alternative B is based on the National Technical Team (NTT) report. This report was an addendum to the BLM's Instructional Memorandum 2012-043. It presents suggestions for conservation measures to protect sage-grouse, based on science. Alternative B turns those suggestions into proposed regulations for the BLM and USFS.
- Alternative C is the most conservation-focused alternative. It is based heavily on public input from environmental organizations such as Western Watersheds Project and Wild Earth Guardians. It is split into two sub-alternatives, C1 and C2. One major difference between those sub-alternatives is how grazing is suggested to be regulated. One alternative proposes reductions, while the other proposes elimination of grazing in sage-grouse habitat.
- Alternative D is the alternative proposed by the BLM and Forest Service. It covers every topic that must be addressed. In many cases, it goes into more detail than the other alternatives.
- Alternative E is based on the Utah Governor's Sage-grouse Plan. Because the Utah plan also addresses issues outside the jurisdiction of the BLM and USFS, only aspects of the state plan that are relevant to federal lands are included. There are two sub-alternatives for E as well. E1 is based on Utah's plan. E2 is based on Wyoming's plan, because several small pieces of federal land managed out of Utah are within Wyoming's borders.

The alternative preferred by both the BLM and the USFS is Alternative D. (Although the two federal agencies are working together, each agency must make its own decisions.) The final decision will probably incorporate elements from several alternatives.

Some of the key differences between the alternatives are as follows:

- A, B, C, and D all use maps that are based on the Utah DWR shape files of occupied sage-grouse habitat from 2012. Alt E uses the Sage-grouse Management Areas (SGMAs) from the Utah state plan. Habitats in B, C, and D are broken into two categories, Priority (PPMA) and General (PGMA). Most proposed regulations apply only to the priority (PPMA) habitats. The PPMA habitat boundaries are based on the SGMAs, minus any area within the SGMAs that is an "opportunity area" or non-habitat.
- Alternatives B and C propose a 3% limit on disturbance. Alternatives D and E propose 5% limits. The details of how each number is calculated vary by alternative. One of the differences is how burned areas are handled.
- For specific issues, including greater detail on energy extraction stipulation alternatives, there are useful comparison charts in the Appendices, such as Appendix K.



*The red arrow above points to the link to download Chapter 2 from the EIS website. This chapter compares the five Alternatives in detail.*

January 29 is the deadline for comments to be submitted to the BLM. Comments can be emailed to: [blm\\_UT\\_comments@blm.gov](mailto:blm_UT_comments@blm.gov). The most useful comments, according to the BLM, are those that "include suggested changes, sources, methodologies and references to a section or page number." In other words, a helpful comment might sound something like this: "On page x, the proposed regulation on this activity would be a bad idea because it would be difficult to implement. A better way to handle this would be..." If you want to submit comments like "my family dislikes all government regulations," you can submit that, but it won't help change the document into something that is more workable for you.

The document is very large and may seem intimidating. Chapter 2, in which the alternatives are compared, is a good place to start. Anyone who would like assistance knowing where to look in the DEIS for specific topics can contact their LWG facilitator.

February 18

- 7:00 am Continental Breakfast
- 8:30 am Opening comments and overview – Greg Sheehan, Director, UDWR
- 8:40 am Welcome – The Honorable Gary H. Herbert, Governor of Utah (Invited)
- 8:50 am Making Conservation Count
  - Presentation: **USFWS Conservation Reporting Standards by VTC** – Noreen Walsh, USFWS Region 6 Director and Pat Diebert - USFWS Sage-grouse Coordinator, Onsite Larry Crist USFWS Utah State Office Supervisor (30 min)
    - o What USFWS needs to know to track conservation progress
  - Presentation: **Utah State Plan – Tracking and Reporting** (Eric Ellis and Jason Robinson, UDWR) (30 min)
    - o How will progress on the Utah state plan be tracked and reported, for public and private lands?
    - o How can LWGs help?
  - Facilitated Q&A
- 10:30 am *Break – Refreshments provided*
- 10:45 am BLM Resource Management Planning and USFS Land Use Plans
  - Presentation: **How Utah’s Plan Integrates into BLM & USFS Plans: The Public Process and a Time Table for Implementation** (Juan Palma and Quincy Bahr, BLM and Chris Iversen, USFS (40 min)
  - Facilitated Q&A
- 12:00 pm *Lunch on site – Sponsored by Deseret Land and Livestock*
  - “An Ode to Sage-grouse” by Todd Black – Wildlife Manager, Deseret Land and Livestock, Woodruff, UT
- 1:00 pm **Utah Plan Topic 1: Habitat Management Strategies**
  - Relevant research: short explanations (Nicki Frey, USU Berryman Institute) (10 min)
  - Utah Plan Implementation (Alan Clark, DNR) (20 min)
    - o Goals & strategy, progress to date
    - o PJ mapping efforts and WRI project tracking
    - o How LWGs can help
  - Wildfire Abatement – Jason Vernon, UDWR (15 min)
  - Facilitated Q&A
- 2:15 pm *Break – Sponsored by NRCS*
- 2:30 pm **Utah Plan Topic 2: Managing and Tracking Sage-grouse Population Responses**
  - Relevant research: short explanations (Dave Dahlgren, USU Berryman Institute, and Randy Larson, BYU) (10 min)
  - Utah Plan Implementation (Jason Robinson, DWR) (10 min)
    - o Goals & strategies
    - o Next steps/challenges, and how LWGs can help
  - Facilitated Q&A
- 3:15 pm **Utah Plan Topic 3: What is “Protecting the Best of the Best”?**
  - Relevant research and experiences by VTC (Holly Copeland, TNC-Wyoming (20 min)
  - Utah Plan habitat protection goals & strategy (Eric Ellis, UDWR) (10 min)
    - o Progress to date
    - o Next steps/challenges, and how LWGs can help
  - Facilitated Q&A

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- 3:55 pm      **Utah Plan: Hot Topics for Tomorrow** (Terry Messmer, USU)
- Utah plan implementation: mitigation and conservation banking
  - Utah plan implementation: mapping and tracking disturbance
  - Utah plan implementation: community-based strategies and CCAAs
- 4:00 pm      **Utah Plan Implementation Council – Official Business Meeting**
- PIC Overview: decisions made/in-progress, unmet challenges (Kathleen Clarke, Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office)
- 6:00 pm      *Announcements; Dinner on your own*

## February 19

- 7:00 am      Continental Breakfast
- 8:00 am      Announcements
- 8:10 am      **Utah Plan Topic 4: Mitigation and Disturbance - 5 % or 3% Disturbance Limit**
- Relevant research: Disturbance and Sage-Grouse (Terry Messmer) (10 min)
  - Disturbance & Mitigation – USFWS Paradigms (Pat Deibert and Larry Crist, USFWS) (15 min)
  - Utah Plan SGMA Mapping and tracking disturbance (Doug Ramsey, USU) (20 min)
  - Utah Plan’s Approach to Mitigation – Public & Private Lands (Alan Clark, DNR) (15 min)
  - Role of LWGs in ground-truthing disturbance and other maps (10 min)
  - Facilitated discussion (respond to questions and concerns, identify key issues)
- 9:45 am      *Break – Refreshments provided*
- 10:00 am      **Summary: Role of LWGs in Utah Plan Implementation – Taking Ownership** (Terry Messmer)
- 10:20 am      **Concurrent Workshops (CHOOSE ONE)**
- **Community-based Species Conservation Strategies** (facilitated by Lorien Belton)
    - o CCAA and CCA – what they are and are not - USFWS
    - o Lessons learned Idaho – Don Kemner, IDGF
    - o Desert LL Greater sage-grouse CCAA – Todd Black, DLL, and Larry Crist, USFWS
    - o Opportunities and Challenges
    - o Facilitated Discussion
  - **Research Application to Management: designing and monitoring projects that work for sage-grouse –** (Dave Dahlgren, Jason Robinson, Randy Larson)
    - o In-depth look at habitat use of projects
    - o Opportunity areas, monitoring, and habitat increases
    - o Facilitated Discussion
  - **Mitigation: further in-depth discussion** (facilitated by Michele Straube)
    - o Implementation lessons from Utah
    - o Implementation models from other states
    - o Process development progress: Utah Plan, federal options
    - o Facilitated Discussion

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

## UTAH SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT AGENDA, CONT.

12:00 pm *Lunch sponsored by Utah Public Lands Policy Coordination Office*

1:00 pm **Management With or Without a Listing: process and what to expect**

- Facilitated Panel (facilitated by Michele Straube)

- o USFWS – Larry Crist
- o State of Utah – Kathleen Clarke
- o UDWR – Greg Sheehan
- o BLM - Juan Palma
- o USFS – Chris Iversen
- o NRCS & SGI – Elise Boeke

- Facilitated Q &A

*Presenters will address how population research and management, habitat management, mitigation, easements, etc. might change with a listing. The goal is to clarify what processes might change, dispel myths, and understand where uncertainty lies.*

3:00 pm Closing Statements (Kathleen Clarke)

3:15 pm Adjourn

### 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.

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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, Kenneth L. White, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.



*Photo courtesy of Todd Black.*