

West Box Elder Sage Grouse – May/June 2015

Project- Greater Sage-grouse Response to Conifer Removal in the Box Elder Sage-grouse Management Area

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Background and Purpose

I am researching whether the on-going juniper removal program in the Park Valley area has increased sage-grouse vital rates (survival, nest success, brood success). To do this I am tracking approximately 45 sage-grouse through the breeding, nesting, and brood rearing (and winter via flights) seasons in order to record survival and success or failure by habitat type. I will also be doing pellet transects, and looking for sage-grouse pellets as proof-of-use in sagebrush, juniper invasion, and juniper removal areas.

Lekking and Breeding-

No lekking behavior has been observed since late May. All of my radio-marked males have moved to their summer ranges in the Grouse Creek and Raft River Mountains.

Nesting

As of June 24th, I have 23 of 33 hens that have initiated a nest (70%). Of these, 7 nests were predated (one hen died), 1 abandoned, and 15 hatched (65% success). Three hens have lost their broods; 1 rejoined a flock, and 2 were predated. One of the hens that had her nest predated has initiated and hatched a second nest with 8 eggs in her clutch (**VERY rare in WBE**). She is currently alive and brooding. No nests have been initiated since the last update, and our last brood is expected to reach 50 days maturity in the first week of August.

Brooding

As mentioned earlier, 11 hens have/had broods. Hens with broods have made very small movements away from their nests, and are generally found in the same area. The effects of the May rains have faded, and hens are starting to move their chicks to more perennial mesic areas. One hen (captured in 2014) has had a suspected battery failure – she went missing the week of June 15. With a previous years locations, we have scoured where we expect her to be, and have come up empty handed.

Special Notes-

As mentioned in the previous update, the hen that nested in ongoing juniper mastication hatched. Her brood reached 50 days maturity on June 22nd. She had just one chick, but given a ~70% detection rate, she may have had others that were not detected. There was another hen that nested in an older treatment as well. She hatched and is currently approximately 1 week from maturity.

We recently received 7 GPS backpacks for the Park Valley area. The backpacks will provide a much larger dataset (up to 10 GPS locations per day), and their data will be used in a continuation of this project over the next two years. We plan on deploying the backpacks during the week of July 6th. I will be in contact with specific landowners where we wish to trap, but a heads-up to everyone; the spotlights will be back out.

Landowners-

I certainly appreciate the outpouring of landowner interest and cooperation. I understand that I am just a guest, and I constantly remind my technicians of the same thing. If you have any issues, please contact me. If you would like an update about your land, don't hesitate to call; ideally, my technicians or I will keep you in the loop if we cross paths.

I am truly thankful for everyone's help!

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