

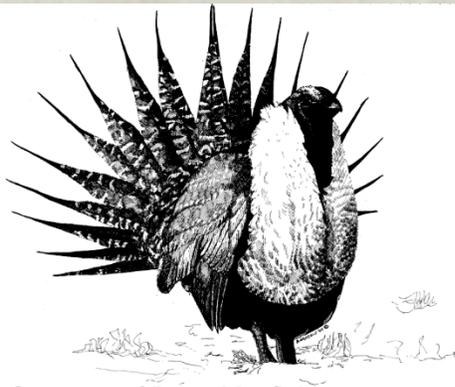
Sage-Grouse Local Working Groups: An Overview of Needs

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Courtesy of Brian Maxfield

Senior Level NRCS Biologists Meeting

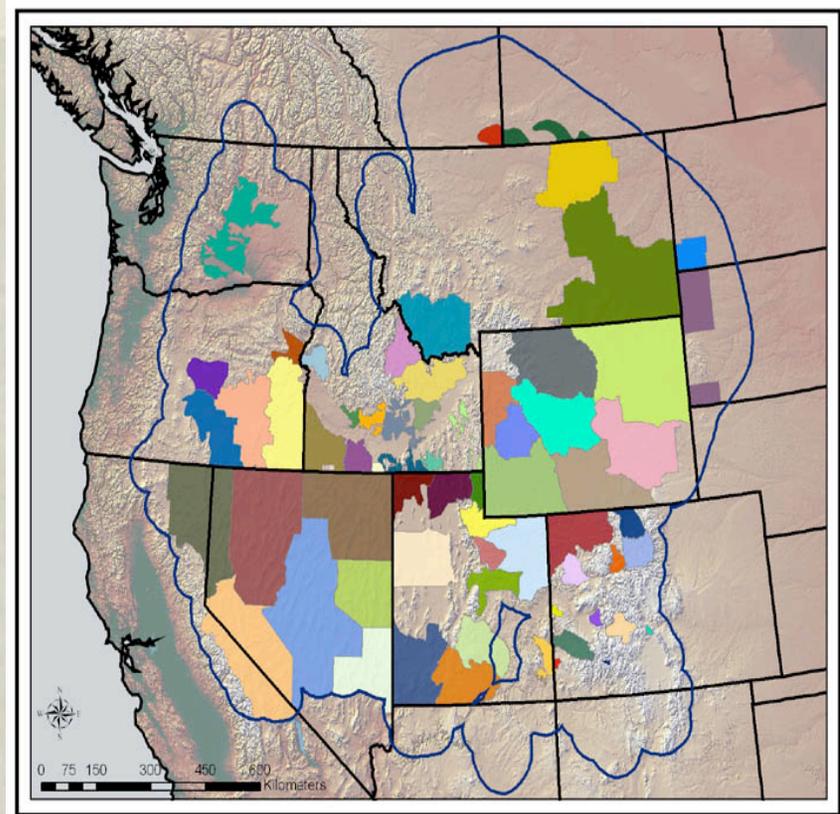
October 7, 2008

Overview

- ❖ Background
- ❖ Mail Survey: Key Results
- ❖ Case Studies: Key Results
- ❖ Summary Recommendations

Sage-Grouse Context

- ❖ Concern
 - Declining sage-grouse populations
 - Possible ESA listing
 - Public and private land habitat
- ❖ 60+ Local Working Groups (LWGs) range-wide
 - Most groups started by state wildlife agencies in cooperation with Western Governors' Association and other agencies
- ❖ Goals:
 - Involve relevant stakeholders
 - Develop local plans
 - Implement projects



Source: USGS-NBII Sage-Grouse Local Working Group Locator Website

Project Background

- ❖ Need for information on the LWGs identified in the Rangeland Conservation Strategy for sage-grouse (Stiver et al 2006)
- ❖ Funding: USDA/NRCS
 - Fish & Wildlife Conservation Grant (#69-7482-6-282)
- ❖ Needs assessment and baseline data
 - Informal discussions w/ state coordinators
 - Mail survey to 54 LWGs
 - Case study interviews of 4 groups

Survey Methods

- ❖ Mail survey of 54 groups
 - Excluded newest groups (less than one year old)
 - 9 U.S. states represented
- ❖ Over 1500 surveys sent
- ❖ 57% response rate

Survey Topics

- ❖ Participant Characteristics
 - Demographics
 - Level of involvement and investment
 - Why join/leave
- ❖ Information Needs
 - Specific sage-grouse related topics
 - Preferred formats
 - Trusted sources
- ❖ Evaluation of Group Experience
 - Meeting dynamics
 - Impressions of the process and other players
 - Successes and challenges

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Survey Results

Participant Profiles

❖ Composition

- All groups have strong agency representation
 - 27% Federal (BLM, NRCS, USFS, USFWS)
 - 22% State (primarily state wildlife agencies)
- 39% ranchers, farmers, or rural landowners
- Energy, utility, hunting, environmental reps

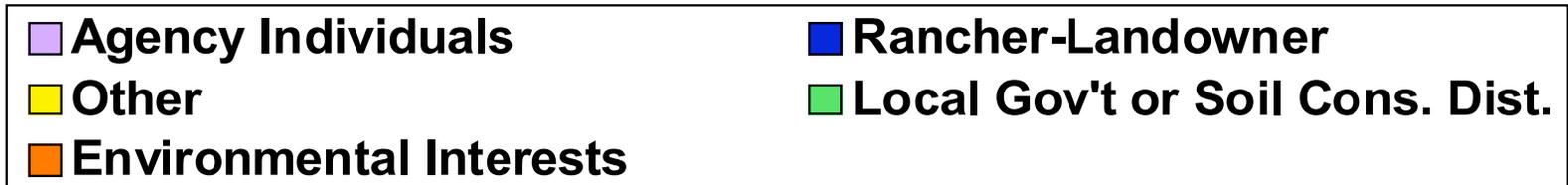
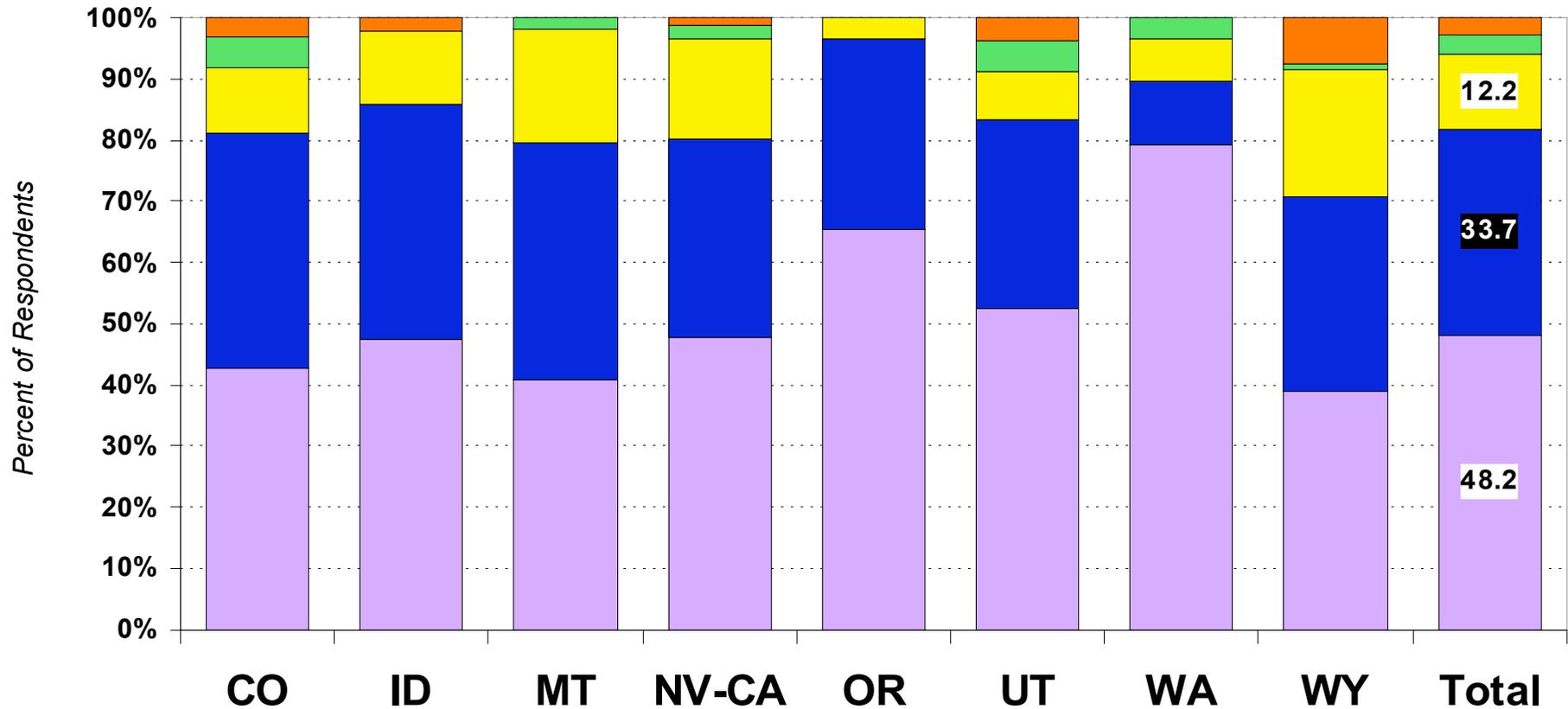
❖ 82% male

❖ 55% Still attend meetings

❖ 64% of those currently attending are paid to attend



Types of Participants (By State)



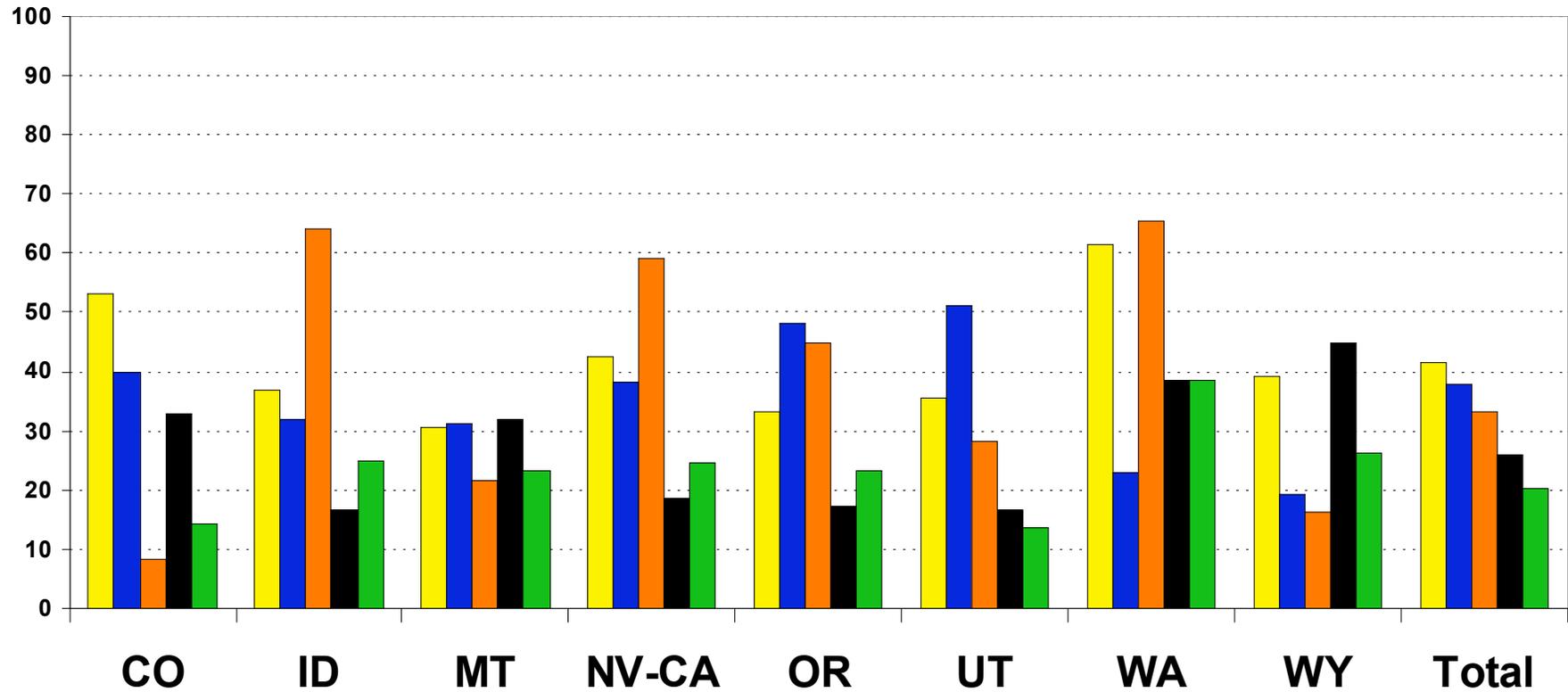
Role of Private Landowners

- ❖ Significant sage-grouse habitat on private land
- ❖ 72% of rancher/landowner participants have sage-grouse on land they own/manage
- ❖ Of those participants who have grouse on their land:
percent making ‘major’ or ‘moderate’ investments
 - 48% Time and labor to improve habitat
 - 40% Cash investments to improve habitat
 - 39% Time & travel to discuss sage-grouse
 - 30% Sacrificed income opportunities
- ❖ Key: Much work done; room to increase efforts

Perceptions of Threats to Sage-Grouse

- ❖ **Percent citing ‘Serious Threat’:**
 - 41% Development (subdivisions, roads, etc.)
 - 38% Predators
 - 33% Wildfire
 - 26% Energy Development
 - 20% Overgrazing
- ❖ **Responses differ by state, affiliation**

Percent Citing Factor as "Serious Threat" to Sage-Grouse (By State)



Development

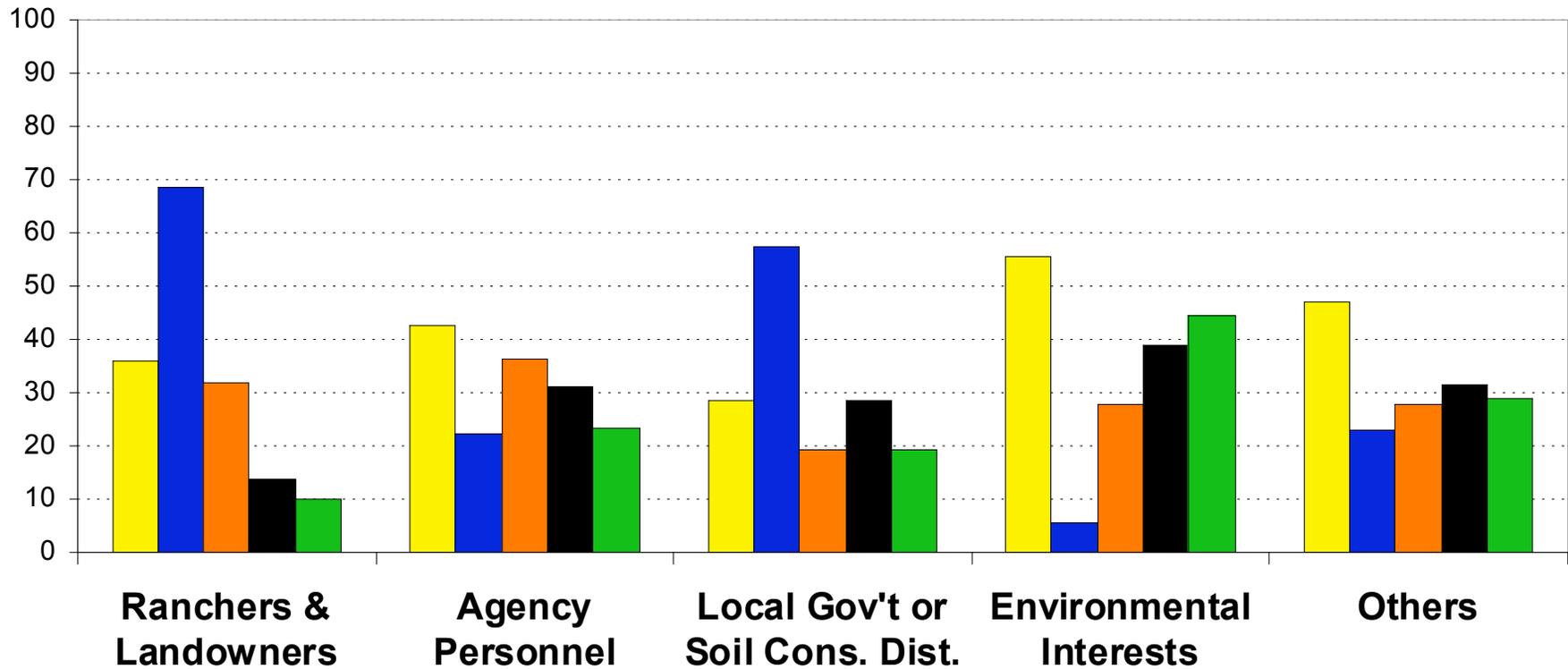
Wildfire

Overgrazing

Predators

Energy Development

Percent Citing Factor as "Serious Threat" to Sage-Grouse (by Type of Participant)



 **Development**

 **Wildfire**

 **Overgrazing**

 **Predators**

 **Energy Development**

Success Metrics

Percent who feel their group is “very successful” at:

40 % = Learning about sage-grouse needs

35 % = Developing a management plan

- 7 % = Adapting plan to changing situations

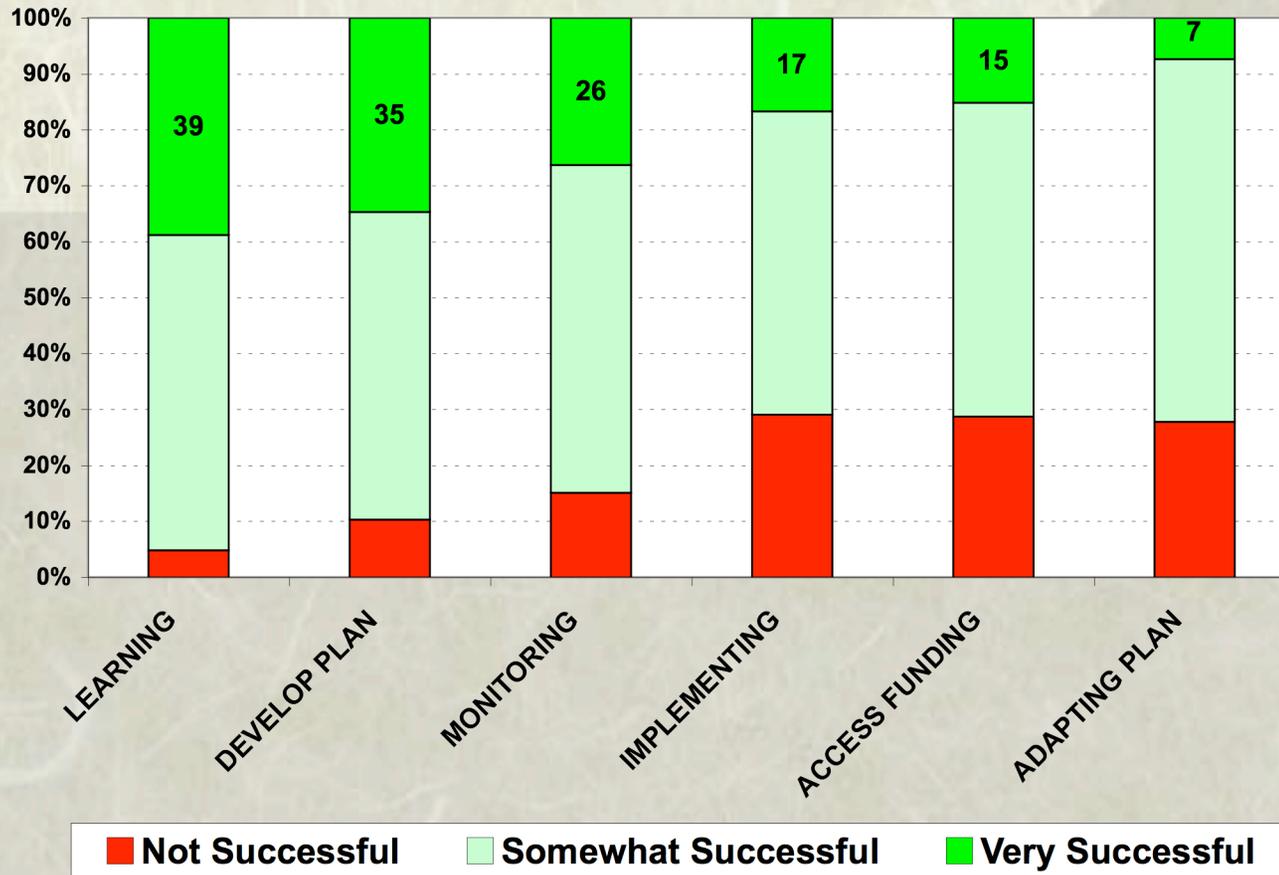
26 % = Monitoring local sage-grouse pops

17 % = Implementing projects on ground

15 % = Accessing funding for LWG work

- ❖ Critical actions (funding and implementing) need greater support to reach potential
- ❖ Key: **Opportunity to focus** where groups report being “somewhat successful”

Success Metrics



Working Group Successes

- ❖ OVERALL (% who agree or strongly agree)
 - 68 % → “This group is likely to make a difference for sage grouse”
 - 29 % → “Working groups can effectively manage sage grouse”
- ❖ Key: Groups are making progress, with room for improvement. **NRCS can help...**

What Information Do They Need?

- ❖ **Percent reporting ‘critical need’ for info on:**
 - 61% Protecting landowners in case of ESA listing
 - 59% Local sage-grouse pops (#s, migration, etc.)
 - 52% Successful examples of habitat improvement
 - 51% Sage-grouse habitat requirements
 - 49% Impact of livestock grazing on sage-grouse
 - 47% Possible funding sources for projects
 - 45% Impact of energy development on sage-grouse

- ❖ **Key need: continued information flow to groups**

Information Needs: Conservation Practices

- ❖ **Percent reporting these would be ‘very useful’**
 - 65% Seeding techniques (sagebrush/forbs)
 - 65% *Biological* habitat manipulation (grazing, etc.)
 - 59% Fire management techniques
 - 58% Sagebrush treatment techniques
 - 57% Predator management techniques

- ❖ **Key need: Understand how exactly to help:**
tested tools to protect sage-grouse, improve habitat

- ❖ **Corollary: Need for monitoring** on projects:
what *does* help sage-grouse?

Most Useful Information Formats

- ❖ **In-Person Learning: very useful**
 - Expert presentations (66% very useful)
 - On-the Ground Training (60% very useful)
- ❖ **Web-Based Learning: not so useful**
 - Website or online databases (19% very useful)
 - Web-based trainings (7% very useful)
- ❖ **Key: people with knowledge about management techniques for sage-grouse habitat are of great value to LWGs**

Who Do You Trust? *(for information on sage-grouse)*

- ❖ **Agencies need to work with landowners...**
- ❖ **Agency personnel trust:**
 - University scientists 84%
 - State wildlife agencies 84%
 - Fish and Wildlife Service 68%
 - Bureau of Land Management 62%
- ❖ **Rancher/landowners trust:**
 - Individual ranchers or landowners 76%
 - Farm and livestock organizations 57%
 - Members of other local working groups 56%
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service 54%
- ❖ **Key: NRCS has a special role to play in landowner relationships**

Basic Themes: Challenges

- ❖ **Top three challenges**
 - Learning how best to manage for sage-grouse
 - Finding manpower for projects or monitoring
 - Engaging landowners in the process
- ❖ **Key need: supporting the implementation of monitored projects**

Support for Changes

Percent saying this change would be positive/very positive:

- ❖ 80% Incentives to increase **landowner involvement**
- ❖ 71% More **financial support** from federal/state gov't
- ❖ 66% More **political support** from federal/state gov't
- ❖ 59% Including **more stakeholders**
 - In contrast: 6% say including **fewer** would be positive

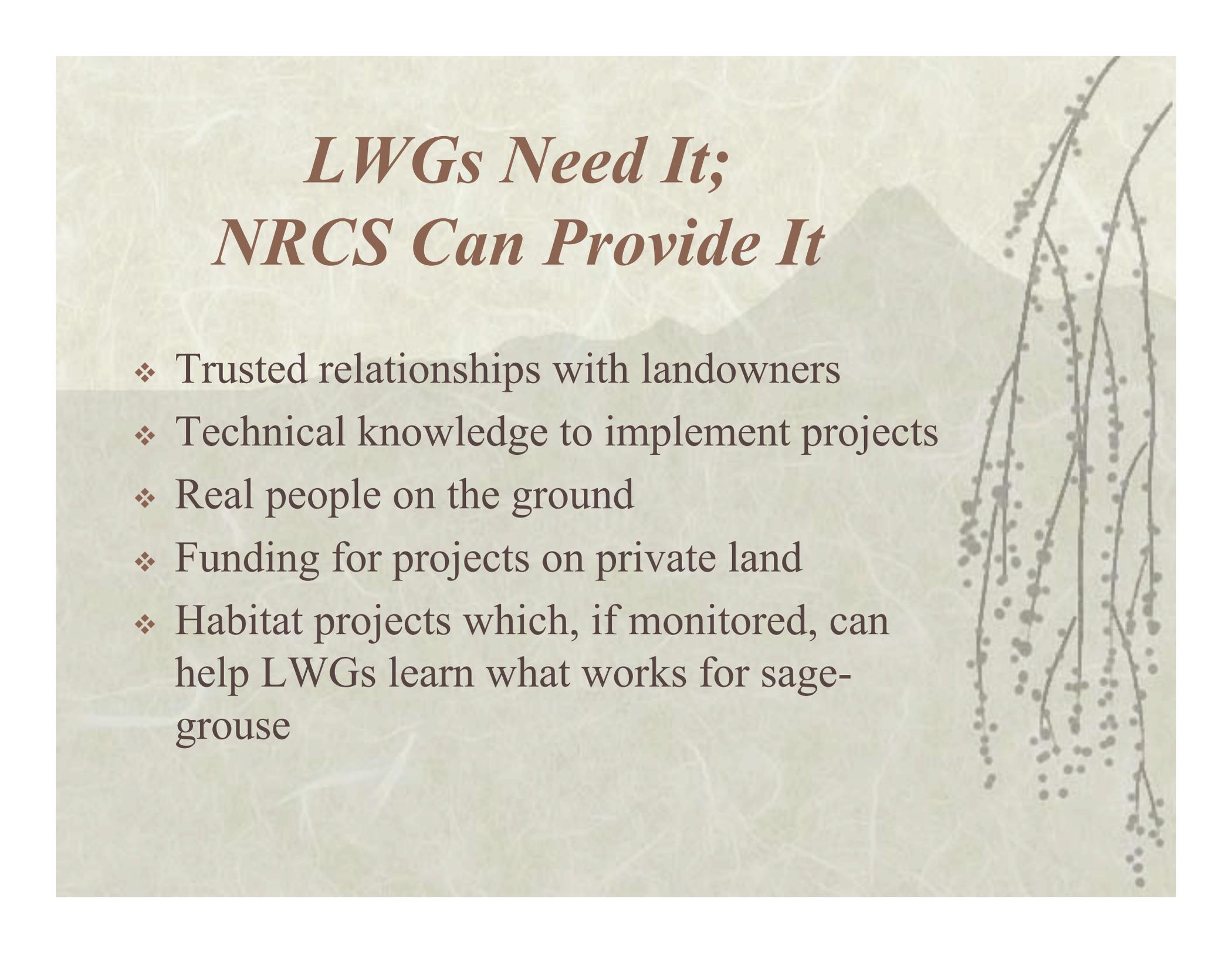
- ❖ Key: **NRCS has the tools and relationships** to make these changes a reality for LWGs range-wide

Funding Needs

- ❖ **Does the group have adequate access to funding?**
 - 36% say YES, the group has adequate access to funding
 - One third do not know
 - Of those still attending, 47% say YES
 - More agency participants than ranchers aware of funding

- ❖ **Funding priorities: “high priority”**
 - 71% On the ground **projects** (i.e. sagebrush treatment)
 - 67% **Habitat restoration**
 - 52% **Research** (on populations, etc.)

- ❖ **Key Need: Information on project funding**



*LWGs Need It;
NRCS Can Provide It*

- ❖ Trusted relationships with landowners
- ❖ Technical knowledge to implement projects
- ❖ Real people on the ground
- ❖ Funding for projects on private land
- ❖ Habitat projects which, if monitored, can help LWGs learn what works for sage-grouse

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Case Study
Interviews

Case Study Methods

- ❖ 4 LWGs in 2 states
- ❖ In each state:
 - One reporting high successes
 - One reporting less success
- ❖ NRCS participation common to all 4 groups
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews with representative members from:
 - NRCS
 - Other federal and state agencies
 - Private landowners
 - Environmental and energy interests
 - Uninvolved landowners

Interview Topics

- ❖ Group successes and projects
- ❖ Keys to success
- ❖ Obstacles to success
- ❖ Current and potential role of NRCS
- ❖ General needs of the group

NRCS is the Trusted Gateway

- ❖ From a state wildlife employee: “They’ve been a key player, possibly because the ranchers trust them. They’re kind of a liaison between federal, ranchers, and state. Something I couldn’t say to the ranchers would be listened to, and probably accepted, if it came from the NRCS rep.”
- ❖ From a rancher: “[NRCS is] a place people like us trust, and they can be an in-between between like us, say, and the BLM... The conservation district working in conjunction with the NRCS: I think that would work, because people like us trust those people.”

Examples of Great NRCS Involvement

❖ **Proactive participation in LWGs**

- Driving project funding proposals
- Recruiting and educating landowners

❖ **Active support internally**

- Helping NRCS staff design grouse-friendly projects
- Using available tools (Ecological Site Descriptions, etc.) to help grouse

❖ **Inter-agency coordination**

- Landscape-level thinking & communication
- Applying NRCS tools to appropriate federal lands

Proactive NRCS Involvement

- ❖ “Our NRCS representative has just been superb... he’s just been a vital part of everything we do.”
- ❖ “[He] follows it up with getting some of his clients to start implementing this stuff.”



The background of the slide features a muted, sepia-toned landscape. In the upper half, there are silhouettes of mountain peaks against a light, textured background. On the right side, a branch of a willow tree hangs down, adorned with small, dark, round berries or buds. The overall aesthetic is natural and rustic.

NRCS Can Help Sage-Grouse

“They need to make sure they get the message across to landowners that this would help improve conditions for grouse, or dissuade landowners from doing practices that would not help improve conditions.”

The NRCS Role in Inter-Agency Cooperation

- ❖ “[They] educate the rest of the group on what else is happening on a landscape basis.”
- ❖ “His insight, and what he provided, was what they [NRCS] do. What monies are available, what projects are available... things they can do to enhance sage-grouse habitat. They can do a lot. They educated me.” (a BLM employee)
- ❖ “Be a little more assertive as far as some of your points of view, and especially the range, ecological sites, and what condition they’re in and what is needed to bring it back to proper functioning. I think that’s the NRCS’s biggest, would be their biggest contribution on ground that was, say, BLM or Forest Service.”



Areas for Further Focus

- ❖ Many groups lack strong NRCS participation
- ❖ Many LWG participants, especially from other agencies, are unaware of NRCS's potential role
- ❖ Some NRCS offices may have no one with solid knowledge of sage-grouse habitat needs
 - Can't assume that all conventional range science solutions are going to be good for grouse (some are, some aren't!)
 - Need for specific knowledge of sage-grouse habitat needs
- ❖ Key: There's no "magic bullet," but NRCS can contribute by building bridges and facilitating 2-way communication between landowners and agencies

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*Take-Home
Messages*

Take-Home Messages

- ❖ **NRCS has the relationships, resources, and skills to address many key LWG needs**
 - Relationships with landowners: key to sage-grouse conservation on private land
 - Trusted individuals on the ground, in-person
 - Funding incentives to engage private landowners in on-the-ground projects
 - Technical knowledge applicable to both private and public lands
- ❖ **Key: NRCS is the appropriate party to increase implementation of LWG recommendations on private land**

Take-Home Messages

❖ **Growing the NRCS Role in LWGs**

- Increase monitoring of habitat treatments to learn how sage-grouse respond: follow through and see what worked
- Incorporate sage-grouse needs into standard rangeland treatments
- Work to address past treatments that may have been detrimental to sage-grouse
- Be a key player in landscape-level coordination between public and private landowners

❖ **For NRCS to be that key player:**

- Don't assume that field staff already have full capacity, training, or sufficient wildlife expertise
- Provide opportunities to meet these goals

Thank you!

