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2010-2011 SAGE-GROUSE LOCAL WORKING GROUP ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT AVAILABLE

Terry Messmer, Utah State University

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*, hereafter referred to as sage-grouse) as candidate species for listing for protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. A key factor in this decision was the determination by the USFWS that the regulatory mechanisms to ensure the continued existence of the species are lacking. In this decision, the USFWS again lauded the efforts of the states and in particular the efforts of sage-grouse local working groups (LWGs) to implement conservation measures. However, because of the emergence of new threats, the USFWS determined the species deserved further consideration.



Local Working Group efforts to preserve sage-grouse, such as the male in this photo, have been praised by the USFWS. Photo courtesy of Todd Black.

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The Utah Community-based Conservation Program in cooperation with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources organized local sage-grouse working groups to develop and implement voluntary sage-grouse conservation plans. This effort was intended to be a long-term collaborative effort to engage private landowners, public and private natural resources management and wildlife agencies and organizations in a voluntary process to identify and implement conservation actions to reduce the threats to sage-grouse, thus preempt a listing.

In 2010-2011, Utah's Adaptive Resources Management Greater Sage-grouse LWGs continued implementation of their sage-grouse conservation plans. The 2010-2011 report is in effect Utah's LWG report card of what they accomplished in this period. In this report they summarize their efforts to implement the conservation strategies and actions outlined in their plans. These strategies were developed to meet the guidelines set forth by the USFWS in their Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) standards. These plans and complete summaries of LWG activities can be found online at www.utahcbcp.org. In 2012, the LWGs will review and revise their plans relative the USFWS decision.

A Merging of Forces to Promote Landscape Conservation Efforts in West Box Elder County



Members of the BARM LWG and WBECD on a field tour visiting a juniper treatment north and east of Park Valley, Utah. These two groups have now formed one larger group, the West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management group. Photo courtesy of Todd Black.

Todd Black, Utah State University

A little over a year ago the West Box Elder Conservation District (WBECD) received a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) district to develop a watershed plan for the area. Based on multiple discussions with the WBECD, leadership with the Utah Association of Conservation Districts (UACD), staff from the Utah Community Based Conservation Program (CBCP), and the Box Elder Sage-grouse Adaptive Resource Management Group (BARM), the groups decided to merge.

“We felt like our meetings for the most part involved many of the same people and most of us felt like we were talking about the same things and trying to solve the same issues at all our different meetings,” said Jay Tanner both the BARM and WBECD co-chair. One of the possible options that local leadership and staff from UACD, NRCS, and CBCP discussed was the possibility of creating a Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) group in west Box Elder County (similar to the existing CRM in Rich County). It was hoped that a CRM would expand conservation efforts to a larger geographic area and involve more local

people. “It didn’t take us long to realize this is what we needed to do,” said Bracken Henderson, UACD Zone 1 Coordinator. With this CRM comes a greater support system involving leadership at state and federal agencies as well as county and other local support. On September 13th of this year, the West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management group (WBECRM) held its kick off meeting and is moving forward toward drafting and implementing a Conservation Plan for the greater West Box Elder area.

To date, the WBECRM has met several times to discuss procedural formalities, form team members, and form several different sub committees. Additionally, they have hired a part time secretary to assist overall efforts as well as take meeting minutes and send out meeting invitations. At their last meeting held in October, they discussed a draft request for quote and are in the process of seeking bids and proposals from consulting firms to draft the resource management plan.

I was asked recently what this means for the old ‘BARM’. While we have been postponing some of our work efforts and meetings, BARM will continue to exist as a subcommittee under the WBECRM. We have selected subcommittee members which are mostly members of BARM. There have been recent changes, though, as Masko Wright was recently hired as the new wildlife biologist for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Jim Christensen was recently hired as the new wildlife biologist for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR).

“We welcome the help and support and the overall bigger picture the CRM will provide not only for sage-grouse but all other resources in the area. I know the County, UDWR, FS, BLM, NRCS, other state and federal agencies along with the local people are very supportive of this process and we welcome the merger of these groups,” said Terry Messmer, CBCP Director at USU. The WBECRM and is chaired by Commissioner Lou Ann Adams and now meets the second Tuesday of every month (excluding December) at 6:00 PM. The primary meeting location is the Park Valley Elementary School. Through USU’s EDNET facilities many folks are able to join the meeting via satellite facilities in places as far away as Richfield, Utah. WBECRM will still post meeting minutes, announcements, and meeting reminders on the CBCP web page at <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups/boxelder>.

By Nicki Frey, Utah State University

This past spring, the Color Country LWG (CCARM) had the unique opportunity to visit the Coal Hollow mine site in Sink Valley. Members of CCARM have been working with Alton Coal Development, who manage the mine site, for the past 5 years; the goal of the group was to ensure the least impact to sage-grouse possible as a result of mining activities in the Sink Valley area. Thus, CCARM was excited to have the opportunity to tour the mine after many years of cooperation from Alton Coal Development. We met representatives from Alton Coal at the south entrance to the mine. They gave us a brief overview of the mine location in respect to the grouse lek, private, and public lands. Additionally, they discussed the method of their operation; to remove coal from a football-field slice of land, using excavation to reclaim the previous slice. After a brief introduction we were guided to the operation site, where heavy machinery was busy digging, extracting coal and soil. At this stage in their operations, trucks were hauling loads of coal every 12 minutes. Representatives from Alton Coal explained the process of removal, instructing the group as to the purpose of each heavy machine, where different soils were going, and how the activities were laid out on the ground. This explanation was very informative – discussions and presentations could not do justice to the activity and process of the mining operation.

From the active site, we proceeded to the mine headquarters. From there, we could see the property boundaries of the mine. To the east, we watched as coal was sorted and trucks loaded up. Across the road, we could see the trucks moving earth. Over lunch, provided by Alton Coal, we talked about the future plans of the mine, and their mitigation efforts. They made available their maps of soil horizons, including depth of coal, which were interesting to read, and helped us understand their method of extraction and timeline of activities. Additionally, they displayed their timeline map, so that we could share how this timeline would potentially impact grouse activities. One interesting action that the mine has implemented is having all truck operators report any sage-grouse sightings, anywhere in Sink Valley. In this way, the mine is creating a database of sage-grouse locations throughout the year. This may be helpful for explaining and understanding how sage-grouse in Sink Valley responded to the mining activities.

It is a rare occasion when extraction industries willingly engage with local conservation groups. We have enjoyed the cooperation we have experienced with Alton Coal. From this interaction, we have learned much about the coal mining industry; similarly, Alton Coal has learned about greater sage-grouse conservation in Color Country.



Members of CCARM discussing the impact of mining activity on sagebrush habitat. Photo courtesy of Kevin Heaton, USU Extension.



CCARM members watch habitat improvement projects conducted by the BLM near the Coal Hollow mine. Photo courtesy of Rbett Boswell, UDWR.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The following meetings have been scheduled. Please check the website for more details, www.utahcbcp.org.

West Box Elder CRM	November 15, 2011, beginning at 6 PM in Park Valley
Carbon/Emery ARM	November 10, 2011, beginning at 6:30 PM in Price
Rich County CRM Executive Board	November 9, 2011, beginning at 2 PM in Randolph
Strawberry Valley ARM	November 21, 2011, beginning at 10 AM in Heber City
West Desert ARM	November 4, 2011, beginning at 1 PM in Tooele

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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and what factors are taken into account when applications are considered. If a formal contract is required, key terms of agreement are explained. Although a summary cannot capture every detail, these summaries provide a place to start, and information is provided on where to go next.

At the end of each section, we have provided a quick guide to help you decide if a program might be a good match for you as a landowner or for particular kinds of conservation goals. The back of the document provides many other resources, like funding and planning resources. In addition, the opening pages list considerations that those thinking about private lands conservation should keep in mind as they design projects or commit money to conservation.

When this document is complete (hopefully by the end of the year), it will be available for download at www.utahcbcp.org, or by contacting Lorien Belton at lorien.belton@usu.edu.

*EQIP and WHIP stand for Environmental Quality Improvement Program and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, both programs that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can use to help sage-grouse habitat, water quality, and a host of other environmental situations.

Conservation Tools for Private Lands in Utah: Resource Guide Coming Soon

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University

Have you ever wondered if a conservation easement might be a good idea, but don't know where to start? Have you heard people talk about the alphabet soup of conservation "cost-share" programs (like EQIP, WHIP*, and others), and wondered if they might be helpful to you? Do you wish that you knew more about managing the forested area of your property, but don't know who to ask? Are you interested in making improvements to your property to help wildlife, but aren't sure where to start?

Over the last year, staff at the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program has worked to summarize the many different kinds of programs that are available for private lands conservation and wildlife work. We have summarized private, local, state, and federal programs. These programs span a variety of purposes, including conservation easements, funding and implementation assistance for habitat projects, education programs, financial incentive programs, and conservation plans and agreements, all of which can be used to support conservation work on private land. Each summary has been reviewed by people who work on that program.

Landowners and land managers as well as wildlife and conservation professionals will find this to be a handy reference guide. Whether you are seeking ways to do conservation on your own land or helping others identify opportunities, we hope this meets your needs.

What makes this different than other summaries you may have seen is the comprehensive comparisons between programs. We asked the same questions about every program – from where the funding comes from to who is responsible for monitoring. There is a description of how each program works – what you can expect from the process of participating in it –

and what factors are taken into account when applications are considered. If a formal contract is required, key terms of agreement are explained. Although a summary cannot capture every detail, these summaries provide a place to start, and information is provided on where to go next.

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