

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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



April 2007

Volume 3, Issue 2

## UTAH'S FIRST SAGE-GROUSE WORKING GROUP SUMMIT

The 2007 Utah Sage-Grouse Working Group Summit explored the successes, trials, and future of community-based sage-grouse conservation programs in the state. The Summit, held March 13-14 at the Red Lion Hotel in Salt Lake City and co-sponsored by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, also included a discussion on how to keep the greater and Gunnison sage-grouse off the federal endangered species list.

Keynote speakers were Mike Styler, Executive Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources and Noelle Cockett, Vice President for Utah State University Extension and Agriculture. A concluding break-out session allowed attending local working group members to share experiences and ideas about this collaborative, community-based process and how to improve it. Presentations given at the Summit are now available online; visit <http://www.cnr3.usu.edu/cbcp/summit.html>.



Dr. Noelle Cockett and Dr. Terry Messmer welcome participants to the Summit.

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## Survey Says: Summit a Proven Success

The 2007 Utah Sage-grouse Working Group Summit was, according to those who attended, a great success. After the Summit, USU Extension's Community-based Conservation Program staff contacted attendees, asking for feedback via an online survey (SurveyMonkey.com). Here's what the survey says:

Most of those attending the Summit were affiliated with at least one of Utah's Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Groups and most came for information about research, the status of sage-grouse populations, and habitat management. Almost 100% of respondents indicated that their reasons for attending were "completely" or "somewhat" fulfilled. Most were satisfied with the Summit sessions, especially the student research project review and the Utah Partners Watershed Initiative (i.e. UPCD) overview. Eighty percent said they would attend a future summit, and indicated that they would like to see sessions on the results of habitat projects, project monitoring, and sage-grouse biology.

Thanks to all who participated in the Summit for making it a great success!

## LOCAL WORKING GROUP NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY COMING SOON!

After almost a decade of experience, state, regional, and national leaders are keen to find out whether local, community-based approaches can be an effective way to manage wildlife. Sage-grouse local working groups are widely viewed as one of the most extensive attempts to develop non-regulatory approaches to wildlife conservation in recent memory. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has funded a research project to provide important feedback on the experiences of these working groups.

In the next several weeks, you may be receiving a survey in the mail on sage-grouse local working groups. The survey is being conducted by independent researchers at Utah State University. This spring, they will be surveying randomly selected group participants across the western states with active working groups.

The survey includes questions about each participant's experiences with their working group, identifies working group challenges and successes, and solicits feedback about how local, state, and federal agencies can help working groups be successful, keep momentum, and manage sage-grouse.

Individual responses to the survey are confidential and will be aggregated with other responses in final reports. Overall results will be used to improve support for local working groups in a variety of ways. If you are interested in the results, you may request a copy.

If you receive a survey, we encourage you to fill it out. Your thoughts and concerns about your working group experience are very important to shaping future decisions about wildlife conservation and management at the local level. A high response rate is critical to providing valid and accurate feedback.

If you have any questions, you can contact Dr. Douglas Jackson-Smith (the lead investigator) at [douglasj@hass.usu.edu](mailto:douglasj@hass.usu.edu) or 435-797-0582, or Lorien Belton (the survey coordinator) at [tecova@gmail.com](mailto:tecova@gmail.com) or 435-760-5545.

## SPRING MARKS THE ARRIVAL OF THE BURROWING OWL IN UTAH

Spring is here and the burrowing owl is en route from South America to its breeding territories in Utah. This small long-legged owl is a summer resident throughout Utah in arid grassland and desert shrub communities ranging from 2,000-7,500 feet elevation. In parts of lower Washington County the burrowing owl is considered a year-round resident. The burrowing owl lives in abandoned mammal burrows and is often associated with prairie dog colonies; however, they have also been reported using ground squirrel burrows, badger dens, coyote dens, and man-made structures such as nest boxes and debris piles.

Burrowing owls usually arrive in Utah in March to establish territories. Upon successful breeding, a clutch of 5-9 eggs will hatch in June or July. By August/September they are off again to their southern wintering grounds. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the Bureau of Land Management classify the burrowing owl as a sensitive species due to declining populations and/or habitat. As development and agriculture converted much of the burrowing owl's historic habitat, nesting pairs have been forced to use sub-optimal breeding grounds. However, research suggests farmland can provide quality habitat for burrowing owls when burrows are protected. Burrowing owls benefit from an increased prey base on or around farmland and farmers, in turn, recruit an accomplished rodent remover. In parts of Utah, researchers have installed and monitored nest boxes in otherwise fragmented habitats, many of which have been successful in recruiting burrowing owls. Continued monitoring efforts, education, and partnerships with landowners will provide a framework to better assess the conservation needs of the burrowing owl.

What can you do? Report sightings to local wildlife agencies, enjoy viewing from a distance, and become involved in research. For more information on the burrowing owls or information on installing your own nest box contact: Rhett Boswell, USU Extension Service, 435-559-3261, [Rhett.Boswell@rcdnet.net](mailto:Rhett.Boswell@rcdnet.net).

*“Your thoughts and concerns about your working group experience are very important to shaping future decisions about wildlife management at the local level.”*



Adult burrowing owl perched outside a burrow.



## SHEEP GRAZING USED TO MANAGE GROUSE HABITAT

Traditional methods of managing sagebrush habitats (herbicides, Dixie harrow, etc.) are fossil-fuel intensive, controversial, and often short-lived. Intensive strategic sheep grazing has the potential to be a viable alternative to these methods. Utah State University graduate student Mike Guttery is evaluating the viability of using sheep to manage sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat on Parker Mountain, Utah. Sheep may increase grass and forb cover by increasing nutrient cycling and soil disturbance, while reducing sagebrush cover through grazing.

In July 2006, Mike delineated 8 sets of paired-plots located in areas dominated by mountain big sagebrush. Each individual plot was approximately 7.9 acres. Mike recorded initial vegetation measurements immediately after plot delineation. From each set of paired plots, he randomly selected one plot to receive a grazing treatment while the other was an ungrazed control. In mid-October, he split approximately 1,000 local sheep into two 500-head flocks and moved the sheep onto the first two plots. Each plot was grazed for 7-10 days in order to achieve adequate utilization. To increase toxin satiation thresholds and facilitate use of sagebrush, Mike fed the sheep a protein/energy supplement at a rate of three pounds per head per day. Mike will monitor vegetation response and greater sage-grouse use of the plots through radio-telemetry, pellet counts, and bird-dog flush counts for the next three summers to determine if efforts to improve the habitat via sheep grazing were successful.



Sheep eating sagebrush in a treatment plot.



Untreated (bottom) and treated (top, with sheep) stands of sagebrush on Parker Mountain.

## STAY CONNECTED WITH SPRING AND SUMMER EVENTS

Utah's Community-based Conservation Program, our partners, and others have a full line-up of events scheduled for the spring and summer of 2007. There are opportunities to get out in the field, attend conferences, and participate in workshops. Check out our comprehensive calendar of events, get out there, and get involved!

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	FOR MORE INFORMATION
April 25	Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group: Lek count & business meeting	Strawberry Valley, Utah	Contact Sarah Lupis, SVARM coordinator, sarahl@ext.usu.edu or 435-770-3116
May 17	Parker Mountain Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group: Field Tour	Loa, Utah	Contact Todd Black, PARM coordinator, 435-770-9302 or Ron Torgerson, SITLA, 435-896-6494
May 22	Central Region Utah Partners for Conservation & Development: Vernon Field Tour	Vernon, Utah	Contact Ashley Green, Central Region UPCD Chair, ashleygreen@utah.gov, 801-491-5678
May 30-31	6th Annual Rural Business Conference: Growing from Within	Logan, Utah	Visit: <a href="http://www.ruralutah.com/index.html">http://www.ruralutah.com/index.html</a>
May 30-June 1	Land EKG Producer School	Richfield, Utah	Contact Bill Hopkin, Utah Grazing Improvement Program, bhopkin@utah.gov
Sept. 18-20	Restoring the West Conference 2007	Logan, Utah	Visit: <a href="http://www.restoringthewest.org">http://www.restoringthewest.org</a>
June 15-16	Utah 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program: State Contest	Salina, Utah	Visit: <a href="http://www.utah4H.org">www.utah4H.org</a> or contact Nicole Frey, 435-586-1924
July 25-29	National Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program Invitational	Cedar City, Utah	Visit: <a href="http://www.utah4H.org">www.utah4H.org</a> or contact Nicole Frey, 435-586-1924

*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.

Utah State University employees and students cannot, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status, refuse to hire; discharge; promote; demote; terminate; discriminate in compensation; or discriminate regarding terms, privileges, or conditions of employment, against any person otherwise qualified. Employees and students also cannot discriminate in the classroom, residence halls, or in on/off campus, USU-sponsored events and activities.

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 Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.

### LICENSE PLATE SUPPORTS SAGE-GROUSE AND OTHER SENSITIVE SPECIES

Show off your sense of style, your favorite wildlife activity, or your patriotism by purchasing Utah's newest wildlife license plate featuring a bald eagle. The bald eagle plate, along with the Utah Non-game Wildlife Fund check-off on your state taxes, is a great way for you to support Utah's wildlife heritage.

The revenue received from the bald eagle plate will enable the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) and its partners to improve conservation of sensitive species, including greater and Gunnison sage-grouse to prevent them from becoming endangered and restore wildlife habitat.

About 90% of the funding used to manage Utah's wildlife comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, and other funds associated with wildlife management. Money provided by hunters and anglers is critical for successful protection of those species that are hunted or fished. However, those funds cannot be used to protect and manage other wildlife.

Revenue generated from the sale of the bald eagle license plate, however, will help implement the Utah Wildlife Action Plan, which is a partner-driven collaborative effort to conserve native wildlife and their habitats throughout the state. A total of 196 species are addressed in the Wildlife Action Plan, including threatened and endangered animals, state sensitive species, and species that we need to learn more about so we can protect their populations.

To get your new plate, stop by any Department of Motor Vehicles office or call 1-800-DMV-UTAH (if you live along the Wasatch Front, you can reach the DMV at 297-7780). If you're shopping for a new vehicle, you can also ask for the bald eagle plate at your dealership. Personalized plates can be ordered at the Division of Motor Vehicles Web site (<http://dmv.utah.gov/licensespecialplates.html#wildlife>). The plates cost \$25 per year and can be personalized with up to five characters.



New bald eagle license plate.