Utah's Sage-grouse Summit Special Report

submitted to

Utah Partners for Conservation and Development

Utah Department of Natural Resources

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Utah State University Extension

Utah State University College of Natural Resources

Department of Wildland Resources

Sage-grouse Local Working Groups

Utah Sage-grouse Summit Participants

Prepared by

Utah Community-Based Conservation Program

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Executive Summary

Utah's Inaugural Sage-grouse Summit was held on March 13-14, 2007 at the Red Lion Inn, Salt Lake City, Utah. The Summit drew over 120 participants representing a cross-section of local sage-grouse working group partners. Over 60 people participated in the breakout sessions. During the breakout session, participants were asked to identify positive aspects of the local working group process, challenges and problems the groups face, and some strategies to address them. Participants also were contacted by e-mail 2 weeks after the Summit and asked to complete a web-based evaluation. We received 51 responses. In general Summit participants were satisfied with the progress being made by the local sage-grouse working groups. However, some participants expressed uncertainty about the future of the efforts given political change. Still, most believed that if the groups were fully engaged in the implementation and evaluation of their plans, they would prove the merits of local governance in the management and conservation of sensitive species. The results of on-going research projects to include evaluations of management actions implemented to benefit sage-grouse were of great interest to Summit participants. Many expressed a need to increase networking opportunities and were especially interested in information which documents vegetation and wildlife responses to management projects.

Introduction

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) organized a Statewide Sage-grouse Working Group in 1998 to identify management issues and concerns and serve as a network for disseminating information needed to complete area conservation plans. This effort culminated in the Utah Sage-grouse Strategic Management Plan. Because of the importance of private land to sage-grouse conservation, the statewide working group identified the need for formation of local working groups (LWGs) to develop and implement local conservation plans which address local issues as their highest priority.

The 2002 Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse, approved by the Utah Wildlife Board on 1 June 2002, mandated the organization of local sage-grouse working groups to develop and implement sage-grouse conservation plans. The DWR in cooperation with Utah State University Extension (USUEXT), private landowners, public and private natural resource organizations, wildlife management agencies, and conservation groups have implemented the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program (CBCP) to compile the plan.

To facilitate LWGs in Utah the DWR entered into a cooperative agreement in 2001 with USUEXT to develop a Utah Community-Based Conservation (CBCP) program. The DWR funded 1 staff specialist position. These funds were matched by USUEXT with funding provided through the Jack H. Berryman Institute and the S.J. and Jessie E. Quinney Foundation to support an additional specialist position and 2 technicians. The specialists work full-time on sage-grouse conservation planning issues. The cooperators believed implementation of conservation plans and agreements will make listing of these species as threatened or

endangered unnecessary, assist in recovery if the species are listed, and provide affected individuals and local communities with increased ownership of the conservation planning process.

LWGs in addition to completing conservation plans are implementing experimental management projects designed to help them learn more about what management practices will result in the greatest benefits for Sage-grouse (Greater and Gunnison), other wildlife species, private landowners, and local Utah communities. These projects are being implemented using experimental designs that will provide LWGs with information to guide future management practices as well as provide scientific information on the effects of shrub-steppe restoration practices on wildlife and vegetation.

Project Administration

The project is currently administered by Dean Mitchell, DWR, and Terry A. Messmer, USU Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist. The program currently includes 4 staff specialists. These staff specialists are responsible for facilitating, implementing and evaluating the LWG process. In 2006, they continued to work directly with the LWG participants and partners to prepare and revise area-wide sage-grouse conservation plans and restoration projects. In accordance with Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UtahPCD) guidance, the LWGs have implemented The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) to develop sage-grouse populations and habitat viability tables. This analysis is assisting LWGs in identifying and prioritizing conservation actions.

The LWGs are ultimately responsible for implementing, evaluating, and reporting the results of their conservation strategies and habitat management actions to DWR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This reporting follows the guidelines established in the USFWS Policy for Evaluating Conservation Efforts When Considering Petition to List a Species (PECE). The information obtained from management projects is being used to revise the conservation plans to ensure that the benefits to sage-grouse and other sensitive wildlife species are optimized.

The CBCP program specialists work closely with NRCS staff, UtahPCD Core and Regional Team members, and LWGs participants to develop, implement, and evaluate management project proposals that qualify for conservation practices cost-share under the Farm Bill, WHIP, EQIP, and Utah Landowner Incentive Program (LIP).

Utah LWGs include the Southwest Desert Adaptive Management Working Group (Iron, Beaver and Milliard Counties), Color Country (South Central and Johns Valley) Adaptive Management Working Group (Kane and Garfield), Parker Mountain Adaptive Management Working Group (Wayne and Piute Counties), West Box Elder Adaptive Management Working Group (West Box Elder), San Juan County Gunnison Sage-grouse Working Group (San Juan County), Rich County Coordinated Resource Management (Rich County), Tooele County Adaptive Management Working Group (Tooele County), Uintah Basin (North and South Slope, and the Book Cliffs) Adaptive Management Working Group (Uintah, Duchesne, and Daggett counties),

Strawberry Valley Adaptive Management Working Group (Wasatch County), Castle Valley Adaptive Management Working Group (Carbon and Emery Counties), Cache Valley and East Box Elder (Cache County and East Box Elder County) Adaptive Management Working Group, and Morgan-Summit Adaptive Management Working Group.

Utah Sage-Grouse Summit

The Utah Sage-grouse Summit was organized to facilitate communication and share information between LWGS and their public and private partners. Working group participants in Utah and rangewide have identified a need to increase information sharing and networking among the groups. A copy of the Summit program can be found in Appendix A.

Because of scheduling conflicts with hotels, the date for the Summit was delayed until March 2007. This later date created conflicts with a number of landowner participants. However, even given these conflicts, over 120 people representing a cross-section of LWG partners registered for the Summit. Over 60 people stayed to participate in the breakout sessions held March 14, 2007. A summary of the breakout session is provided below.

Breakout Session Summary

The purpose of the breakout session was to allow participants to share their ideas and insights about the local working group process. In particular, what has been positive about their experiences, the challenges and problems they currently face and those they anticipate, and to brainstorm some strategies that could be implemented to sustain and enhance their efforts.

The participants were broken down into 3 groups. Each group was asked the same question. The facilitators for each group were; Group 1: Todd Black; Group 2: Nicki Frey, and Group 3: Sarah Lupis. The verbatim summary of each group is provided in Appendix B.

The following is a synopsis of the common themes express by each group.

A. Good things about local working groups

Summit participants were very satisfied with the progress local working groups were making and optimistic about the future. Most believe the process has created a forum for increased communication and cooperation between local communities and public and private partners. The process has worked to build trust, increased information sharing, and provided an organized way of approaching a difficult resource issue. This in turn has increased access to private lands for management and research and created an atmosphere for adaptive management to succeed. The importance of regular meetings facilitated by impartial, trained facilitators was viewed as being an essential and positive component of the effort.

B. Challenges and Concerns

The list of challenges and concerns expressed by Summit participants was rather lengthy. However, most participants believe that challenges and concerns should be seen as opportunities for the process to grow. A common theme expressed by each group was the need to increase private landowner participation at the meetings. Some participants argued that just because landowners did not attend every meeting should not be construed as a sign of apathy or skepticism. In many cases, landowner participation is governed by economic decisions. Participants expressed concerns that project implementation is not being prioritized to address the greatest threats. Some participants were concerned that the groups were trying to do too many projects without clearly documenting the effects of the projects on sage-grouse and other wildlife species. Others were concerned about the changing political climate and the uncertainty it might bring to the process. In summary, the participants were concerned about sustaining group momentum, having money to implement projects, monitoring, lack of marketing and public outreach, and the lack of a broad scale plan to coordinate the efforts of all the groups.

C. Strategies to Address Local Working Group Challenges

Many of the strategies identified to address the challenges and concerns focused on building the capacity of the local working groups to address them through training, education, public outreach, recruitment, and better planning and monitoring. Many believed these strategies should be incorporated into a larger UtahPCD plan that incorporates training for agency personnel and local working group participants. As part of this plan, local outreach efforts should be implemented and evaluated that target teachers, youth groups, dedicated hunters, and others in programs that directly involve them in project development, evaluations, and monitoring. These types of programs would serve a dual purpose in helping partners to monitor project impacts and increase public awareness of the efforts. To facilitate information sharing, a clearinghouse that includes a common database, built using standard protocols, should be developed. This clearinghouse should be accessible by all partners. Consideration should be given to modifying the current UtahPCD database to incorporate public access and data sharing features. This could be similar to the current format used by Wikipedia.

D. Summit Evaluations

Two weeks after the Summit, participants were e-mailed and provided the web site address that contained an evaluation form. Fifty-one participants (45%) completed the evaluation form. Respondents represent the spectrum of Summit participants. Most (70%) were members of one or more local sage-grouse working groups. Most learned about the Summit via e-mail (49%) or through a personal contact (43%). The primary reason given for attending was information sharing and networking (55%). The sessions rated as being of most interest to the participants were the student research project updates (74%), the state of sage-grouse (45%), sage-grouse habitat management (39%), and local working group updates (23%). Ninety-eight percent of the respondents (49) felt the Summit fulfilled their reason for attending.

In general most respondents were satisfied with the information presented (90%), the conference arrangements (92%), the quality of the presentations (96%), registration procedures, (90%) the conference length (90%), and food (88%). Although many felt the timing (74%) of the Summit and Hotel Venue (73%) were appropriate, some felt it should have been conducted in January and at a centrally located facility. To address these latter concerns, we have initiated a dialogue with UtahPCD to co-host a Utah Partners and local sage-grouse working group meeting in 2008.

When asked what they would like to see at future Summits, the clear winner was "more results of habitat projects (80%) and project monitoring (58%)." Other topics of interest included project development (35%), sage-grouse biology (39%), field trips (31%) and mitigation banking (26%). These topics will be included in future summits. In summary, based on participant response, the summit achieved it purpose.

APPENDIX A.

The final program for the Utah Sage-grouse Summit, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 13-14, 2007.

Tuesday Day 1: Wasatch Rooms 1 and 2

8:30-9:30 Registration

9:30- Welcome
Session Moderators: Terry Messmer, Utah State University Extension and Dean Mitchell, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

9:45-10:30 Keynote Speakers
Mike Styler, Executive Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources, Salt Lake City, Utah

Noelle Cockett –Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University, Logan, Utah

10:30-10:45 Break

Session Moderator: Jeremy Maestas, Natural Resources Conservation Service

10:45-12:00 Overview of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Actions Regarding Sage-grouse conservation and listing petitions – Laura Romin

Overview of Utah Bureau of Land Management Sage-grouse Programs and Activities on BLM lands – Steve Madsen

Overview of US Forest Service Sage-grouse Conservation Programs and Activities - Clint McCarthy

Overview of The Nature Conservancy Sage-grouse Conservation Efforts in Utah – Joan Degiorgio

12:00-1:00 Luncheon (Provided)

Luncheon Speaker: Sylvia Gillen, State Resource Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Overview of Utah NRCS Programs and Activities for Sage-grouse Conservation on Private Lands

Session Moderator: Dean Mitchell, UDWR

1:00-3:00 Panel Discussion: Sage-grouse and Habitat Management

Sagebrush Communities - Restoration Limitations - Stephen Monsen, Ecologist

The Tools and Using them Properly to Restore Sage-grouse Habitat - Jason Vernon, Program Manager, UDWR, Great Basin Research Center

Availability and Use of Native Seeds - Kelly Memmott, USFS Ecologist

What and how much to monitor: Overview of Research into Monitoring - Russ Norvell, Wildlife Ecologist, UDWR

Keeping the lights on while dealing with avian interactions – raptors, ravens and sage-grouse - Jim Burruss and Sherry Liguori, PacifiCorp

3:00-3:15 Break

Session Moderator: S. Nicole Frey, Utah State University

3:15-5:15 Utah Sage-grouse Local Working Group Flagship Projects - Research Update

Sage-grouse response to sagebrush manipulations and brood-hopping on Parker Mountain - Dave Dahlgren, Utah State University

Sage-grouse and sheep – Michael
Guttery, Utah State University

Sage-grouse ecology in West Box Elder County - Jan Knerr, Utah State University

Evaluation of Habitat Use and Habitat Stability of Northern Utah's Sage- grouse and the Effects of Sagebrush Thinning Treatments on Sage-grouse Pre-laying and Brooding Habitats. - Eric Thacker, Utah State University

Sage-grouse translocations in Strawberry Valley - Rick Baxter, Brigham Young University

Sage-grouse ecology in the West Desert- Jason Robinson, Utah State University

Sage-grouse response to Pinyon-Juniper removal - Chel Curtis, Southern Utah University

Gunnison sage-grouse use of CRP and response to emergency grazing -Sarah Lupis, Utah State University

Sage-grouse and powerlines - Phoebe Prather, Utah State University

5:15 Announcements

6:00-6:30 No Host Social

6:30-8:00 Dinner – Program

Wednesday Day 2 Wasatch Rooms 1 and 2

7:00-8:00 Continental Breakfast

8:00 Welcome, Agenda for the Day

Session Moderator: Karen Fullen, Natural Resources Conservation Service

8:00-8:30 Utah Sage-grouse Population Status and Plan Overview - Dean Mitchell, Upland Game Program Coordinator, UDWR

8:30- 10:00 Local Working Group Summaries: Planning Status, Accomplishments, Future Actions, Challenges for Success – Terry Messmer, Sarah Lupis, Todd Black, and S. Nicole Frey, Utah State University

10:00-10:30 Break

10:30-11:00 Review of Statewide Watershed Initiative – Linkages to Sage-grouse - Rory Reynolds. Utah Department of Natural Resources

11:00:11:30 Review of Rangewide Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy - Tony Apa, Sage-grouse Framework Team and Colorado Division of Wildlife Resources

11:30-11:45 Status of Rangewide Sage-grouse Working Group Needs Assessment - Douglas Jackson-Smith and Lorien Belton, Utah State University

11:45-1:00 Lunch

1:00-2:30 Working Group Breakout Sessions

During the session each group would develop a list of concerns, factors impeding progress, and recommendations to address them.

2:30-3:00 Break (Preparation of summaries by facilitators)

3:00-3:45 Recap of Each Topic by Table Facilitator

3:45-4:00 Summary

4:00 Adjourn Summit

APPENDIX B.

Complete list of comments expressed during breakouts session, Utah Sage-grouse Summit, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 13-14, 2007.

A. Good things about local working groups

Group 1:

1. Landowners getting educated in issues / NR things dissemination to landowners
2. Getting agencies/landowners together as partners
3. Gives rural communities a voice in the process
4. Local ownership, ground up approach, not forceful
5. Access to private lands for research and new leks
6. Support of others to landowners and vise versa (court/political clout)
7. Landscape approach, no administrative boundaries
8. Learning from research
9. Involvement of county officials and feedback from group
10. Finding out about all the resources
11. No force / all carrot no stick to participate
12. Learning from landowners and others
13. Getting to know others in the area
14. Access to monies (new programs)
15. Getting things done on the ground faster

Group 2:

1. Obtaining perspectives from agencies as well as public
2. Power of partnership
3. Distribution of information/newsletter
4. Increased respect and trust
5. Improvement of cooperation among agencies and public
6. Facilitation process
7. Plan that involved diverse interests, consensus, ownership
8. Process/program attracted resources Was able to overcome “bureaucracies”
9. It worked so far
10. Builds success that is geometric, walking and running in quick time

Group 3:

1. Projects that target LWG needs
2. Meet regularly
3. Involving a diverse group of people
4. Field trip
5. Landowners involved in projects
6. Neutral meeting location

7. Having a facilitator
8. Having coordination
9. Facilitation/Coordination is neutral
10. Information sharing
11. Built trust
12. Constantly updating info
13. Delegating workload
14. Sharing data gathering with whole group
15. Developing common ground and common vision through being at same table
16. Reduced fear
17. Sharing concerns
18. Comparing a diversity of treatment types
19. Compels action
20. Media for potential stakeholder and general public
21. Some working with more than one species

B. Challenges and Concerns

Group 1:

1. More participation from and attendance of landowners at meetings
2. Long term sustainability of CBCP/LWG process
3. Bureaucratic red tape/politics (NEPA/ARC etc.)
4. Skepticism of landowners
5. Communication between groups
6. How to change the plan
7. Maintaining what is real and what is abstract with plan objectives
8. Follow through - continuing with plan update and implementation
9. Adjoining county participation
10. Dropping of the ball by those in charge
11. What happens with all the research after G.S. is gone
12. Continued research lacking
13. Communication with state and region
14. Disconnect between money and on the ground projects
15. More education for all about biology, leks, habitat
16. Financial incentives for landowners to attend meetings
17. City/county involvement and buy into or become part of plans
18. Getting all parts of integrity tables into the written/hardcopy plans
19. Assessment needs CCAA for landowners and LWG plan area
20. Produces unclear obligations with regards to contracts and projects
21. Manpower (ARC/NEPA)
22. Cost vs. results. At what point are they worth it? At present costs just for wildlife vs livestock.
23. Current project treatment techniques - are there others?
24. W.N.V. and disease

25. No clear purpose of LWG purpose; sage-grouse or watershed?
26. Focus on projects/research in other parts of the state.
27. Broaden research scope within and without research area.
28. Clarify role of LWG with UPCD & WSI

Group 2:

1. Future loss of CRP habitat (immediate concern)
2. Loss of group momentum
3. Grooming of future landowner participation
4. Source of financing
5. Following up with "effectiveness" monitoring - huge
6. Following established objectives
7. Narrow-minded focus
8. Continuity of purpose with turnover
9. Availability of resources (seed, manpower, equipment)
10. Communication to the broader audience (urbanites, suburbanites) value assessment
11. Biting off more than we can chew; over-extending
12. Biggest bang for the buck - return on investment
13. Project prioritize
14. Unintended consequences
15. Political changes
16. Integration with other initiatives (see #12)
17. Trust issues
18. Economics - $/bird - cost:benefit

Group 3:

1. Documenting for future use
2. Agency policy precludes adaptive management
3. Personal perceptions preclude adaptive management
4. Fear of trying something new
5. Ability to maintain momentum
6. Keeping end point in mind
7. Having too narrow a focus
8. Keeping LWG adaptable
9. Need more community involvement
10. Meeting content can be disorienting for new members
11. Find/learn a common language
12. Motivating landowners to go to meetings
13. Making landowners feel welcome, included and respected
14. Need for time
15. Need for education of each other
16. Effects on other wildlife - single species focus
17. Lack of broad-scale landscape planning
18. Overall ecological monitoring

19. Lack of money
20. Communicating to leadership/management, convey priority
21. Over representation of govt. people
22. Lack of local govt representation
23. Realistic plan goals
24. Need for decisions based on sound science
25. Lawsuits create lack of trust which leads to loss of information exchange and increased fear
26. Paralyzed by complexity
27. Need to think outside the box
28. Lack of disclosure
29. Uncertainty and indecision creates no action

C. Strategies to Address Local Working Group Challenges

Group 1:

1. Prioritize projects
2. Consider other resources, coordinate some kind of biologist training
3. Educate political and social leaders
4. Recruit from the critics
5. Wildlife enterprises
6. Follow established project objectives
7. Communicate with other working groups
8. Use sage-grouse LWGs as umbrella to develop community level involvement.
9. Consider new management techniques
10. Establish a database of equipment available
11. Invite public to view projects.
12. Encourage media involvement.
13. Do a value study
14. Review group to feedback.
15. Keep one foot on the ground and realize that you can't always do it all

Group 2:

1. Group to affect Farm Bill - lobby
2. Complete projects with measurable objectives that have quick return.
3. Public school outreach, Extension, DWR, FWS. Get FFA and 4-H involved to generate interest in younger groups.
4. Support expansion of range monitoring crew to collect wildlife response data.
5. Develop partnerships with other agencies or groups.
6. Use UPCD database and diversify sources
7. Create subgroups to address scope and financial needs.

8. Clearly defined goals and objectives.
9. Establish statewide, flexible protocol.
10. Well-defined plan, goals and monitoring.

Group 3:

1. Expand focus to ecosystem
2. Identify and recruit key participants
3. Educate public at large about need to conserve sagebrush and sage-grouse
4. Develop and communicate data collection and sharing protocol
5. Take the meeting to the barn
6. Better communication of long-term goals
7. Better marketing of success
8. Better peer to peer communication - use key landowners
9. Data collection protocol and sharing mechanism
10. Identify data and research needs and address them
11. Cross agency training
12. Look for unusual or unlikely partnerships
13. Identify need, purpose, and expectations for participants
14. Define benefits and deliverables
15. Better ability to leverage resources and find out about funding
16. Long range agenda
17. Target participants for agenda
18. Target agenda for participants
19. Identify “problem solving task force” to help resolve conflicts, provide perspective
20. Solve one problem or goal at a time
21. Involve local media in telling success stories
22. Divest people of useful info before they move on
23. Sharing stewardship ethic