

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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## INTERNATIONAL SAGE-GROUSE FORUM TO BE HELD NOVEMBER 12 & 13, 2014

By Terry Messmer, Utah State University

At no time in the recorded annals of wildlife management have so many devoted so much to the management and conservation of a single species – the greater sage-grouse. The species is indicative of the health of the sagebrush ecosystems important to all for its environmental services.

The International Sage-grouse Forum (ISGF) will be held at the Radisson Hotel, downtown Salt Lake City, Utah, on November 12-13, 2014. The focus will be “Conservation through Science, Management, and Local Community Involvement.” The ISGF will bring together local sage-grouse working group members, landowners, county and city planners, energy industry and environmental organization representatives, and local government officials from throughout the western U.S. and Canada to interact with federal, regional, state sage-grouse conservation

*Photo courtesy of Todd Black.***Save the Date: November 12 & 13**

decision makers, wildlife managers, and biologists to further advance sage-grouse conservation through science, management and local community involvement. The ISGF will also highlight the magnitude and resolve of on-going range wide species conservation partnerships.

ISGF participants will be able to attend sessions covering a variety of topics that will enhance their understanding of sage-grouse conservation needs and the role of ongoing efforts to conserve the species. A draft agenda is outlined on page 2 of the newsletter. The conference website will have up-to-date agenda details, as well as hotel, registration, sponsorship and scholarship information. Registration for the meeting will begin August 1, 2014. Early bird registration deadline ends September 15, 2014.

### NEW SAGE-GROUSE BLOG

By Amos Eno, President of Resources First Foundation

Earlier this year, we at Resources First Foundation created the Conservation Habitat Management Portal to help private landowners manage the habitats of candidate, threatened and endangered species on their land. With the development of the sage-grouse page of our Conservation Habitat Management Portal ongoing, I found this an opportune time to speak with Terry Messmer, director of Utah State University Extension's Community-Based Conservation Program, which works to develop a coordinated effort between resource management working groups, private, and public partners for the conservation of sage-grouse and sage-brush steppe ecosystems. You can access the blog at: <http://www.privatelandownernetwork.org/plnBlog/post.aspx?id=200>

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# INTERNATIONAL SAGE-GROUSE FORUM DRAFT AGENDA

## WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

8:00 a.m.	Welcome
8:05 a.m.	Keynote Speaker
8:15 a.m.	Forum Purpose – Defining Your Place in the Conservation of Sage-grouse
8:30 a.m.	Seeking Collective Solutions: Empowering States Through the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Report, USFWS
9:00 a.m.	The Role and Status of BLM and USFS Plan Revisions in Sagebrush Country, BLM/USFS
9:30 a.m.	History and Evolution of Sagebrush Landscape and Sage-grouse Conservation
10:00 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m.	The Sage Grouse Initiative: Partnerships in Action
11:00 a.m.	Success in the Bi-State - Combining Biology, Policy and Win-win Solutions to Proactively Conserve the Bi-State Population
11:30 a.m.	Lunch -- A Public Rancher's Perspective: My View from the Saddle
1:00 p.m.	State of the States and Provinces: Sage-grouse Population and Conservation Effort Status
3:00 p.m.	Break – Room Set-up for Concurrent Workshops
3:30 p.m.	Concurrent Workshops (Choose one, some sessions repeated) (A) A Primer in Sage-grouse Biology and Ecology (B) Sagebrush and Sage-grouse Landscape Management – Minimums and Maximums (C) SGI Science to Solutions: Low Hanging Fruit and How to Pick It. (D) Approaches to Mitigations Sage-grouse- Mitigation and Mining in Nevada Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Banking
6:00 p.m.	LWG Facilitator Coordination Event (LWG facilitators primarily)

## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13

8:00 a.m.	Concurrent Workshops (E) Predation and Hunting: Lightning Rods and Silver Bullets (F) Strategic Conservation Planning for Private/Public Lands (G) New Breakthroughs in Fire and Invasive Weed Management (H) What is - Development, Disturbance, Fragmentation, and Habitat Loss?
10:00 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m.	Concurrent Workshops (B) Sagebrush and Sage-grouse Landscape Management – Minimums and Maximum (Repeat) (C) SGI Science to Solutions: Low Hanging Fruit and How to Pick It. (Repeat) (D) Approaches to Mitigations (Repeat) (I-1) State and Province Plans Digested: In-depth Discussion (Nevada, Utah, Idaho, California, Washington, Oregon)
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m.	Concurrent Workshops (F) Strategic Conservation Planning for Private/Public Lands (Repeat) (I-2) State and Province Plans Digested: In-depth Discussion (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Alberta, Saskatchewan) (E) Predation and Hunting: Lightning Rods and Silver Bullets (Repeat) (G) New Breakthroughs in Fire and Invasive Weed Management (Repeat)
4:00 p.m.	Sage-grouse Conservation: Setting the Tone for the Future

## PARM PROVIDES LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND INPUT ON UTAH SAGE-GROUSE MANAGEMENT BOUNDARIES

By Dave Dahlgren, Utah State University

The Utah Governor's Office approved the Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Utah in April 2013. This plan established Sage-grouse Management Areas or SGMA, which are essentially large landscapes of federal and non-federal lands occupied by sage-grouse across Utah. The original boundaries of SGMA were done with a "broad brush stroke" to incorporate areas believed to be important to sage-grouse. A provision in the Utah Plan allowed proposals for boundary adjustments to SGMA. The proposals would be reviewed by the Sage-grouse Implementation Coordinator and the Public Lands Policy Coordination Office before official adjustments to an SGMA boundary would be made.

The Parker Mountain Adaptive Resource Management (PARM) working group has recently submitted a proposal to change the boundaries of the Parker Mountain SGMA (Figure 1). PARM members, including co-chairs Andy Taft and Dave Christensen, were concerned that private agricultural lands around Loa and Bicknell were not necessary to the conservation of sage-grouse in the area. Research conducted by Utah State University over the last couple of decades supported their conclusions. No radio-marked sage-grouse have been documented using these agricultural fields (Figure 1). Additionally, some lands north of Koosharem Reservoir were not included in the SGMA but have sage-grouse habitat. They are mostly School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) or Federal lands. PARM proposed these areas be added to the Parker Mountain SGMA (Figure 1). PARM is currently waiting for the decision on the adoption of part or their entire proposed boundary changes.

Members of PARM recognized that Utah's Sage-grouse Plan provides no jurisdiction over private lands. However, PARM's concerns over the boundaries in the Loa and Bicknell areas were about the potential use of these boundaries by other regulatory agencies. Private land within an SGMA boundary does have the advantage of qualifying for funding for habitat improvement projects, which can also increase livestock forage and other watershed benefits.

PARM is one of Utah's original Local Working Groups (LWG) (see [www.utahcbcp.org](http://www.utahcbcp.org)) and was established in 1997 as a community-based conservation organization. Members of PARM include local livestock interests, Wayne County commissioners, state and federal agency biologists, and other interested parties. PARM has worked hard over the years to establish a local voice and partnership for natural resources, including the sage-grouse issue. LWGs are recognized as a critical component for the implementation of Utah's Sage-grouse Plan.

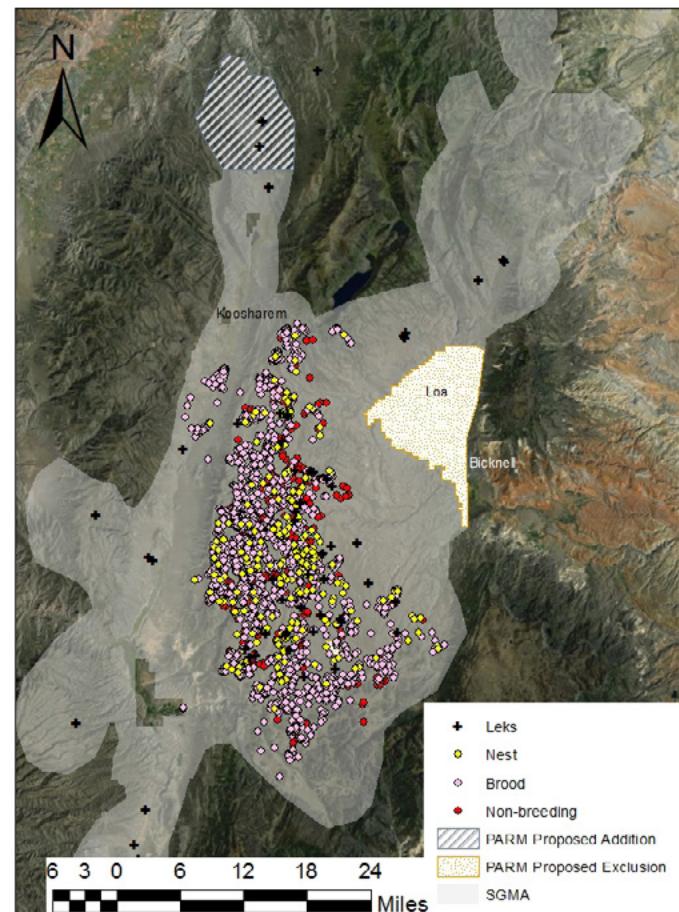


Figure 1. Map showing proposed changes to the Parker Mountain SGMA as well as locations used by sage-grouse. Map courtesy of Dave Dahlgren.

Figure 1. Map showing proposed changes to the Parker Mountain SGMA as well as locations used by sage-grouse. Map courtesy of Dave Dahlgren.

## DATABASE OF SAGE-GROUSE SCIENCE ARTICLES AVAILABLE ONLINE

Have you had a hard time finding what the latest sage-grouse literature says, or what new articles have been published? There is a database, managed by the USFWS, which lists all those articles. You can find it online by typing "refworks" and "sage-grouse" into Google. It will bring up a database of hundreds of articles on sage-grouse. Unfortunately, to access some of the full articles, you need to have access through an institution that has subscriptions to the journals, like a university. However, many are available via Google Scholar – a different search engine. The following link also connects to the database: <http://tinyurl.com/sagegrousescience>

## If it's not good for communities, it's not good for wildlife.

### SAGE-GROUSE GROUPS REVIEW PROJECTS, WORK JOINTLY WITH UTAH PARTNERS FOR CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

By Lorien Belton, Utah State University



Trina Hedrick, UDWR, explains recent stream restoration work on Red Creek in Daggett County during a joint UPCD-UBARM tour. The project has the potential to benefit aquatic and terrestrial species, including greater sage-grouse. Photo courtesy of Lorien Belton.

Over the last few years, two collaborative efforts have developed a highly effective way of working together. The sage-grouse local working groups, facilitated by Utah State University Extension, are important reviewers for sage-grouse-related projects proposed for their local areas. Projects are developed through partnerships in regional teams, called the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD). In some cases, the seeds of ideas for the projects originate in the sage-grouse local working group meetings. They are then proposed for funding by the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). Once proposed, a project is entered into a public online database. The sage-grouse groups (and anyone else interested) can then review the projects, ask questions, and provide recommendations.

For example, in January of 2014, the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Group (WDARM) reviewed numerous projects proposed in the West Desert area. Each project was evaluated on its technical merits, location, potential benefit for sage-grouse, etc. Project managers were given feedback on everything from the percentage of pinyon juniper a project should aim to remove to suggestions for how to better present the project so that its benefits could be clearly seen by other reviewers. In some cases, comments were submitted to ensure that other reviewers knew that the sage-grouse group strongly supported the implementation of a particular project. Other working groups around Utah also discuss proposed projects in a similar fashion.

Other sage-grouse groups and regional UPCD teams have found even more ways to work together. In the Uintah Basin, the two groups regularly hold joint field tours, and coordinate meetings several times a year. Coordinated meeting schedules allow participants to focus their time and travel money, and not have to choose between the two meetings when time limitations become an issue. In Rich County, the CRM group reviews all the WRI projects, sage-grouse or otherwise. These are just a few examples of how sage-grouse groups and the regional UPCD teams are improving coordinated natural resource management implementation across Utah.

### BLM UPDATE ON STATUS OF UTAH GREATER SAGE-GROUSE DRAFT LAND USE PLAN

During the public comment period for the Utah Greater Sage-grouse Draft Land Use Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received approximately 16,742 letters from individuals, organizations, state, local and federal government agencies, and Native American Tribes. The BLM has read all those comments to identify issues, input, and information to consider in preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The BLM and Forest Service will prepare responses to all substantive issues raised during the public comment period and include those in the FEIS.

In addition to reviewing and responding to comments, the BLM has worked with its cooperating agencies and adjacent sage-grouse planning efforts to develop a Proposed Plan and prepare the analysis for the FEIS. The FEIS will include separate Proposed Plans for the BLM and the Forest Service. The Proposed Plan and FEIS are in the process of being prepared, with an expected public release in the fall of 2014. When the Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment/FEIS is released, it will initiate a 30-day protest period and 60-day Governor's Consistency Review. Upon the resolution of any protests or issues raised during the Governor's Consistency Review, the BLM and the Forest Service will prepare separate Records of Decision and the Final Land Use Plan Amendments will be issued.