

NEWSLETTER

News and updates about sage-grouse conservation in Idaho



OWYHEE LOCAL WORKING GROUP SHOWS OFF JUNIPER MASTICATION PROJECTS

The Owyhee Local Working Group (LWG), in partnership with the Jordan Valley Cooperative Weed Management Area, The Nature Conservancy and private landowners, conducted 2 demonstration tours this fall to view 2 of their juniper mastication projects on private lands. The 1st tour was on September 30 on Juniper Mountain; the 2nd tour was on October 14 in Josephine Creek. Participants viewed areas where junipers were removed in the past few days, plus were able to see the masticator in action. The following photos demonstrate how well and quickly the equipment works, plus

shows that there is minimal impact to the soil, sagebrush and bunchgrasses. Sage-grouse should be able to use the opened-up sagebrush habitat next year.

The Owyhee LWG is using a website called "Spatial Interest" to share information about the juniper mastication projects and other LWG activities.

The website is available at: www.spatialinterest.info

To find more photos and information about the mastication projects, click on the "Forums" link, then select "Owyhee LWG".



Participants at the juniper mastication demonstration day at Juniper Mountain on 9/30/09 inspecting remnants after mastication.



The ground after the masticator has been through.



The masticator in action

FISCAL REPORT BY DON KEMNER, SAGE-GROUSE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

2002-2009 Sage-grouse Funds	
USFWS grant funds	\$2,081,821.00
SAC and LWG expenses	\$330,861.00
Habitat projects	\$786,035.40
Inventory & monitoring	\$663,535.54
Other projects*	\$58,948.50
Other OSC expenses	\$181,765.00
Current commitments	\$60,372.00
Total Expenditures	\$2,081,517.44
Other projects include education, fence marking, and a landowner survey	

Since 2002, Congress has earmarked over 2 million dollars for sage-grouse management in Idaho. These funds originate in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) budget. The Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC) uses these funds to implement a variety of sage-grouse management activities, including the Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC) and LWG facilitation and expenses, OSC grant projects, OSC sponsored projects (2 Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances [CCAA] plans, sage-grouse landowner guide, mitigation white paper, participation in Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative), and current commitments to on-going LWG

projects and CCAA planning.

Citizens and agencies have also help fund sage-grouse management. Volunteers donated thousands of hours serving on the SAC and LWGs. Idaho Fish and Game funded SAC and LWG facilitation, and habitat, monitoring, and inventory projects. Bureau of Land Management has funded SAC facilitation since 2008. In 2009, the USFWS is helping to funded site-specific plans under the West Central CCAA. Many citizens, non-governmental organizations, and agencies have provided matching funds for projects.

LOCAL WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The USFWS will publish the finding of their Greater Sage-grouse status review by February 26, 2010.



Ecology and Conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse: A Landscape Species and its Habitats is a special publication of the Studies in Avian Biology. Individual peer-reviewed chapters are available for download at:

<http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/monograph.aspx>



BIG DESERT

The Big Desert Local Working Group completed a draft of their plan. It was recently out for agency review and they will go through the agency

comments at their next meeting. The group would like to share ideas with other groups about how to get and keep permittees more involved in

LWGs. The BLM continues to work on their road grading and fuel breaks project in the Big Desert.

CHALLIS

The group has not met since the last SAC meeting, but the group's representative asked

the facilitator if they could meet more regularly. He commented that it is hard to

keep up with things when a group meets infrequently.

EAST IDAHO UPLANDS

The group is still working on a few sections of their plan. They continue to meet at 2 locations via conference phone. At their last meeting, Idaho Fish and Game pre-

sented results of their aerial lek surveys. They found 1 new lek and confirmed that 3 additional leks (which had not been observed for many years) were still active. The

draft CCAA for the Blackfoot/Soda Spring area is near completion. Attendance at the CCAA meetings by grazing association and LWG members has increased.

GREATER CURLEW VALLEY

The Forest Service, in cooperation with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Cheyenne WY, has recently completed low-elevation aerial photography of the Greater Curlew Valley. The

aerial photographs will be correlated and verified with field data. The finalized map of suitable sage-grouse habitat should be available soon. The Forest Service has signed an agreement with ARS in

Aberdeen, ID to grow and test suitable cultivars for restoration of basin big sagebrush on the Curlew National Grassland. The Curlew LWG will meet next in December.

JARBIDGE

The Jarbidge LWG is planning to meet quarterly, about 1-2 weeks before each quarterly SAC meeting, in order to identify any questions or issues they would like to share with the SAC. At their last meeting,

Mike Remming gave a presentation on the spring lek survey results in the Jarbidge. Rick Vander Voet, Field Manager of the BLM Jarbidge Field Office, updated the group on the Murphy Complex Fire and

results of the rehabilitation efforts. To date, most permittees have been able to turn out their cattle after this growing season, but the status of a few allotments is still to be determined.

NORTH MAGIC VALLEY

The North Magic group meets about once a month and they are currently prioritizing the threats to sage-grouse in their

planning area. One rising threat is the growth in agricultural areas due to expiring CRP. The LWG continues to

be concerned about the proposed new airport near Hailey.

SHOSHONE BASIN

The group still does not have a facilitator, and therefore struggles to have regular meetings. There have been some changes to key opera-

tors in their area, so they need to coordinate with them. Shoshone Basin, like many areas in Idaho this year, had a very wet spring resulting in

good forb production. Many seasonally wet areas are still moist and green.

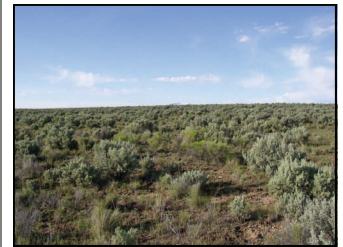
LOCAL WORKING GROUP UPDATES, CONTINUED.

OWYHEE

The group's last meeting was in August. They primarily talked about the juniper mastication project (see front page article). They also talked about the Gateway West transmission line project. There are 2 alternatives;

1 would pass through Owyhee County and the other through the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area north of the Snake River. The Owyhee LWG recommends that the line go through the Birds of Prey Area, which

could benefit nesting and perching raptors there. This alternative would avoid also impacts to sage-grouse. They also discussed the potential to open up the Castle Creek area to cutting juniper for firewood.



SOUTH MAGIC VALLEY

The South Magic Valley group is still fairly young, but like most groups, they have had diminishing attendance. They

have had 1 habitat project, which re-seeded private land following a wildfire. This year Idaho Fish and Game put out

3 new wing barrels in the area to increase the sample size of wings from hunter-killed birds.

UPPER SNAKE

The Upper Snake LWG has not had a meeting since this summer. The group got its Table Butte Sagebrush Seed-

ling project funded by the Office of Species Conservation. The project will start this fall, when sagebrush seed will

be collected and grown at the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes' greenhouse.

Welcome to Richard Savage, the new representative to the SAC from the Idaho Cattle Association! John Romero will remain on the SAC as a member of the general public.

WEST CENTRAL

The programmatic West Central CCAA should be finalized by the end of the year. In the meantime, Idaho Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are drafting

the first site-specific plan. They want to assure that all landowners are being treated objectively and fairly, while also assuring the sage-grouse population remains viable.

They will review the proposed standards with the landowner and report at the next LWG meeting in November.

SHOSHONE-PAIUTE TRIBES

Biologists are beginning to analyze data from this past year from their radio-collared

birds. They will be starting a habitat restoration project this fall.

There were 2 confirmed cases of sage-grouse deaths due to West Nile virus in Idaho in 2009; 1 was in the West Central and 1 was in the Big Desert.

CHAPTER 6 UPDATE

The Chapter 6 Subcommittee met on October 1, prior to the full SAC meeting that afternoon. The subcommittee reviewed and addressed the public comments received on the draft Chapter 6. They also reviewed agency comments that required additional discussion and those that came in after the agency review deadline. The subcommittee then presented their completed Chapter 6 to the full

SAC. The SAC reached consensus agreement and approved the final Chapter 6. The revised Chapter 6 presents a five-year implementation plan for the *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho*. The SAC then agreed on a process to formalize Chapter 6. The SAC will be requesting letters of support from the agencies that signed the MOU for the State Plan. The letters will

demonstrate continued support of the State Plan, including the revised Chapter 6, and extend the MOU through December 31, 2015. The request for support letters will go to the agencies in mid-November, with a due date of December 31, 2009.



IDAHO SAGE-GROUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

600 S. Walnut St.
P.O. Box 25
Boise, ID 83707

Visit our website!
http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/plans/sage_grouse/

2009 SAGE-GROUSE SEASON OPENING WEEKEND RESULTS

Idaho Fish and Game runs several check stations on opening weekend of the sage-grouse season. Biologists collect information on the number of hunters, numbers of birds seen and harvested, and the number of hours spent hunting. Although results from check stations don't necessarily capture all hunters, the same check stations have been run for many years, thereby providing an index of comparison among years. They also collect wings from harvested birds, which will later be examined to determine age and sex.

This year opening weekend saw fewer hunters but more birds harvested than the 5-year average. Statewide results show 1,209 hunters harvested 875 sage-grouse,

overall a little better than last year when 1,245 harvested 845 grouse. The average is 1,227 hunters and 860 sage-grouse taken.

In the Upper Snake, most hunters reported seeing sage-grouse; many reported seeing more than 50 and some reported seeing more than 150 sage-grouse over the opening weekend. The data show a slight decrease in all harvest measures, but harvest, hunters, and hunter success were essentially the same as during the 2008 sage-grouse season. Check stations reported 651 hunters harvested 574 sage-grouse – close to the same as last year when 660 hunters took 589 birds.

In the Magic Valley, opening weekend participation and

harvest were the lowest in the region since 1965. This year, 383 hunters took 182 birds, still a slightly better success rate than last year when 491 hunters took 194 birds.

Elsewhere in the state:

- In the Southwest Region, 119 hunters checked 100 sage-grouse. That was an improvement on last year when 94 hunters took 62 grouse.
- In the Southeast Region, 56 hunters checked 19 grouse.

After the season is over IDFG will mail out a hunter survey form to a random sample of those who purchased a sage/sharp-tailed grouse validation. This method provides harvest estimates by harvest zone for the entire season.

SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT RESTORATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT ON THE CAMAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BY ALAN SANDS, SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT RESTORATION COORDINATOR, IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME; AND BRIAN WEHAUSEN, REFUGE MANAGER, CAMAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Camas National Wildlife Refuge, located near Dubois, was established in 1937. The refuge came into existence primarily to protect wetlands and associated waterfowl. Nevertheless, there were significant other wildlife values, not the least of which was sage-grouse. Refuge manager reports during the 1940s indicated some sage-grouse nesting and brood use, but 2,500–3,000 birds were reported to winter there.

Fast forward to the 21st century – much of the upland habitat on the refuge has little sagebrush and few sage-grouse. Much of it is now non-native grasslands, composed of crested wheatgrass, smooth brome, intermediate wheatgrass, and cheatgrass. The area is still being used by some sage-grouse for brood rearing, but nesting and wintering birds are quite rare. Former refuge manager, Rob Larranaga, saw a need and an opportunity to change the situation to be more favorable to sage-grouse. He built a partnership that included Kent Christopher and Tim Reynolds (North American Grouse Partnership), Mike Gregg (USFWS Regional Sage-Grouse Restoration Coordinator) and the Upper Snake LWG. They applied for and received 2 grants –

one from OSC and one from Rocky Mountain Power. Because they knew that converting these exotic grasslands back to a healthy sagebrush-native grass habitat was going to be challenging, they decided this should be a demonstration project.

Two treatment areas were selected. Site A, 15.7 acres, was dominated by smooth brome. Site B, 14.0 acres, was largely cheatgrass and some smooth brome. Both sites were burned in the fall of 2008 and then sprayed with Roundup® in the spring and fall of 2009. Site A was split into 2 parts, half the area was seeded with a Brillion seeder and the other half was disked twice, harrowed, cultipacked, and seeded with the Brillion seeder. Site B was also split into 2 parts with half the area seeded with the Brillion seeder and the other half sprayed with Plateau® and seeded with the Brillion seeder. The seed mix was quite diverse – bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, needle and thread grass, Sherman big bluegrass, arrowleaf balsamroot, globemallow, northern sweetvetch, lupine, western yarrow, sainfoin, and alfalfa. Big sage-

brush seedlings will be planted early next fall and winter.

Time will tell the outcome of these various approaches. We will monitor the treatment areas with permanent study transects and plots. We should have a good idea of our successes and failures within 2–3 years. Success could lead to an operational program on the refuge to restore many areas to sagebrush habitat as well as knowledge that could be applied to similar areas outside of the refuge.



Brillion seeder working on Camas National Wildlife Refuge