



INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
JOINT VENTURE

conserving habitat through partnerships

August 1, 2015

Ron Alvarado
State Conservationist
USDA NRCS
1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard
Suite 900
Portland, OR 97232

Tim Griffiths
Sage Grouse Initiative National Coordinator
USDA NRCS
10 East Babcock Street
Federal Building, Room 443
Bozeman, MT 59715

Ron & Tim:

On behalf of the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) Management Board and staff, I extend our sincere appreciation to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for partnering with the IWJV on the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT).

Please find attached the SGI SWAT NRCS Quarterly Report for April – June 2015. The report also contains the following appendix: Objectives and Evolution of the SGI SWAT.

Please give me a call at (406) 549-0287 if you have any questions. We look forward to reporting on future SGI SWAT successes!

Sincerely,

Dave Smith
IWJV Coordinator

Sage Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team
Quarterly Report: April 1 – June 30, 2015
Intermountain West Joint Venture
August 1, 2015

The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) continued to make significant gains this past quarter in each of its four focus areas: field delivery, science, communications, and partner development. The following reports on these accomplishments from April – June 2015.

FIELD DELIVERY CAPACITY

The SWAT field staff continued to expand and accelerate SGI conservation delivery this quarter with support from local and state U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, funding



Sage grouse lek near Malta, Montana, with cattle roaming nearby. Photo by Kelsey Molloy, SWAT in Malta with Montana Association of Conservation Districts

partners, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV). The team’s dedicated and enthusiastic range conservationists, wildlife biologists, and natural resource specialists not only help get conservation on the ground but also spread the shared vision of achieving wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching throughout the West. Below are some of the incredible highlights from the SWAT field staff and the IWJV’s efforts to support SGI delivery this reporting period.

Conservation Implementation

The IWJV maintains a detailed tracking system to document SWAT field staff progress on a quarterly

basis. These contributions are rolled up with other NRCS actions and reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), during the annual sage grouse status review process, to ensure landowner and partner efforts are considered in Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decision reviews.

Partner Positions Accelerate Conservation—Additional field capacity support provided by SWAT partner positions across the West has essentially enabled NRCS to double the amount of SGI conservation. Partner staff have helped plan or implement:

- **2,085,596 acres** of rangeland improvement to increase sage grouse hiding cover during nesting season. Additional grass cover is expected to increase sage grouse populations by eight to ten percent.
- **244,248 acres** of conifer removal in key nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering habitats. Removing encroaching conifers from sagebrush rangelands eliminates tall structures in otherwise suitable habitat. As birds re-colonize former habitats, increased bird abundance is anticipated.
- **192 miles** of “high-risk” fence near leks to be marked or removed. Marking fences is expected to reduce sage grouse fence collisions by 83%.

SWAT Position Updates

SWAT field team talent does not go unrecognized by other employers. As position vacancies arise, the IWJV works with NRCS, hiring entities and funding partners to re-assess position locations to ensure technical assistance is focused where it’s needed most; positions are quickly refilled to minimize disruption to conservation delivery. Here are changes that occurred this quarter:

- Kourtney Stonehouse filled the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) position in Tremonton, Utah. Kourtney has a BS in Biology from Calvin College in Michigan and an MS from Washington State University, where she studied habitat selection in Greater Sage-grouse and Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse. Most recently, she was a wildlife technician and research associate with Colorado Parks and Wildlife working on mule deer.

- Connor White filled the Pheasants Forever (PF) position in Burley, Idaho. Connor is an Idaho native who grew up working on a farm in New Plymouth and received a BS in Rangeland Ecology from the University of Idaho. Connor's prior experience includes working as a range/wildlife technician for both the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS).
- Justin Hughes filled the newly established Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) Wildlife and Range Conservationist position in Ekalaka, Montana. Justin grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm and earned a BS degree in Fish and Wildlife Ecology from Northland College in Wisconsin. He previously worked as a wildlife technician for the USFS, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources where he monitored Northern Goshawks, Kirtland's Warbler and Sharp-tailed Grouse. Having grown up in agriculture, Justin is passionate about both wildlife and cattle production.
- Leah Lewis (formerly in the MDF position in Tremonton, Utah) relocated to the MDF position in Vernal, Utah (formerly in Roosevelt).

SWAT Orientation

SGI relies on its SWAT team to assist NRCS field offices and ranchers with scaling-up conservation in sage grouse strongholds across 11 western states. Every new rangeland conservationist or biologist comes well-qualified for the competitive positions. However, there can be a steep learning curve for new hires to carry out SGI, including everything from an in-depth knowledge of sage grouse biology to tips and tools for working with landowners and building community partnerships. Since March of 2014, SGI has hired seven new staff to fill vacant positions.

The IWJV recently brought these staff together to fully immerse them in SGI and share some lessons-learned for working successfully with ranchers, NRCS, and partners. The group, including two Partner Biologists with Point Blue Conservation Science (PBCS), gathered for a two-day orientation training in Bozeman, Montana, June 16-17, with the goal of better preparing SWAT staff for delivering SGI.



SWAT Orientation participants, from left: Mary Beth Albrechtsen (PF, Belle Fourche, South Dakota); Connor White (PF, Burley, Idaho); Kolten Hawkins (PBCS, McArthur, California); Mandi O'Donnell (PF, Elko, Nevada); Logan Ross (Baker City Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Baker City, Oregon); Donn Slusher (Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Kremmling, Colorado); Jeremy Maestas (NRCS West National Technology Support Center); Briana Schnelle (PBCS, Alturas, California); Seth Gallagher (IWJV/SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator); Kourtney Stonehouse (MDF, Tremonton, Utah); Justin Hughes (MACD, Ekalaka, Montana). Photo by Tina Dennison

The SGI and IWJV team wishes to thank our guest speakers: Jerry Shows (NRCS Montana Assistant State Conservationist for Operations); Kyle Tackett (NRCS District Conservationist in Dillon, Montana); Sam Lawry, (PF West Region Director); Lindsay Schmitt, (NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist in Dillon, Montana); Tim Griffiths (NRCS National SGI Coordinator); Dr. Dave Naugle (NRCS SGI Science Advisor/University of Montana Wildlife Biology Program Professor); Jeremy Maestas (NRCS West National Technology Support Center Sagebrush Ecosystem Specialist); and Seth Gallagher (IWJV/SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator).

SGI also commends all our hard-working NRCS field staff who provide day-to-day leadership to our SWAT team and numerous paying partners who support the positions.

Utah Partner Meetings

Seth Gallagher, SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator, was accompanied by Don Ashby, NRCS Northern Utah Area Conservationist, and Casey Burns, NRCS Utah State Biologist, for several partner field visits during the last week of June in Utah. Individual discussions included the status of the SGI partnership, practices and projects being implemented, as well as the future of the partnerships in each location.

Meetings were held with the following partners:

- Ogden – Kourtney Stonehouse (MDF SWAT in Tremonton); Elise Boeke (NRCS Utah State Resource Conservationist); Jeff Schick (NRCS Utah District Conservationist in Tremonton); Travis Mote (NRCS Utah Range Conservationist in Tremonton); and Karl Fleming (FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Utah State Coordinator).
- Randolph – Taylor Payne (SWAT in Randolph, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food [UDAF]); Troy Forrest (UDAF Grazing Improvement Program Coordinator); Elise Boeke (NRCS Utah State Resource Conservationist); and David Mabey (NRCS Utah Acting District Conservationist in Randolph).
- Salt Lake City – Miles Moretti (MDF President/CEO); Elise Boeke (NRCS Utah State Resource Conservationist); and Karl Fleming (FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Utah State Coordinator).
- Vernal – Leah Lewis (MDF SWAT in Vernal); Natasha Hadden (BLM Wildlife Biologist/Pathways in Vernal); Jim Spencer (NRCS Utah Wildlife Biologist in Roosevelt); Jeremy Maycock (NRCS Utah Soil Conservationist in Roosevelt).



Taylor Payne shows the group a firebreak installed on a SGI project near Randolph, Utah. Photo by Seth Gallagher

SWAT Field Staff Calls & Events

Several events occurred during the quarter to further SWAT coordination:

- Northwest Colorado Field Tour (April 27-28) – Seth Gallagher (IWJV/SGI Field Capacity & Delivery Coordinator) joined Chris Yarbrough (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation SWAT in Craig); Chris West (Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust Executive Director), and Jodi Peterson (High Country News Senior Editor) in visiting several SGI projects, including easements on the Cross Mountain Ranch.
- PF All Staff Meeting (June 1-5) – SGI Field Capacity & Delivery Coordinator presented on “Working Lands for Wildlife Program – A New Paradigm for Species Conservation” to PF staff in Estes Park, Colorado.

The annual SWAT Workshop will be held August 18-19, in Minden, Nevada. This year’s event will focus on the human dimension of formulating a successful collaborative conservation effort.

The IWJV continues to host monthly conference calls in which SWAT members receive SGI updates, share accomplishments and experiences, ask questions, and receive continuous technology transfer and training.

SCIENCE CAPACITY

Mapping Invasive Conifer Across the Range—Oregon Data Available

A major science project to map invasive conifers across seven states and 102.5 million acres will be completed by September of 2015. As each step is finished, the data is then made available. This quarter, the Oregon data is now ready to serve scientists and managers in their efforts to strategically target where to remove conifers for the biggest benefits for sage grouse in Priority Areas for Conservation (PAC). The data will be useful for working across public and private lands to make the greatest difference for sage grouse and is available on the USGS Landscape Conservation Management and Analysis Portal (or LC MAP), powered by ScienceBase. To view the dataset, click on the link or search for the text, as follows: "[Tree Canopy Cover across Sage Grouse Habitat in Oregon](#)". Funding for the project comes from SGI, BLM and FWS.

Background—Mapping Project Important for Restoring Historic Sage-Steppe

Science can sometimes be simple. Fact: sage grouse hate trees. Where conifer invasions have taken over sage grouse range, the birds abandon their leks at levels as low as four percent tree cover. Science tells us that in the last 150 years, junipers and pinyon pines have expanded 600 percent, degrading rangeland health across more than 12 million acres in the Great Basin. Almost 90 percent of the invaded area was once a largely treeless sagebrush-steppe that supported sage grouse other species dependent on that ecosystem. Armed with this information, scientists aim to target the best places to make a difference. A key step is to map the conifer across the habitat using GIS mapping, including each PAC where conifer is a threat. Mapping results offer conservation practitioners the tools necessary to prioritize conifer removal to proactively maintain both sage grouse distribution and abundance.

Focus on Early Phase Conifer Invasion—Time Sensitive Action

Conifers come in three successional phases. Phase I represents the frontline invaders where conifer is present in low densities with excellent shrub and herbaceous plants present. In Phase II, conifers are co-dominant with the shrubs and herbaceous plants, with declines in sagebrush and other shrubs. In Phase III, conifers have taken over the shrubs entirely, and there's a sharp reduction in herbaceous plants as cover for sage grouse and forage for grazing. The time to solve the fragmenting threat is now, while 80 percent of conifer encroachment in the Great Basin is still in Phases I and II. Each year, 200,000 acres cross the threshold into Phase III. Scientists have done the math to predict only a 30-year window to fix the problem or live with the permanent loss of sagebrush habitats.

Figure 1. Three phases of conifer encroachment in western U.S. rangelands.



Phase I



Phase II



Phase III

Conclusion & Contacts

The mapping project gives efficient, timely and precise data where it can be most effective. The Oregon results show what will be coming for all seven states by fall of 2015. Principal investigators for the range-wide mapping project are Dr. Dave Naugle (NRCS SGI Science Advisor/University of Montana Wildlife Biology Program Professor, 406-240-0013, david.naugle@umontana.edu); Patrick Donnelly (IWJV Spatial Ecologist, 406-493-2539, patrick_donnelly@fws.gov); and Dr. Michael Falkowski (University of Minnesota Department of Forest Resources Professor, 906-370-7776, mfalkows@umn.edu).

COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

Bi-State Sage Grouse Decision Shows Partnership Power

The FWS decision on April 21 not to list the Bi-State (California/Nevada) population of sage grouse under the ESA was the big news of the quarter, and SGI Communications played a major role in helping spread the word. The SGI website home page includes the Bi-State partnership success as one of its featured “photo boxes,” which links to [a page devoted to all relevant Bi-State sage grouse news and information](#). The following pieces were produced, in association with this exciting announcement:

[USDA NRCS Factsheet – *Bi-State Sage-Grouse: Partnerships Key to Success at the California-Nevada Border*](#)

[NRCS Nevada Video – *A Conservation Partnership Takes Flight*](#)

[USDA Blog – *Bi-State Sage-Grouse Success Shows Importance of Voluntary Conservation Partnerships* posted by Robert Bonnie, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment](#)

[U.S. Department of Interior Press Release – *Successful Conservation Partnership Keeps Bi-State Sage-Grouse Off Endangered Species List*](#)

The impressive efforts of the Bi-State Local Area Working Group, as well as science, funding support and landowner participation led to tangible success on the ground and commitments for the future.

Sand County Foundation’s New Publication: *Stories from the Range – Ranching and Sage Grouse Conservation*



[SGI helped promote](#) the [Sand County Foundation’s](#) publication, [Stories from the Range](#), which showcases six different ranchers’ sage grouse conservation success stories. The report demonstrates how SGI and its many partners are making positive steps towards the restoration and protection of habitat for sage grouse and many other wildlife species. Tim Griffiths, NRCS National SGI Coordinator, wrote a post for the USDA Blog entitled, [New Report Highlights Ranchers Restoring Habitat for Sage Grouse](#). He concluded his post with recognition of the role of private landowners in conserving and restoring sage grouse habitat: “Collectively, the work these ranchers have done through SGI demonstrates the benefits and potential of private lands conservation. By prioritizing conservation, ranchers like O’Keeffe, Taft and Fulstone are boosting their land’s productivity, providing wildlife habitat, and demonstrating the vital role that private lands play in conservation.”

SGI Conservation Easement in Colorado Benefits Sage Grouse & Colorado River Too—Making the Water Connection

When [Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust](#) closed a key easement on the Yust Ranch, [SGI stepped up to help spread the word](#). Through the Farm Bill, SGI provided important funds, along with other partners. What’s more, this particular easement showed an unusual coalition of partners, including Trout Unlimited. It’s not often that a sage grouse easement aimed at keeping working lands intact can benefit a large river system and wild trout directly. This one did. It clearly illustrated the importance of large landscape conservation that keeps both water and uplands connected and intact, benefiting many wildlife species. Petra Barnes, NRCS Colorado Public Information Officer, wrote a USDA Blog post entitled, [Key Sage Grouse Habitat Protected in Colorado through a Conservation Easement Partnership](#). In addition, E&E News published the following: [Colorado officials praise large ranching easement in grouse territory](#).



Yust Ranch (Photo by John Fielder)



Photo courtesy of Pokorny family

Success Stories—SGI Featured Ranchers

This continuing series has [a dedicated page on the SGI website](#) to easily connect readers to featured SGI ranchers. More than 950 ranchers are enrolled in SGI programs, yet facts and statistics can't deliver the real stories of the individuals and families, [such as the Pokorny Family in Wyoming](#), and what they do to make a difference. SGI is tying the facts to real life stories in a series featuring ranchers from each of the 11 western states in the sage grouse range. All are involved with SGI, many with the SGI SWAT staff.

Other News

SGI also played a large role in the following stories, via writing, posts on the SGI website, Facebook page and Twitter:

April – [Western Governors' Association \(WGA\) Releases Major Sage Grouse Conservation Report](#) (SGI); [Sage-Grouse Inventory – 2014 Conservation Initiatives](#) (Special Report by WGA)

April – [New Guide Helps Landowners and Managers Navigate the Farm Bill to Conserve Habitat](#) (SGI); [2014 Farm Bill Guide to Fish and Wildlife Conservation](#)

May – [Invasive Plants in Sage Grouse Habitat – Strategy Report Release](#) (SGI); [Invasive Plant Management and Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation: A Review and Status Report with Strategic Recommendations for Improvement](#) (Report by Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Wildfire and Invasive Species Initiative Working Group)

Featured Friend

The *Featured Friend* series is dedicated to holding up SGI, featuring the partner on the home page of the website and development of a one-page handout. In addition to the home page feature, all *Featured Friend* stories to date can be viewed in [a single category](#) or on [the Resources page](#) of the SGI website.

June – [Pheasants Forever](#)

SGI Partners

Universities and Colleges

SGI relies on our university partners to help provide the science to guide conservation. Research includes sage grouse population dynamics, land use effects on insects that sage grouse depend on, fence-marking, response of birds to conifer removal, and mapping habitat. As part of recognizing SGI's diverse group of partners, [the list of SGI participating universities](#) has been expanded to include Colorado State University, Little Big Horn College, Montana State University, Oregon State University, University of Idaho, University of Minnesota, University of Montana, University of Nevada, Reno, University of Wyoming, and Utah State University.



Photo by Nick Richter

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative

The launch of [Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative's \(LPCI\) new website](#) marked an opportunity to share the commonalities of LPCI and SGI – based on the same principles of landowners voluntarily stepping up to conserve habitat with partnerships playing a strong role for win-win conservation.

SGI E-News

The bi-monthly SGI E-News continues to delivery several stories within a professional template into the e-mail inboxes of subscribers (currently over 3,200). E-News from the quarter include:

[April 1, 2015](#)

[April 16, 2015](#)

[April 21, 2015](#)

[May 6, 2015](#)

[May 27, 2015](#)

[June 11, 2015](#)



*Bodie Mountain summit, looking southwest towards Mono Lake and the Sierra Crest in eastern California. The Bodie Hills are prime habitat for the Bi-State population of Greater Sage-grouse.
Photo by Bob Wick*

PARTNER DEVELOPMENT

The IWJV continues to strengthen the partnership for SGI implementation through extensive coordination and collaboration among state and federal agencies, non-profit conservation organizations, and corporations – all facilitated by the leadership of its Management Board. The Partner Development element of SGI has played a critical role in maintaining strong support for SGI across a diverse group of conservation partners.

In cooperation with PF, a key partner of the SGI, the IWJV has now executed 77 field capacity, science, communications, and management agreements. Together, the IWJV and PF closely manage these agreements to ensure successful implementation and achievement of SGI objectives. These projects encumber a total of \$6,995,956.87 in SWAT funds. This quarter, we continued to modify field capacity agreements, which will extend the positions through June 2016, initiated a new agreement with USGS to produce two conifer related manuscripts, and finalized a new agreement with Utah State University to continue its grazing study for another year.

The IWJV devotes significant staff time and resources to maintaining existing partnerships, as well as to the development of new partnerships. Frequent communications with the NRCS National SGI Coordinator, NRCS SGI Science Advisor, NRCS Sagebrush Ecosystem Specialist, and SGI Field Capacity & Delivery Coordinator ensures that the implementation of SGI is precisely aligned with NRCS objectives – and has built a solid foundation for regular communication and coordination that will yield substantial benefits over the life of the SGI SWAT. The SGI SWAT Coordination Team met for the twelfth time on February 4-5, 2015, in Missoula, Montana. The Coordination Team will next meet July 29-30, 2015, to review current activities, discuss a long-term strategy for SGI Communications, and assess the budget as we enter the final year of SGI SWAT and transition to SGI SWAT 2.0.

SUMMARY

The SGI SWAT is a model for science-based, landscape-scale habitat conservation – and a model for the future. It represents a landmark step forward in helping NRCS – through partnerships with the FWS, state fish and wildlife agencies, and others – address many of the bottlenecks that have long prevented Farm Bill conservation programs from realizing their true potential for wildlife habitat conservation in the West.

NRCS SGI SWAT AGREEMENT PERFORMANCE METRICS

- a) *Efforts for outreach to, and participation of, beginning farmers or ranchers, and Native American Tribes within the project area.* The SWAT field capacity workforce worked directly with four Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, or Beginning Producers and one new Indian Tribal member this quarter.
- b) *Assistance provided to program participants to help meet local, state, and/or federal regulatory requirements.* The intent of SGI is to proactively conserve sage grouse habitat to negate the need for additional regulations. Participating producers are highly committed to sage grouse conservation, and the SGI provides an excellent vehicle for addressing threats to sage grouse populations at very large scales.
- c) *Numbers of NRCS program participants assisted and/or cooperating in the project effort.* The 25 SWAT partner positions made 1,409 contacts (field visits, etc.) with 641 different agricultural producers as of December 31, 2012. The reporting system was revised in 2013, and we now track Technical Assistance days. Since January 1, 2013, the SWAT provided 6,442.5 Technical Assistance days. This level of technical assistance provision is indicative of how the SWAT will ratchet up SGI implementation over the next few years.
- d) *Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) being employed through the SWAT agreement.* Thirty-eight (38) FTEs (27.0 Field Delivery Capacity Partner Position FTEs, 1.0 Rangeland Inventory Support FTE, 1.0 SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator FTE, 1.0 SGI Communications Director FTE, 1.0 Communications Support FTE, 3.0 IWJV FTEs, and 4.0 Science Support FTEs) were employed during the reporting period.
- e) *Acres of project area addressed in NRCS program contracts and/or extents of conservation activities implemented in the project area.* The SGI SWAT, to date, resulted in the following accomplishments: conservation planning for 2,085,596 acres of grazing systems; 244,248 acres of conifer removal; 1,013,763 feet (192 miles) of fence marking or removal; 8,541 acres of wetland restoration; 12,036 acres of rangeland seeding; and, 24,685 acres of conservation easements.
- f) *NRCS program dollars obligated in agreements in the projects area by program.* A total of \$3,285,568 in Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds were obligated during the reporting period. ***This brings the total amount contracted by the SWAT, to date, to an impressive \$52,665,629!***
- g) *Other partner or resource contributions from other agencies or organizations which help implement provisions of the agreements.* We have secured \$4.96 million in partner funding toward all aspects of the SWAT through the first three years, have secured or project an additional \$2.23 million in partner funding leveraged in Years 4 and 5, and have secured an additional \$800,000 from COP through 2019. We are in the process of securing commitments from partners for continuation of their SWAT field delivery capacity matching contributions for the out-years.

Appendix A Objectives & Evolution of the Sage Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team

Launched in 2010, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) is a highly targeted and science-based landscape approach to delivering enough of the right conservation practices in the right places, in order to elicit a positive sage grouse population response to management. SGI uses dedicated Farm Bill conservation program funds at appropriately large scales to alleviate threats that otherwise fragment habitats, the primary reason for the species "candidate" designation under the federal Endangered Species Act. SGI targets Farm Bill resources to high sage grouse abundance centers, or "core areas," to maintain large and intact habitats rather than providing palliative care to small and declining populations.

The SGI Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) was established to strengthen NRCS' capacity to implement SGI. The SWAT builds field capacity and strengthens the science guiding SGI, as well as bolsters communications capacity – all through partnerships that leverage the NRCS SGI funding with significant contributions from other sources. The Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV), in close collaboration with NRCS at multiple levels, continued to make significant progress toward the following objectives in launching the SGI SWAT during the reporting period:

- Increase field-level capacity by placing specialized human skill sets at critical geographic "pinch points" to increase SGI benefits.*
- Increase science capacity to better focus SGI implementation, assess biological outcomes, and continually improve program delivery.*
- Improve and enhance outreach and communication strategies to increase partner buy-in and SGI participation from landowners.*
- Expand SGI partnership to further leverage NRCS contributions resulting in increased outcomes and participation.*

This work is facilitated by execution of an Interagency Agreement (IA) between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and subsequent modifications to the IA. The \$4 million in SWAT funds were obligated in an NRCS-FWS IA, signed June 24, 2011. NRCS provided an additional \$3 million to the SGI SWAT NRCS-FWS IA late in FY 2011, from another funding source, to bring the total NRCS commitment to \$7 million. The "Phase 2" \$3 million was obligated in a modification to the IA, executed on September 13, 2011. NRCS provided an additional \$2.3 million to extend the agreement through December 1, 2016, through a "Phase 3" modification to the IA on September 28, 2012. As with all SWAT projects, the IWJV leveraged NRCS' investment by raising 25% of the funds needed to implement the SGI SWAT from an array of conservation partners, including the FWS, state wildlife and agricultural agencies, conservation districts, non-governmental conservation organizations, and corporations.

The IWJV, through the FWS, subsequently entered into a Cooperative Agreement with Pheasants Forever (PF) to facilitate fiscal administration and partnership-based implementation of SGI SWAT, effective August 9, 2011. PF works closely with the IWJV staff on SWAT implementation and is also playing a key role in building field capacity for SGI, specifically by supervising seven of the 24 positions through agreements they have negotiated with state fish and wildlife agencies and other partners. For the purpose of this and future reports, we consider the overall \$14.7 million effort as the SGI SWAT, even though only \$4 million arose from NRCS' FY 2011 SWAT appropriation.