

# Sage-Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team

## Quarterly Report: January 1 – March 31, 2012

Intermountain West Joint Venture

*May 1, 2012*

The Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) became fully operational during the reporting period with fully deployed field delivery, science, and communications capacity (see attached Objectives & Evolution of the SGI SWAT). The following is a report of our accomplishments from January 1 – March 31, 2012.

### FIELD DELIVERY CAPACITY

The heart of the SGI SWAT is devoted to landowner outreach, conservation planning, and the development and implementation of SGI contracts. These essential functions are being achieved, in



part, through partner range conservationists, wildlife biologists, and other resource specialists working in USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field offices. These professionals are specifically trained and equipped to deliver SGI habitat conservation projects with participating ranchers.

The Intermountain West Joint Venture's (IWJV) SGI Field Delivery Capacity Coordinator, Randy Gray, led and effectively shaped the Field Delivery Program during the

reporting period. In addition to the 20 partner positions that had previously been developed and filled, the IWJV filled the four remaining partner positions during this quarter, in the following NRCS field offices: Ely, Nevada; Mountain Home, Idaho; Burley, Idaho; and Craig, Colorado. In addition, the Roosevelt, Utah, position was refilled after the position was vacated in January. With these newly hired resource professionals, the total number of field capacity partner positions is 24.

These natural resource professionals – while very new in their positions, still in the phase of completing necessary training, and becoming familiar with their landscapes – are already making a difference with SGI implementation. For example, Tammy Koldyke (Ogden, Utah), catalyzed a very productive Utah SGI workshop that garnered support and enthusiasm for SGI statewide. Likewise, Gillian Brooks (Belle Fourche, South Dakota) took the initiative to develop a targeted mailing to agricultural producers informing them of SGI opportunities. Gillian's work has already produced tangible results – 22 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications were received in Butte County, South Dakota, in FY 2012, after only one EQIP application was received in FY 2011 (see attached outreach materials that Gillian developed).



*Sgi SWAT Team, Salt Lake City*

In accordance with the requirements in the NRCS-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Interagency Agreement for delivering workshops and specialized training to the SWAT positions, the IWJV also accomplished the following during the reporting period:

- The SWAT team participates in monthly conference calls in which team members receive SGI updates, continuous training, as well as have an opportunity to ask questions and share experiences. During the reporting period, SWAT Supervisors also held their first quarterly conference call to provide updates and guidance on invoicing and tracking.
- Toward ensuring that the field capacity team is as prepared and successful as possible, the IWJV worked closely with Marcus Miller and Pat Shaver of the NRCS West Technical Center to develop training curriculum that emphasizes rangeland inventory and monitoring and rangeland health. The training syllabus includes online training videos available from the Jornada Range and Experiment Station and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The training videos and related materials will be used during an upcoming event in Pinedale, Wyoming, where NRCS staff will lead field and classroom exercises to build on the training videos. The field capacity partner positions will additionally participate in NRCS wildlife/range training webinars over the next three months (see attached SGI SWAT Training Syllabus).
- The IWJV is hosting a SWAT Workshop and Managers' Meeting the week of June 25<sup>th</sup> in Pinedale, Wyoming. The workshop will follow up on the successful SGI SWAT Orientation Training held in Salt Lake City last November, by giving the 24 SWAT hires an additional dose of focused sage-grouse conservation training. The SWAT Managers' Meeting, which will be held at the same location later in the week, will allow the SWAT Managers (including supervisors, funders, and NRCS) to discuss the progress of the partner positions and share information. The Pinedale event will also include a SWAT celebration featuring the following speakers: NRCS Chief Dave White; NRCS State Conservationist for Wyoming; Sublette County Conservation District Executive Director; Howard Vincent, Pheasants Forever CEO; and Alan Clark, IWJV Management Board Chairman and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Deputy Director.

- Importantly, the IWJV has developed a detailed tracking system so that SWAT team members may systematically document their accomplishments on a quarterly basis. This tracking system documents the conservation activities that NRCS reports to the FWS under the Conference Report.

## SCIENCE CAPACITY

The IWJV has built upon its significant progress in supporting a science-based approach to conserving sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat. The IWJV continues to work closely with the SGI Science Advisor Dave Naugle and, to date, has allocated \$371,712 in SWAT Science funds to five outcome-based research or decision support tool development projects. All five of these agreements have either been executed or are in the final stages of execution, and all five are currently being implemented.

The work and analyses being performed pursuant to these science agreements is yielding excellent information and results across millions of acres of private sagebrush grasslands and wetlands in Montana, Nevada, California, and Oregon. These science projects, many of which were initiated with NRCS Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) funds, are being carried out by reputable, independent scientists to measure biological response of sage-grouse to improved grazing management, removal of encroached conifer, and the marking and moving of fences. The results will play a pivotal role in effectively targeting SGI as needed to realize sage-grouse conservation objectives and help ranchers conserve sustainable rangelands.

Assessment partners in this work include The University of Montana, University of Idaho, Utah State University, The Nature Conservancy, FWS, state fish and wildlife agencies, other federal agencies, and others. Additional funding is expected from CEAP which will provide another year of sustained funding for the three ongoing outcome-based SGI assessments in Montana, Oregon and Utah.

The five science projects funded with SWAT funds are summarized below. Along with the onset of successful implementation of each of these agreements, note that the IWJV recently negotiated and developed an amendment to The University of Montana agreement; it will allow for the collection and genetic analysis of sage-grouse feathers in order to better understand sage-grouse movement within and between core areas, particularly as it relates to landscape features responsible for shaping sage-grouse distribution.

- **Assessing Sage-Grouse Response to the Removal of Encroaching Juniper (University of Idaho):** Agreement with the University of Idaho to conduct multi-year assessment on the effects of juniper removal on sage-grouse habitat and populations.
- **Assessing the Range Condition of Core Sage-Grouse Habitat near Roundup, Montana (Open Range Consulting):** Agreement with Open Range Consulting to perform rangeland habitat mapping and related data analysis services on eight private ranches comprising 500,000 acres in north central Montana.

- **Evaluating Effects of Rest-Rotation Grazing on Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat and Population Dynamics in Central Montana (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; The University of Montana):** Agreements with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and The University of Montana to implement a long-term research project evaluating rest-rotation grazing practices on sage-grouse population dynamics (see Partner Spotlight below).
- **Improving Fence Structure in Sage-Grouse Core Areas of North Central Montana (The University of Montana):** Agreement with The University of Montana to implement a multi-year research project assessing the impact and success of removing, relocating, and/or marking fences in high risk grassland areas in hopes of reducing sage-grouse mortality.
- **Measuring Intra- and Inter-annual Wetland Persistence and Variability During Sage-Grouse Brood-rearing Periods over a 30-year Time Span in Oregon, Nevada and California (IWJV/Nevada Department of Wildlife/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife):** This collaborative project among the IWJV, NRCS Science Advisor, Oregon NRCS, Nevada NRCS, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Nevada Department of Wildlife will result in a spatially explicit decision support tool that will help the SGI target the most productive sage-grouse brood rearing habitat as well as facilitate related outcome-based evaluations. This project will provide tools that will be particularly useful with the utilization of conservation easements in the SGI, including the Wetlands Reserve Program.

We also developed and advertised a Request for Proposals for the creation of a guidance tool for resource managers to utilize when considering whether or not treatment is necessary and/or justified in sagebrush habitats for the benefit of sage-grouse.

## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

### Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Lorelle Berkeley: From One Grouse to Another

*April 25, 2012, Northwest of Roundup*

Lorelle Berkeley turns up the telemetry receiver volume and aims the antenna into the sagebrush merging with tall golden grass from last year's lush growing season. Meadowlarks sing from fenceposts. The Snowy Mountains gleam white on the northern horizon.

The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) research biologist has dialed the frequency to match a radio-collared sage-grouse hen. The beeps come in right away, an excellent sign. Lorelle slowly sweeps the antenna in an arc, holding it parallel to the ground, a technique to find a grouse that's not far away.



Where the beeps are loudest, she pauses. The more she turns down the volume, the more precise the beeps pinpoint the bird. Today, she's finding the hen just where she'd hoped she would from her check two days prior—nesting on private land enrolled in the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI).

Lorelle, who wears her hair in a ponytail tucked under an SGI ball cap, is no stranger to grouse. On the side, she's finishing up her Ph.D. dissertation on ruffed grouse from her studies at the University of Minnesota. You might say, she's moved from one grouse to another.

Now based in Roundup, Lorelle tracks sage-grouse and their responses to changed grazing systems. FWP has generously committed resources to make her work possible. When Lorelle is not capturing, collaring or following the birds, she's collaborating with Joe Smith (a University of Montana doctoral student on the project), running a field crew of technicians and checking in with landowners.

After she's clear on the nest location, Lorelle strides noisily out into the sagebrush, so the hen will think she's nothing but some passerby, rather than a stealthy predator. A slightly higher rise makes the ideal viewpoint to glimpse the bird 20 yards away. Brown-speckled feathers of the hen's back blend with the twisted wood of the sagebrush. The hen is so still and camouflaged, it takes several minutes to see her nestled under a bush ringed by tall grass— unless you've got Lorelle's gestalt for sage-grouse.

The hen is one of several dozen collared in a sage-grouse stronghold of eastern Montana where the threat of sod busting is high. The several hundred thousand acres of what's called a "core area" marks the birthplace of the Sage-Grouse Initiative.

In 2010, the first landowners signed up to be part of the SGI, which focuses on the application of Farm Bill funds towards planning and implementing grazing systems aimed at benefiting grouse habitat and rangeland productivity. The ultimate goal is to prevent a listing of the declining birds under the Endangered Species Act.

FWP teamed up with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help evaluate whether the practices are working. That's where Lorelle comes in. Her role is more than a biologist. She's a spokesperson for the SGI, too.

Driving down a rough two-track road under a wide-open sky north of the Musselshell River, Lorelle carries a stack of handouts to update anyone who's interested in their latest findings. She drinks coffee in ranch house kitchens. On early mornings, you'll likely find her ordering up a pancake sandwich at the Stage Stop Café in Roundup and chatting with the owner, who's known for inventing special breakfasts.

What makes the SGI tick? It's the winning combination of teaming up with local landowners, working with invaluable partners like FWP, and applying science and practical know-how to make a difference. Already, in just two years, the rangelands appear to be responding to rest-rotation and timed grazing. That's good news for sage-grouse looking for the suite of habitats they need for breeding, nesting, chick-raising, and fall/winter ranges. And it's great news for ranchers, too.

## COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

The communications and outreach of the SGI continues to track well—increasing the visibility nationally, recognizing/attracting partners, and effectively sharing key resources, such as the four SGI videos, brochures and core maps.

The SGI website officially launched March 19<sup>th</sup> at [www.sagegrouseinitiative.com](http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com). The Facebook page followed on March 26<sup>th</sup> (viewable at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sage-Grouse-Initiative/408072312539614>). Within a day of the launch, NRCS Chief Dave White reviewed the website and gave it his compliments. The website and Facebook page immediately started functioning the way everyone hoped. SGI now has the “go to” site for the latest news, postings, and materials. So much happens with the SGI that every day something new and important comes to light.

People are watching the SGI unfold and our collective accomplishments are drawing large media attention. Resulting communications are holding up agriculture as the new paradigm for conserving at-risk species, replacing top-down regulatory approaches with voluntary and incentive based conservation. This message has been shared with millions to date. A few examples include:

- SGI is featured this month on *Living on Earth*, a public radio program carried by more than 300 stations in the U.S. and on Public Radio International: <http://www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?programID=12-P13-00015&segmentID=5>
- SGI is a feature story in The Nature Conservancy’s *Nature* magazine with a print readership of 750,000. *On the Life List: Can the sage grouse recover from an energy boom in the West?* By Jim Robbins: <http://magazine.nature.org/features/sage-grouse-on-the-life-list.xml>
- The Great Falls Tribune in Montana just ran a Sunday edition article spotlighting the efforts of ranchers, BLM, and NRCS to proactively conserve sage-grouse and ranching: <http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20120429/NEWS01/204290302/Land-managers-ranchers-working-avert-Big-Open-s-sage-grouse-from-listing?odyssey=mod%7Cdefcon%7Ctext%7Cfrontpage>

With this powerful communication strategy already assembled, our collective job now is to get this information out into broad markets.

Specifically, the IWJV encumbered \$125,151 in seven communications agreements and accomplished the following communications-related tasks during the reporting period.

### **Videos**

- Conservation Media produced four short (three to five minutes) high-definition films on the SGI for internet and DVD distribution.
- These videos are now available on the SGI website and are receiving excellent usage with over 6,100 views to date.
- We have made and distributed 1,000 SGI Visual Resources DVDs, which also contain the videos and photographs, and are now used routinely by NRCS field, area, and state staff for SGI promotion and telling the broader story. These videos are a powerful medium to tell the positive role that agriculture is playing in sage-grouse conservation.

## **SGI Website**

- Writing:
  - Sage Grouse 101: identification, habitat, range, food, nesting, behavior, conservation, what you can do, etc.
  - Success tracker overviews and individual stories: Conservation Easements—Conserving the Sagebrush Migration Highway; Encroaching Conifer Removal—Native American Young Adults Restore Sage Grouse Habitat; Grazing Systems; Invasive Species; Accidental Grouse Mortality—FFA Students Mark Fences to Prevent Sage Grouse Collisions; Restoration—Restoring Sage Grouse Habitat in North Dakota.
  - Up-to-date funding, news story summaries, resource descriptions, and more.
- Partners:
  - Solicited partner information, logos and posting, which has proved an excellent way to make contacts for communications work.
  - Worked with partners on success stories.
- News:
  - Posted current and useful news stories and accompanying photos.
- Events:
  - Identified and shared relevant calendar items, such as a NRCS workshop entitled, *Interpreting and Measuring Indicators of Rangeland Health*, in Belle Fourche, South Dakota; WAFWA's 28<sup>th</sup> Sage-grouse and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop, which will be held in Colorado next month, is also listed.
- Photo Library:
  - Worked with Conservation Media to select, download, and caption 80 photos. These photos, as well as the four videos, are now on disk, which is a huge benefit for SGI trainings, media use, and more.
  - In addition to the photo library, the Communications Specialist has collected photos to use for various parts of the website and Facebook page.
- Website Redesign:
  - Interviewed for a new website provider/designer. This is part of future planning to make improvements to the look and function of the website, and to create a user-friendly site for regular updates.

## **Facebook Page**

- Designed the Facebook page, set up its functions, and posted informational items and a photo gallery. Within a week, the Facebook page had over 100 “likes” and continues to build and create interest. For example, 28,886 people either clicked on our content or were forwarded it from a friend in a single week. The Facebook page can also be accessed via a link on the website.

## **Other Communications & Outreach:**

- IWJV's Communications Specialist has strategized and researched specific stories to write and feature on the SGI, as well as the best outlets for the news. She will be on assignment in northeastern California and southern Oregon next month to meet with partners who are actively removing encroached conifer from sage-grouse core areas.

- The SGI Field Capacity Coordinator and two SWAT team members staffed a booth highlighting SGI at the 2012 National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic in February in Kansas City, Missouri. These IWJV representatives provided useful information to landowners and others on the SGI.
- Lastly, we have begun the process of coordinating and contracting for the development of a pocket-sized sagebrush identification field guide. The pocket guide will inform landowners and resource professionals of the important sagebrush species that their lands support and will open doors for voluntary partnership and conservation opportunities in sagebrush habitats throughout the West.

## **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. In cooperation with Pheasants Forever (PF), a key partner of the SGI SWAT, the IWJV effectuated 15 science, communications, and SWAT management agreements during the reporting period that encumbered \$526,458 in SWAT funds and associated matching dollars.

The SGI SWAT is made possible by the IWJV's fund distribution mechanisms and ability to efficiently build the administrative and contracting capacity needed for successful implementation. The IWJV devoted a tremendous amount of staff time and resources during the reporting period to assembling the partnerships and developing the agreements needed to achieve SGI objectives. Specifically, we are strengthening SGI by building and maintaining partnerships that result in additional funds contributed to SGI capacity; supporting NRCS staff in coordinating SGI implementation among a diverse array of wildlife conservation partners – including 11 state fish and wildlife agencies and, to date, 14 non-governmental conservation organizations or corporations; and, effectively managing contracts and agreements to facilitate the objectives of the SWAT.

The IWJV has engaged the SGI National Coordinator and Science Advisor at every juncture to ensure that the implementation of the SGI SWAT is precisely aligned with NRCS objectives. Collectively, we have built a solid foundation for regular communication and coordination that will yield substantial benefits over the life of the SGI SWAT. We implemented our second SGI SWAT Coordination Meeting in February, involving SGI, IWJV, and PF staff; a vast array of administrative and implementation items were discussed and decisions were made by the team. Lastly, we have engaged conservation districts at a high level in SGI SWAT implementation, particularly in Wyoming, Montana, and Oregon, where they are holding SWAT field delivery positions. The IWJV is bringing resources to the table from partner agencies and organizations that are new to the arena of sharing technical assistance costs and field positions with NRCS (e.g., Mule Deer Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Utah Chukar and Wildlife Foundation), while at the same time forging important relationships with long-standing NRCS partners, such as conservation districts and PF.

## SWAT PERFORMANCE METRICS

The establishment of the 24 partner positions facilitated substantial habitat conservation during the January-March 2012 reporting period, as quantified through our detailed accomplishment tracking system administered by the IWJV's SGI Field Delivery Capacity Coordinator and SGI Project Coordinator. While SWAT field staff were still becoming familiar with their landscapes and receiving essential training, the "boots-on-the-ground" began to yield impressive outcomes, as follows:

- 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 six beginning farmers or ranchers and two Native American Tribes. SWAT field staff in Winnett, Montana, and Powell, Wyoming, were particularly active with beginning farmers and ranchers.
- 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 24 SWAT partner positions made 417 contacts (field visits, etc.) with **231 different agricultural producers**. This level of technical assistance provision is indicative of how the SGI SWAT will ratchet up SGI implementation over the next few years.
- d) *Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) being employed through the SWAT agreement.* Twenty-eight (28) FTEs (24.0 Partner Positions FTEs, 1.0 SGI Field Delivery Capacity Coordinator FTE, 1.0 Communications Specialist FTE, and 2.0 IWJV FTEs) were employed during the reporting period. This will expand during the next reporting period with the start-up of science projects and full-scale implementation of communications projects.
- e) *Acres of project area addressed in NRCS program contracts and/or extents of conservation activities implemented in the project area.* The SGI SWAT resulted in the following accomplishments: conservation planning for 234,379 acres of grazing systems; 24,070 acres of conifer removal; 213,028 feet (40.3 miles) of fence marking or removal; 300 acres of wetland restoration; and 169 acres of rangeland seeding. These activities are preparing NRCS field offices for substantial SGI contract development over the next few months. Those contracted acres and dollars will be reported in the next two quarterly reports.
- f) *NRCS program dollars obligated in agreements in the projects area by program.* A total of \$432,000 in Grasslands Reserve Program funds and \$82,007 in EQIP funds were obligated during the reporting period. As described above, these figures will increase dramatically from April-June 2012.
- g) *Other partner or resource contributions from other agencies or organizations which help implement provisions of the agreements.* We have secured \$1.59 million toward the 24 partner positions and leveraged an additional \$2.03 million in partner funding for other elements of the SGI SWAT.

## **SUMMARY**

In three short months of full SWAT operation, it is clear that the SGI is a model for science-based, landscape-scale habitat conservation, and that the SGI SWAT is a model for the future. The SGI SWAT 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. In closing, the SGI is currently one of the best examples of Strategic Habitat Conservation in North America, and the accomplishments described herein bode extremely well for the future!

## ATTACHMENT

### Objectives & Evolution of the SGI SWAT

*Launched in 2010, the USAD 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 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 the 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 a subsequent modification 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. As with all SWAT projects, the IWJV leveraged the 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 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 \$10.6 million effort as the SGI SWAT, even though only \$4 million arose from NRCS' FY 2011 SWAT appropriation.*

## ATTACHMENT

Gillian Brooks  
Belle Fourche NRCS Field Office  
1837 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
Belle Fourche, SD 57717

March 5, 2012

Dear \*\*\*\*\*:

I am writing to inform you about a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation program you are eligible for, based on location of land that you may lease or own.

NRCS's Sage-Grouse Initiative was launched in 2010 and looks to restore sage-grouse populations while simultaneously assisting producers in sustaining working ranches. A principle objective of the Sage-Grouse Initiative is to ensure that ranching remains the primary land use within sage-grouse range.

Through conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, producers within sage-grouse range in Butte, Harding, and Fall River counties may be eligible to receive technical and financial assistance. Please see the enclosed fact sheet for practices and payment rates available to you through NRCS's Sage-Grouse Initiative.

Program deadlines for 2012 have not been set; however, NRCS is currently taking applications and can begin planning with ranchers immediately in anticipation of 2012 contracts.

Feel free to call me at (605) 892-3368 ext. 3, or visit your local NRCS field office for more information.

Sincerely,

Gillian Brooks  
Range & Wildlife Conservationist  
Pheasants Forever, Inc.

*"The NRCS effort has won ranchers' support because the federal government is working alongside livestock owners rather than removing land from the grazing system."* – **MIKE DEERING**,  
SPOKESMAN FOR NATIONAL  
CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION



## Financial Assistance Available to ENHANCE RANGELAND SUSTAINABILITY on Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat in South Dakota

### Available Conservation Practices:

- ✚ Access Control
- ✚ Brush Management (invasive/noxious plants)
- ✚ Fence (construction, removal, retrofitting)
- ✚ Range Planting
- ✚ Restoration & Management of Declining Habitats
- ✚ Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- ✚ Obstruction Removal (removal and disposal of unwanted structures, debris, or other materials)
- ✚ Upland Wildlife Management
- ✚ Pipeline
- ✚ Pumping Plant
- ✚ Water Well
- ✚ Watering Facility

### Example Practice Payments (2012):

- ✚ Fence: \$0.47 – \$1.20/linear foot
- ✚ Obstruction Removal: \$120.00/hour
- ✚ Pipeline: \$1.65 – \$2.21/linear foot
- ✚ Upland Wildlife Management:
  - \$15.21/acre enrolled in a livestock exclusion/rest rotation grazing system
  - \$5.60/acre enrolled in a rotational grazing system

Landowners and operators in Butte, Harding, and Fall River counties within the range of Greater Sage-Grouse can apply for EQIP at their local NRCS office.

Interested landowners and their land must meet the eligibility requirements for EQIP.

Eligible applications will be ranked and will compete against other projects for funding. Higher preference will be given to projects located within six miles of active Greater Sage-Grouse leks.

### South Dakota NRCS Field Offices located within Greater Sage-Grouse habitat:

- Belle Fourche\* .....(605) 892-3368 ext.3
- Buffalo.....(605) 375-3218
- Hot Springs.....(605) 745-5716

\*NRCS Field Office responsible in overseeing SGI in South Dakota

Information provided for conservation planning purposes is strictly confidential.



**Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
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## ATTACHMENT

### Sage-Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team TRAINING SYLLABUS *March – June 2012*

#### Tools for Working on Rangeland

*The videos and webinars should be completed prior to the Pinedale, Wyoming, workshop scheduled for June 26 – 28. The workshop will include one day of looking at sage-grouse habitat, including stressors such as habitat fragmentation, as well as hearing from landowners and conservation partners. The following two days will be spent in the field collecting vegetation information (during the mornings) and analyzing and developing conservation recommendations in a classroom setting (during the afternoons).*

#### **Self-Paced Videos**

1. Rangeland Inventory & Monitoring Techniques (each video is 30 minutes or less); go to <http://jornada.nmsu.edu/monit-assess/training> => click on *Videos*
  - i. Introduction
  - ii. Ecological Site Identification
  - iii. Establish a Transect
  - iv. Photo Points
  - v. Line Point Intercept
  - vi. Canopy Gap Intercept
  - vii. Basal Gap Intercept
  - viii. Soil Stability
  - ix. Plant Production
  - x. Vegetation Structure Using Cover Pole
  
2. Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health; go to <http://jornada.nmsu.edu/monit-assess/training> => click on *Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health Training Videos*

#### **Webinars (phone numbers, times &/or dates TBA)**

- 1) Ecological Site Descriptions (Marcus Miller & Pat Shaver, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- 2) Management of Grazing for Fish & Wildlife Conservation
- 3) Water for Wildlife (Stu Tuttle, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service & Dan Taylor, Bat Conservation International) ~ Wednesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>
- 4) Assessing Restoration Potential of Meadows (Marcus Miller & Sandy Wyman, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service)

#### **Workshop ~ Pinedale, Wyoming**

*(Logistical details will be forthcoming; however, all travel & per diem costs will be covered.)*

- Monday, June 25<sup>th</sup> ~ Travel Day
- Tuesday, June 26<sup>th</sup> – Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup> ~ Training
- Evening of Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup> ~ Dinner with Partners & Funders
- Friday, June 29<sup>th</sup> ~ Meeting with Partners & Funders