

INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
JOINT VENTURE

conserving habitat through partnerships

May 2, 2017

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Ron & Thad:

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 January-March 2017. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Smith".

Dave Smith
IWJV Coordinator



Sage Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team

Quarterly Report: January 1 – March 31, 2017

Intermountain West Joint Venture
May 2, 2017



The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) continued to make significant gains this past quarter in each of its three focus areas: people and partnerships, science and technology, and communications and outreach. The following reports on these accomplishments from January – March 2017.

PEOPLE & PARTNERSHIPS

SGI would like to thank U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, partners, and ranchers for all of their great work and dedication to conserving sage grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem in 2016. The positive momentum for SGI's proactive, voluntary conservation model has continued to grow following the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service's (FWS) 2015 decision not to list sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. Thanks to the many partners, SGI is proving that this new paradigm of cooperative conservation on working lands is making a difference for ranchers, wildlife and rural economies.

SWAT Field Staff

The SWAT field staff continued to expand and accelerate SGI conservation delivery this quarter with support from local and state NRCS staff, funding partners, Pheasants Forever (PF) 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 PF's efforts to support SGI delivery this reporting period.

Conservation Implementation

PF and the IWJV maintain 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 FWS, during the annual sage grouse status review process, to ensure landowner and partner efforts are considered in Endangered Species Act 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:

- **2,527,395 acres** of rangeland improvement to increase overall rangeland health and resiliency through sustainable ranching to benefit sage grouse and other wildlife.
- **322,039 acres** of conifer removal in key nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering habitats. Removing encroaching conifers from sagebrush rangelands to increase water availability and eliminate tall structures in otherwise suitable habitat. As birds re-colonize former habitats, increased bird abundance is anticipated.
- **219 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 Update

SWAT field staff talent does not go unrecognized by other employers that work with us. As position vacancies arise, PF 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:

- Alisha Mosloff was selected for the PF position in Vernal, Utah (vacated by Leah Lewis, who is now a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sage Grouse Biologist in Vernal). Alisha came from Minnesota, where she received a BS in Natural Resources with an emphasis in Wildlife Management in 2015. During school and after graduation, Alisha was employed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources working with private landowners and conducting surveys for sharp-tailed grouse.
- Kyle Brown was selected for the PF position in Tremonton, Utah (vacated by Charles Sandford, who is now an FWS Sage Grouse Biologist in southeast Idaho). Kyle is a former BLM seasonal employee whose efforts were focused in Utah's Box Elder County. During his time with BLM, he worked on fuel treatment projects and pinyon-juniper removal projects; he also conducted sage grouse habitat evaluations.



Alisha Mosloff

- Montana has two positions that have changed or will be changing:
 - The Glasgow position (vacated by Luke McCarty, who is now a Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Assistant Project Manager) will be relocated to Roundup, and the hiring process is underway.
 - The Malta position was vacated by Kelsey Malloy in April, and the hiring process to refill her position began during the quarter. Kelsey has been hired as a Rangeland Ecologist with The Nature Conservancy in Malta.
- Due to partner priorities and adjustments in funding, Oregon will no longer have full-time SWAT positions. With these changes, PF has worked with NRCS field offices to develop a two-year, seasonal (summer) field technician program. During the summer of 2017 and 2018, PF will hire four positions located in Baker City, Hines, Lakeview, and Ontario. The technicians will conduct field work for conservation planners and enhance the ability of field staff to complete current SGI projects and work with new landowners.

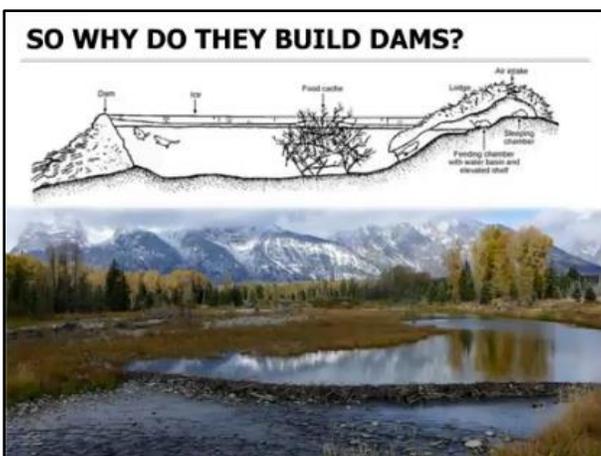


Kyle Brown

SWAT Field Staff Calls & Webinars

PF and the IWJV continue 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.

Several webinar trainings occurred this quarter, including the two highlighted below:



[Cheap and Cheerful Stream and Riparian Restoration | Beaver Dam Analogues As Low-Cost Tool](#): Stream and riparian area degradation is widespread across the Intermountain West, yet restoration resources are limited. Relatively simple and low-cost alternatives are needed to scale up to the scope of the problem. A renewed appreciation of the role of the once widespread beaver has revealed insights about how this ecosystem engineer affects stream hydrology, geomorphology, riparian vegetation and habitat for other species with its dam building activities. Drawing upon lessons learned about how

nature heals degraded systems, conservationists are increasingly seeking ways to recreate beneficial effects associated with beaver dam-building activities, where appropriate, to achieve a variety of stream and riparian recovery goals. Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) are one [low cost, 'cheap and cheerful' technique](#) used in beaver-assisted restoration to mimic natural beaver dams, promote beaver to work in particular areas, and accelerate recovery of incised channels. This webinar provided a brief overview of beaver ecology and hydrogeomorphic feedbacks, beaver-assisted restoration, BDA design and application, and NRCS planning considerations and resources. The March 22 webinar was highly successful and reached an estimated 750 participants, including from all 50 states, four Canadian provinces, Puerto Rico, Scotland, and Israel! Additionally, a great story was run in Pennsylvania's *Lancaster Farming* newspaper on the webinar – [To Aid Streams Simply, Think Like a Beaver](#) – further demonstrating the reach of the NRCS Conservation Webinars system and SGI's conservation message. The webinar was recorded and can be viewed [here](#).

[Rangeland Management Strategies and Tools: Promoting Resiliency and Addressing Invasive Species](#): The webinar, presented on January 12, is part of a series presented by the Western Governors' Association for the [National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative](#)—the Chairman's Initiative of Montana Governor Steve



Bullock. The initiative creates a mechanism for states and land managers to share best practices and policy options for forest and rangeland management. The webinar examined new developments for increased resilience to the threats posed to western rangelands by invasive species, drought, wildfire, and other stressors. Panelists discussed techniques that maintain high quality rangeland plant communities in areas where they persist and restore them in areas where they have declined. The panel was moderated by Jeremy Maestas, NRCS West National Technology Support Center Sagebrush Ecosystem Specialist. Panelists included: Chad Boyd, USDA Agricultural Research Service Rangeland Ecologist; Brian Mealar, University of Wyoming Sheridan Research and Extension Center Director;

and Jay Kerby, The Nature Conservancy's Southeast Oregon Project Manager. The webinar was recorded and can be viewed [here](#).

Annual SGI SWAT Workshop – June 13-15, 2017 in Gunnison, Colorado

Planning for the annual SGI SWAT workshop in Gunnison, Colorado, is coming along nicely, and we are expecting another great turnout. The draft agenda has been created, and invitations will be sent out in early April to more than 180 partners. This year's workshop is set to be another great event, with Bill Zeedyk giving a presentation on his mesic work in the Gunnison Basin, as well as providing hands on training for SWAT and NRCS staff.

SCIENCE & TECHNICAL TRANSFER

The first quarter of 2017 included the release of 15 research papers, published in a special issue of the Society for Range Management's (SRM) scientific journal, *Rangeland Ecology & Management* (REM). In addition, a full-day symposium where the researchers presented on their published work was held, as part of SRM's 2017 Annual Meeting in January. Several SGI [Science to Solutions](#) articles were produced in conjunction with the papers (both this quarter and in late 2016).

[Rangeland Science Journal Publishes Special Issue on Reducing Woodland Expansion](#):

The January 2017 REM issue was dedicated to research on woodland expansion in the West's sagebrush and grassland ecosystems. Fifteen new research papers, all available for free to the public (see links below), describe the impacts of the woody invasion of western rangelands. The research also evaluates habitat restoration using grouse as a focal species – the Greater Sage-grouse in sagebrush country and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken in the southern Great Plains. For NRCS, removing these encroaching woody plants has long been a conservation priority through SGI and the [Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative](#). SGI has partnered with hundreds of ranchers and across fences on public lands to remove 457,000 acres of conifer since 2010, restoring rangelands and core habitat for sage grouse.

Rangeland Ecology & Management, Volume 70, Issue 1 | Woody invasion of western rangelands: Using grouse as focal species for ecosystem restoration



Introduction and Summary

- 1) [Special Issue: Targeted Woodland Removal to Recover At-Risk Grouse and Their Sagebrush-Steppe and Prairie Ecosystems](#) by Richard F. Miller, David E. Naugle, Jeremy D. Maestas, Christian A. Hagen, Galon Hall

Woodland Expansion Threat

- 2) [A Hierarchical Perspective to Woody Plant Encroachment for Conservation of Prairie-Chickens](#) by Samuel D. Fuhlendorf, Torre J. Hovick, R. Dwayne Elmore, Ashley M. Tanner, David M. Engle, Craig A. Davis
- 3) [Mapping Tree Canopy Cover in Support of Proactive Prairie Grouse Conservation in Western North America](#) by Michael J. Falkowski, Jeffrey S. Evans, David E. Naugle, Christian A. Hagen, Scott A. Carleton, Jeremy D. Maestas, Azad Henareh Khalyani, Aaron J. Poznanovic, Andrew J. Lawrence

Vegetation Response

- 4) [Sage Grouse Groceries: Forb Response to Piñon-Juniper Treatments](#) by Jonathan D. Bates, Kirk W. Davies, April Hulet, Richard F. Miller, Bruce Roundy

Ecosystem Water Availability

- 5) [Ecosystem Water Availability in Juniper versus Sagebrush Snow-Dominated Rangelands](#) by Patrick R. Kormos, Danny Marks, Frederick B. Pierson, C. Jason Williams, Stuart P. Hardegee, Scott Havens, Andrew Hedrick, Jonathan D. Bates, Tony J. Svejcar

Human Dimensions and Restoration Paradigms

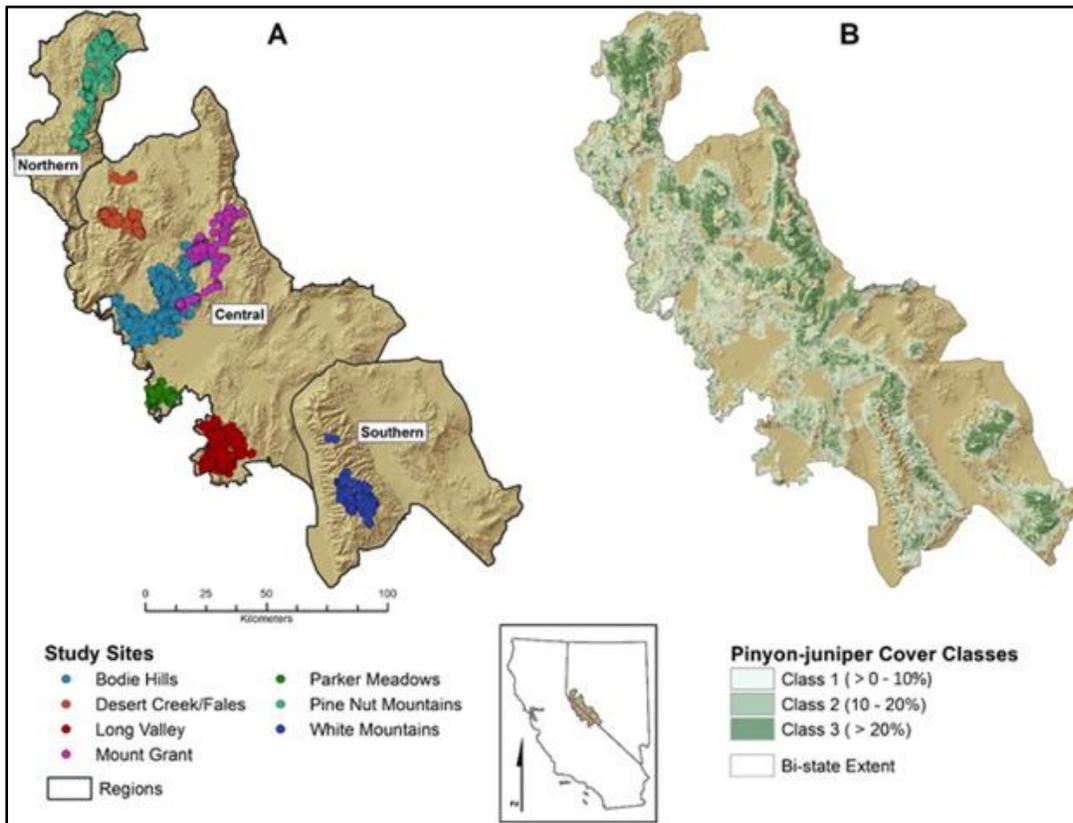
- 6) [Conserving the Greater Sage-Grouse: A Social-Ecological Systems Case Study from the California-Nevada Region](#) by Alison L. Duvall, Alexander L. Metcalf, Peter S. Coates
- 7) [The Sage-Grouse Habitat Mortgage: Effective Conifer Management in Space and Time](#) by Chad S. Boyd, Jay D. Kerby, Tony J. Svejcar, Jon D. Bates, Dustin D. Johnson, Kirk W. Davies

Sagebrush Songbird Response

- 8) [Bird Responses to Removal of Western Juniper in Sagebrush-Steppe](#) by Aaron L. Holmes, Jeremy D. Maestas, David E. Naugle
- 9) [Extending Conifer Removal and Landscape Protection Strategies from Sage-Grouse to Songbirds, a Range-Wide Assessment](#) by J. Patrick Donnelly, Jason D. Tack, Kevin E. Doherty, David E. Naugle, Brady W. Allred, Victoria J. Dreitz

Sage Grouse Response

- 10) Pinyon and Juniper Encroachment into Sagebrush Ecosystems Impacts Distribution and Survival of Greater Sage-Grouse by Peter S. Coates, Brian G. Prochazka, Mark A. Ricca, K. Ben Gustafson, Pilar Ziegler, Michael L. Casazza



Left: Greater sage grouse telemetry data across study subregions separated by A, north, central, and southern region, and B, mapped pinyon-juniper classes (1, 2, and 3) at the 1-m resolution within the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment during 2003–2005 and 2011–2013.

- 11) Encounters with Pinyon-Juniper Influence Riskier Movements in Greater Sage-Grouse Across the Great Basin by Brian G. Prochazka, Peter S. Coates, Mark A. Ricca, Michael L. Casazza, K. Benjamin Gustafson, Josh M. Hull
- 12) Short-Term Response of Sage-Grouse Nesting to Conifer Removal in the Northern Great Basin by John P. Severson, Christian A. Hagen, Jeremy D. Maestas, David E. Naugle, J. Todd Forbes, Kerry P. Reese
- 13) Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Selection Drives Reproductive Fitness Under a Conifer Removal Strategy by Charles P. Sandford, Michel T. Kohl, Terry A. Messmer, David K. Dahlgren, Avery Cook, Brian R. Wing
- ### Lesser Prairie-Chicken Response
- 14) Lesser Prairie-Chicken Avoidance of Trees in a Grassland Landscape by Joseph M. Lautenbach, Reid T. Plumb, Samantha G. Robinson, Christian A. Hagen, David A. Haukos, James C. Pitman
- 15) Impacts of Mesquite Distribution on Seasonal Space Use of Lesser Prairie-Chickens by Matthew A. Boggie, Cody R. Strong, Daniel Lusk, Scott A. Carleton, William R. Gould, Randy L. Howard, Clay Nichols, Michael Falkowski, Christian Hagen

[Free Live-Broadcast Symposium: Impacts of Woodland Expansion at the Society for Range Management](#)

Conference: The SRM's annual conference featured a full-day symposium on reducing woodland expansion in the West, based on the journal's recently-published research studies. Research findings were presented on January 31 at the conference and live-streamed for free on the SGI website. Hosted by Oregon State University's Rick Miller, a 30+ year veteran of woodland expansion science topics, the full-day symposium included: new targeting tools for planning conifer removal projects, rapid sage grouse recolonization into newly available habitat following conifer removal, enhanced grouse nesting and brood survival rates following cuttings, songbird benefits from

conifer removal, and higher water retention on ranches without trees. Thanks to the [BLM](#), the public was able to watch the presentations on the SGI website and [access archived presentations for on-demand replays](#). A total of 259 people registered for the live broadcast, tripling the average in-person audience. Participants represented 22 states, Washington, DC, and Canada; 90 different organizations and landowners were represented.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

SGI published 24 different stories from January to March that shared news of science, events, and success stories across the range. These stories included two fact sheets on SGI *Featured Friends*, one on the [Harney County Soil & Water Conservation District](#) (released January 3) and one highlighting the [Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee](#) (released March 21).

SGI also released two new articles in the popular *Science to Solutions* series: [Conifer Removal Boosts Sage Grouse Success](#) (January 26), and [Sage Grouse Need Intact Landscapes for Long-Distance Movement](#) (March 28).

More featured publications last quarter included a [rancher success story](#) on K.D. Leander, who left a legacy of conservation in Washington State, and an "Ask An Expert" interview with Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Tom Christiansen, entitled, [What Do Sage Grouse Do All Winter?](#) In addition, SGI helped publicize four webinars over SGI communications outlets, including replays.

The screenshot shows a webpage layout for an article. At the top, it says "Science to Solutions" and "Sage Grouse Initiative". The main title is "Sage Grouse Need Intact Landscapes For Long-Distance Movement". Below the title is a sub-headline: "In Brief: Two new studies revealed unknown long-distance dispersal and migration movements in sage grouse that offer fresh insights for conservation. Using DNA from feathers dropped at leks, scientists discovered that some grouse (about 1% of populations) travel long distances to explore breeding areas up to 120 miles away—movements that can potentially boost populations and temper inbreeding. A separate satellite-telemetry study of sage grouse that migrate between Saskatchewan and Montana found that this population migrates annually up to 150 miles round-trip between seasonal ranges. During migration, grouse use pathways through intact habitat and rest and refuel at stopover sites. Taken together, these findings underscore the need to conserve intact sagebrush habitats across large landscapes on both public and private lands to sustain sage grouse movement pathways, their populations, and genetic diversity." Below this is another section titled "DNA and Satellites Reveal Unexpected Journeys" with a small image of a grouse. The article text continues: "Numerous research initiatives have shed new light on animal behavior and ecology, as well as supplemental conservation knowledge about a species. Two recent studies took a fresh look at movements of sage grouse—had that intense familiarity to help us breed in spring and to quickly establish a knowledge network about distances as necessary between seasonal ranges. The first study examined dispersal movements of sage grouse between breeding sites, finding that about 1% of a population, less a third in other studies that say as home birds, they will disperse surprisingly long distances in new life sites. The second study looked at the seasonal movement patterns of a population that migrates much farther than any other species known, making a 150-mile roundtrip journey between breeding areas in Canada and winter range in the US." At the bottom, it says "Using feather DNA and satellite telemetry, scientists revealed surprising long-distance movements by greater sage-grouse. Photo by John C. Colborn." and "Sage Grouse Initiative - www.sagegrouseinitiative.com".



Photo by Stan Harter

Last quarter, the most popular posts (see Top Website Pages & Posts below) were those related to the release of the conifer special issue of *Rangeland Ecology & Management* and associated live-streamed symposium on January 31. Both of these posts **received four times more traffic** than an average SGI post, partly due to the partnership outreach conducted through IWJV, SRM, and BLM outlets. The success of these science posts shows that investing in the special issue and live broadcast were effective tools for growing the breadth of SGI's audience.

Other popular communications posts were on "feel good" topics like lekking season or photos of sagebrush-dependent wildlife, like the pygmy rabbit (which generated the most engagement SGI has ever had on Twitter) or mule deer. Posts like these helped SGI gain 173 new followers on Facebook and 182 new followers on Twitter. The E-News distribution list now goes out to 4,140 people around the globe.

Visitors to SGI's website stayed longer than the previous quarter, indicating people like what they're seeing and staying to read. From January through March, there were 24,078 unique visitors and a total of 48,837 page views, **up by 15%** from the previous quarter.

On [the SGI Interactive Web App](#), there were 2,299 users and 7,621 total page views—45% of the traffic was returning visitors, showing that people like the product and want to keep using it. The majority of users (63%) came from the main SGI website, while the rest found the Web App through an internet search or external website.

TOP WEBSITE PAGES & POSTS:

- 1) Free Live-Broadcast Symposium: Impacts of Woodland Expansion: 2,030
- 2) Rangeland Science Journal Publishes Special Issue On Reducing Woodland Expansion: 1,054
- 3) 2014 Sage Grouse Lek Viewing Tours & Places to See the Wondrous Dance: 764
- 4) Events & Webinars: 710
- 5) What Do Sage Grouse Do All Winter? 662
- 6) Brave Sage Grouse Strike Out Solo Over Long Distances: 618
- 7) Get Involved: 546
- 8) About: 455
- 9) Science & Policy: 387
- 10) How To Watch The Best Mating Dance In The West: 349 (published March 29; stats are from only two days of traffic!)



TOP FACEBOOK POSTS:

- 1) **February 19** (97 likes & 13 shares): Inmates are volunteering to grow sagebrush seedlings in 11 prisons across 6 states to restore the range. Now that's a win-win! <http://buff.ly/2aOFYYX>.
- 2) **March 23** (92 likes & 19 shares): Learn more about how a male gets lekky – ahem, lucky – with the ladies from National Audubon Society.
- 3) **January 21** (21,598 people reached): Sagebrush leaves provide food for wildlife when other plants are covered in snow: <http://buff.ly/2i6fks9>. Photo of mule deer Tom Koerner, USFWS.

TOP TWITTER TWEETS:

- 1) **February 12** (24 likes & 14 retweets): Over 7,000 collected sage grouse feathers show how sage grouse disperse widely across the landscape: bit.ly/2kNeP9j [#science](#).
- 2) **January 10** (17 likes & 8 retweets): Kudos to [@NRCS_MT](#) for helping a landowner remove conifers on 200 acres to restore prime [#sagegrouse](#) mating habitat! bit.ly/2jmGID2 pic.twitter.com/XQYHFhvpxB.
- 3) **February 25** (100 likes & 53 retweets – HIGHEST EVER!): Weighing just one pound, the pygmy rabbit could fit in the palm of your hand. Its diet is 99% sagebrush. bit.ly/2pkboZl.



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.* No new Indian Tribes, Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, or Beginning Producers were contacted by the SWAT field capacity staff 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 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 9,036.25 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-three and three-quarters (33.75) FTEs (24.0 Field Delivery Capacity Partner Position FTEs, 1.0 Rangeland Inventory Support FTE, 1.0 SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator FTE, 0.75 SGI Communications Coordinator 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 2,527,395 acres of grazing systems; 322,039 acres of conifer removal; 1,157,361 feet (219 miles) of fence marking or removal; 8,822 acres of wetland restoration; 27,831 acres of rangeland seeding; and 30,408 acres of conservation easements.
- f) *NRCS program dollars obligated in agreements in the projects area by program.* A total of \$765,829 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 \$64,875,101!***
- g) *Other partner or resource contributions from other agencies or organizations which help implement provisions of the agreements.* We have secured or leveraged a total of \$7.4 million in partner contributions to date.

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 eight of the SWAT 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.