



The Need

Once numbering 16 million before settlement, the greater sage-grouse population has dwindled to as few as 200,000 birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will decide in 2015 whether to list the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). FWS has found that fragmenting the vast rangelands into smaller pieces is the main threat facing the species. A decision to list the sage-grouse would have far-reaching effects on ranching, energy production and other industries in the West.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) launched the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) in 2010 to promote sustainable ranching which results in wildlife conservation. The goal is to conserve and restore the bird's strongholds on 56 million acres across 11 western states. SGI is taking bold steps to conserve the bird and avert an ESA listing, while meeting the nation's food and energy needs.

Goals

SGI seeks to support sustainable ranching and conserve healthy sage-grouse populations by addressing the threats common to both. It is a highly targeted, science-based approach to increase sage-grouse population and improve their habitat by helping ranchers improve and conserve their lands.

SGI-sponsored studies target implementation and quantify biological outcomes; rigorous science guides SGI work.

Programs

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
- Grassland Reserve Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program

Results/Outcomes

Over 700 ranchers have enrolled 2.5 million acres to benefit sage-grouse. NRCS has invested \$145 million while partners matched \$70 million to assist ranchers to implement critical conservation measures. As a result:

- Reduction in anticipated bird losses by two-thirds by embedding conservation easements inside Wyoming's core areas.
- Increase of sage-grouse numbers by 8 to 10 percent on 2.1 million acres when improved

grazing systems enhance habitat.

- Removal of 200,000 acres of invasive conifer in core habitats, tripling the chance of maintaining sage-grouse populations.
- Prevention of 2,600 sage-grouse fence collisions annually by marking or moving 500 miles of "high-risk" fence. This action reduced fence strikes by 83 percent.

From Nevada

"I was headed out in the field, and the sage-grouse took off and headed right for that fence, but sure enough, at the last minute, they went up and over those markers!"

Don Phillips, Rancher



Don and Sheila Phillips
Ely, Nevada



Feature Story
Idaho Producers
Unite to Benefit
Sage-grouse Habitat

The strong partnership among landowners, agencies and others participating in USDA's SGI has resulted in better protection for the best remaining sage-grouse habitat in Idaho. Southeast of Sun Valley, Idaho, the 2.3 million acres of wild country encompassing the legendary Pioneer Mountain Range stretches to Arco and includes 160,000 acres of working farms and ranches that link public lands to the

north and south. Ranchers in this area voluntarily placed portions of their properties in conservation easements to protect them from potential development that could signal an end to viable ranching. With SGI support and the efforts of many partners, ranchers have entered 33,000 acres into conservation easements.

Ray Baird is one of the ranchers who signed up for SGI. His ranch lies in the heart of the Pioneer Mountain Range. When he enrolled more than 1,200 acres of his ranch in an easement, he contributed a large piece of

property that connects other private and federal lands.

"This easement is exactly what we are trying to do all these years; it guarantees there will be hunting and grazing," Baird said. "It guarantees it is going to stay in the family."

Terry Clark, another rancher participating in SGI, said the following about his easement: "Our ranch has been in the family for more than a hundred years. We'd like to keep it together and not see it developed."

SGI leverages Farm Bill funds with partner matches to

help pay for conservation easements. In the Pioneer Mountains, funds came from The Nature Conservancy of Idaho, the Blaine County Land, Water and Wildlife Program, and other sources.

The initiative also supports science that ensures the best practices are applied in locations where birds are concentrated and recovery efforts will have the greatest impact. The Pioneer Mountains is an example of one of those prime locations. Keeping the land intact is important for the ecosystem and the wildlife it supports.

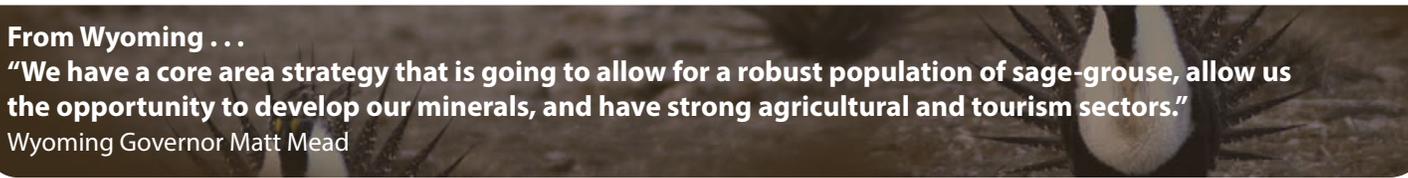
Fiscal Year 2012 Sage-Grouse Initiative
NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts/Agreements

State	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)			Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)			Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)		
	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Contract Acres	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Contract Acres	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Contract Acres
California	14	\$1,497,700	93,473	3	\$90,360	1,026			
Colorado	5	\$368,152	8,452				6	\$2,886,250	12,563
Idaho	24	\$2,787,103	89,031						
Montana	11	\$2,474,809	169,261	10	\$256,256	6,080			
Nevada	15	\$2,067,160	328,964	6	\$97,789	4,347	1	\$5,001,790	4,064
North Dakota	11	\$364,424	24,740	4	\$171,050	12,300			
Oregon	28	\$3,307,965	44,854	10	\$1,041,530	8,315			
South Dakota	6	\$835,231	31,840	11	\$1,090,400	45,198			
Utah	10	\$1,139,010	31,002						
Washington	5	\$537,479	8,299	7	\$748,622	12,482			
Wyoming	29	\$4,553,673	355,002	11	\$845,207	37,314	7	\$5,731,350	14,065
Totals	158	\$19,932,706	1,184,918	62	\$4,341,214	127,062	14	\$13,619,390	30,692

From Wyoming . . .

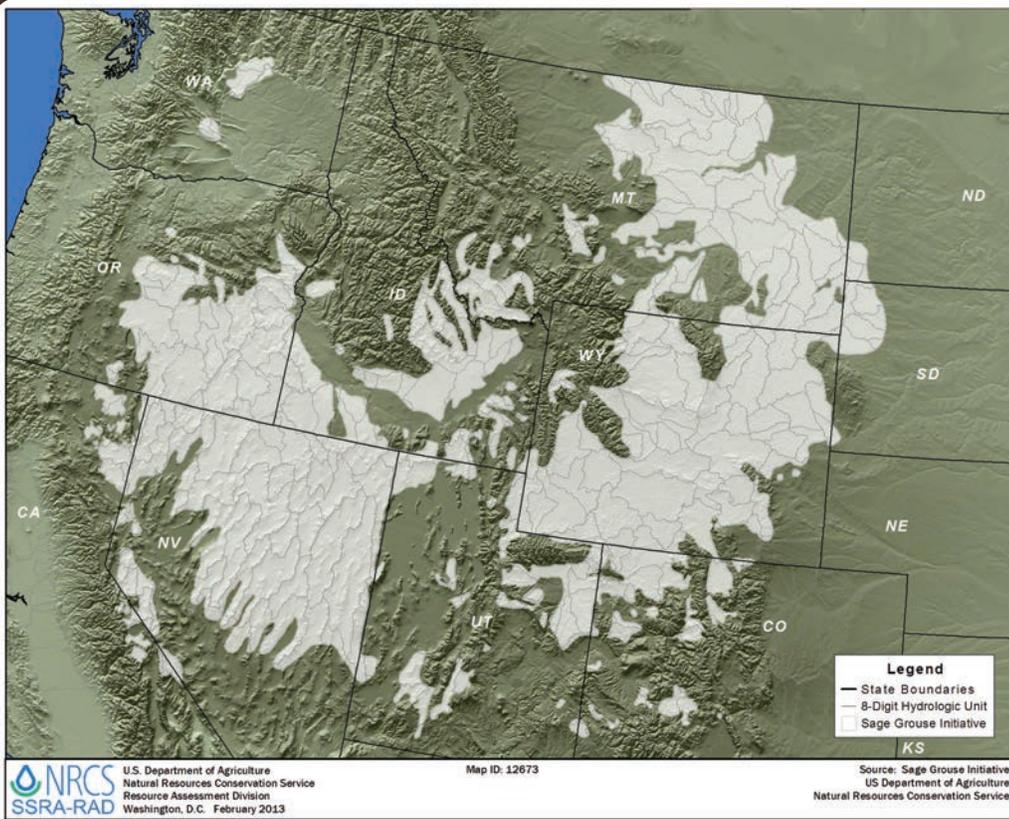
"We have a core area strategy that is going to allow for a robust population of sage-grouse, allow us the opportunity to develop our minerals, and have strong agricultural and tourism sectors."

Wyoming Governor Matt Mead



From Washington
"The biggest bunch I ever saw was two years ago. I saw 35 or 40 of them. I couldn't believe it. If we can keep the sage grouse numbers going up, that's good."

Kay D. Leander, Douglas County Ranch Owner



**Fiscal Year 2012 Sage-Grouse Initiative
 NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts/Agreements**

State	Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)			Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)		
	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Contract Acres	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations	Contract Acres
California						
Colorado	1	\$557,325	1,200			
Idaho	13	\$5,393,800	14,038			
Montana	1	\$1,309,845	3,809			
Nevada	1	\$2,218,565	741	2	\$3,980,442	6,136
North Dakota						
Oregon						
South Dakota						
Utah						
Washington						
Wyoming	1	\$3,100,338	8,402			
Totals	17	\$12,579,873	28,190	2	\$3,980,442	6,136



Statistical source: Protracts for new enrollment, October 4, 2012. Easement sourcing information: National Easement Staging Tool (NEST) for enrollments as of 10/18/2012. Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI) for financial obligations as of 9/30/2012.

Helping People
 Help the Land



Results

In California and Nevada

The bi-state sub-population of sage-grouse is unique to an area of California and Nevada where a comprehensive action plan is being implemented to address the full range of threats impacting the population. NRCS invested \$500,000 to help fund four new partnership positions to increase the capacity to deliver conservation on the ground. The investments are paying dividends by accelerating sage-grouse conservation efforts. NRCS has now finalized contracts worth \$14.8 million for bi-state sage-grouse projects, primarily funding conservation easements to retain large intact working ranches and the habitat these lands provide for the sage-grouse populations.

Oregon

In the Warner Mountains of southeastern Oregon, a diverse partnership has rallied to take back former sagebrush-steppe lands invaded by junipers after more than a century of fire suppression. These junipers make the habitat unsuitable for sage-grouse and reduce the productivity of the rangeland for grazing. NRCS is helping ranchers remove juniper across 7,000 acres of private lands that are critical to the long-term health of sustainable ranching and one of the highest density sage grouse populations in the West. Juniper removal on private land ties in well with efforts by the Bureau of Land Management, bringing the total to 32,000 acres of juniper being cut across private and public lands. Evidence is showing that once the invading trees are removed, sage-grouse return and flourish in treeless shrub lands with plentiful sagebrush and a mix of native wildflowers and grasses.

Reducing sage-grouse losses through conservation easements in core areas.

Reducing bird collisions by marking high-risk fence.

Increasing sage-grouse numbers by installing grazing systems to provide additional cover.

Increasing sage-grouse populations by removing invasive conifers in core habitats.

Sage-Grouse Initiative



For more information, visit: <http://go.usa.gov/476z>

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

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