WY NRCS ACTIVITIES RELATED TO SAGE GROUSE

BRIAN JENSEN
Who is NRCS?

Born in Response to a National Tragedy

11,000 employees, 92% in county/field offices

Staff trained in soils, agronomy, range, engineering, biology

Private lands focus

Public land partnerships

Non-regulatory approach
NRCS Mission: Helping People Help the Land

Vision: Productive, sustainable agriculture in balance with a high quality environment
NRCS helps private landowners make good conservation decisions
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Keeping SG off the LIST
Sage Grouse Initiative

- Remove threats to sage-grouse and improve sustainability of working ranches
- Implement enough of the right practices in the right places to benefit populations
- Assess effectiveness, quantify benefits, adapt program delivery, and tell the story
Program Timeline

- 2008: EO
- 2009: Conference Report
- 2010: SWAT Trng
- 2011: Practice revisions, 24 SWAT positions
- 2012: SWAT Trng
- 2013: FWS Certainty, $60 m nationally

- 2008: FWS Listing, $20.9m nationally
- 2009: EO Revised
- 2010: SGI launched, NRCS Trng
- 2011: $92.1m nationally
- 2012: SWAT Trng
- 2013: $60 m nationally

Grazing Influence, Objective Development, and Management in Wyoming’s Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

- With Emphasis on Nesting and Early Bird Nesting

Wendy Coney, Dawn Eakins, Rob Bock, Scott Christiansen, Vicki Herema, Matt Holbrook, Benjamin Bushnell, Mike Smith, Justin Williams
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Traditional Model</strong></th>
<th><strong>SGI Model</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency-specific</td>
<td>Collaborative, Partnership-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic</td>
<td>Strategic, Targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning-averse</td>
<td>Science-based and Planning-intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management actions are based on achieving outputs</td>
<td>Management actions are based on achieving environmental outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and research are dispensable</td>
<td>Monitoring and research are indispensable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SGI is not a new ‘program’ but rather strategic focusing of existing programs
NRCS Programs

**Technical Assistance Program**
- Conservation planning assistance only

**Financial Assistance Programs**
- EQIP, WHIP (EQIP)
- Cost-share for practice implementation
- Typically 3-5 year contracts

**Easement Programs**
- FRPP, GRP, WRP (ACEP)
- Permanent easements, long-term rental agreements

**Science Support**
- CEAP, CIG, SWAT
Compatible Land Use?

- **Good for both**
  - Large, intact landscapes
  - Plant Diversity
  - Perennial grasses and forbs
  - Invasive species management
  - Healthy springs/seeps
  - Well designed grazing plan

- **Bad for both**
  - Subdivisions
  - Overgrazing
  - Human development that fragments landscapes.
  - Sod formers
  - Tanks without escape ramps
  - Conifer Encroachment

**Shared Vision**

*Wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching*
Habitat Improvement Programs - EQIP and WHIP (EQIP)
Implementation through SGI

- Sagebrush Removal
- Ag Conversion
- Fire
- Conifer Encroachment
- Weeds/Annual Grasses
- Energy (Oil, Gas, Wind)
- Mining
- Range Management Structures
- Fences
- Infrastructure (non-range)
- Grazing
- Free-Roaming Equids
- Recreation
- Urbanization/Exurban Development

State-based strategies guide implementation
ESA Predictability

• NRCS ‘conferenced’ with USFWS and conditioned 40 practices to ensure benefits to sage-grouse

• Provides predictability to landowners
Training
Range-wide Accomplishments
Improved grazing systems on 2+ million acres

Removed encroached conifers on 200,000 acres

Helped secure conservation easements on 240,000+ acres

Marked or moved 500+ miles of ‘high risk’ fence

>700 ranchers enrolled, $145M invested, $70M match

In 2013 another 198 new ranchers & $19M invested

In 2014 another $31M is allocated to SGI
Pie chart size = SGI investment

93%

conifer  grazing  easements
WY Accomplishments
2010 Initiative Accomplishments

- 72 Applications Total
- 23 Contracts funded (20 EQIP, 3 WHIP)
- Common practices - Grazing management for nesting habitat improvement, Water developments and conversion to solar, Fencing, Fence marking.
2011 Initiative Accomplishments

- 43 Applications Total
- 21 Contracts Funded (16 EQIP, 4 WHIP)
- Similar practices as 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Unit</th>
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<tr>
<td>EQIP</td>
<td>Brush Management</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>ac</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Area Planting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fence</td>
<td>209,542.6</td>
<td>ft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obstruction Removal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pipeline</td>
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<td>Pumping Plant</td>
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<td>Spring Development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upland Wildlife Habitat Management</td>
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<td>Water Well</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watering Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Stabilization Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herbaceous Weed Control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Range Planting</td>
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<td>ac</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Road / Trail / Landing Closure and Treatment</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHIP</td>
<td>Fence</td>
<td>31,200</td>
<td>ft</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Upland Wildlife Habitat Management</td>
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</table>
2012 Initiative Accomplishments

- 54 Applications Total
- 35 Contracts Funded (24 EQIP, 11 WHIP)
- Similar practices as 2010 and 2011
2013
- 41 applications total
- 17 funded for $1.8 million on 137K acres
Screening and Ranking

- Core Areas
- Breeding Bird Density
- Current Condition
- % of Threats Addressed
- % of operation enrolled
- Practices
# SGI Challenges

## Ownership by Sage Grouse Core Areas and Local Working Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership Key</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Acres</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banbhead</td>
<td>2,500</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DOE</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish &amp; Wildlife</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest Service</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Geoslands</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Park Service</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wind-Sweetwater River Basin LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1,230,593.
- **Private**: 32,223.
- **State**: 235,596.
- **Federal**: 46.
- **Bureau of Land Management**: 1,266,234.
- **Forest Service**: 46.

**Lower Snake River Basin LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 16,400.
- **Private**: 490,975.
- **State**: 12,846.
- **Federal**: 300.
- **Bureau of Land Management**: 1,133,324.
- **Forest Service**: 46.

**Mesquite Basin LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 19.5.
- **Private**: 8,855.

**South Central LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 16,400.
- **Private**: 81,716.
- **State**: 202,235.
- **Federal**: 54.
- **Bureau of Land Management**: 1,834,986.
- **Forest Service**: 46.

**Northeast LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 19.5.
- **Private**: 8,855.

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**Upper Snake River Basin LGW**
- **Surface Owner**: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1,230,593.
- **Private**: 32,223.
- **State**: 235,596.
- **Federal**: 46.
- **Bureau of Land Management**: 1,266,234.
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Easement Programs-
FRPP, GRP, WRP (ACEP)
2010

- $14m for FRPP- not directed towards SG. 21 contracts.
- $4.1m for GRP- ~1/2 for SG. 4 easements, 5 rentals.
2011

- $52.2m for FRPP, $40m for SG - 36 of 39 projects in SG core or current
- $10.4m for GRP- 11 projects all in SG core or current. 6 rentals, 5 easements.
2012

- FRPP- $15.6m, 12 SG core, 4 non SG
- GRP- $4.4m, all SG; 6 rentals, 1 easement
2013

- WRP/GRP not authorized under CR
- $5.5 million in FRPP for prior year contracts on 18K acres
Easements - Existing and Pending
SWAT- Strategic Watershed Action Team

- 5 positions in WY: Lander, Pinedale, Powell, Buffalo, and Saratoga
SGI SWAT: Paying Partners
Supporting **Science** to Target Delivery and Measure Outcomes

**Figure 4.** Sage-grouse population response to feature density regression relationship (solid line) with 95% CI (dotted lines).

\[ y = e^{-0.5 \times \text{feature density}} \]

- Hellnor (2005)
- Taylor (2012)
- This study

**Fence Collision Risk**

**Legend**
- **Collision_Risk Value**
  - High
  - Low
Telling the Story

Follow the partnership: www.sagegrouseinitiative.com
2014 and Beyond

- New Farm Bill
  - Programs combined - overall funding down ~30%
  - New easement program - no allocation
- New Chief for NRCS in 2013
- Initiatives the new normal?
  - SGI only initiative to receive additional funding in 2014 - $50 million
  - SWAT funded through 2016.
- WY SGI - $6.5 million
- Listing decision Impacts?
QUESTIONS?
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brian.m.jensen@wy.usda.gov