

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: USDA Sage Grouse Initiative Science Advisor

Type of Project: Technical Assistance

Project Discipline: Natural

Funding Agency: NRCS

Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Montana

Effective Dates: 4/19/2010 - 6/30/2015

Funding Amount: \$1,027,577 [FY12: \$640,577; FY11: \$220,000; FY10: \$167,000]

Investigators and Agency Representative:

Agency Contact: Danielle Flynn, USDA, NRCS, 400 Independence Ave, Room 6154-S, Washington, D.C., 20013; Phone: 202-690-0856; danielle.flynn@wdc.usda.gov

Investigator: Dave Naugle, Wildlife Biology Program, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812; 406-243-5364; david.naugle@umontana.edu

Project Abstract: The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) uses dedicated Farm Bill conservation program funds delivered at appropriately large scales to alleviate threats that otherwise fragment sage-grouse habitats and sustainable agricultural grazing lands. The NRC remains firmly committed to achieving landscape scale conservation benefitting sagegrouse populations and sustainable rangelands in the West. To date, NRCS has enrolled 462 ranchers encompassing 1.7 million acres, invested over \$115 million, and generated nearly \$60 million in partner match to achieve lasting conservation.

This agreement is to retain the services of SGI Science Advisor David Naugle to continue to guide and direct outcome-based assessments to measure the biological response of populations to conservation practices, to assess effectiveness, and to adaptively improve program delivery. Assessments reflect the scales at which sagegrouse populations use habitat resources year-round and transcend that of an individual ranch to encompass multiple and nearby enrolled properties.

New SGI science reaffirms our approach but ongoing studies take time to complete because sage grouse is a long-lived species that responds slowly but positively to implemented conservation measures. Moreover, conceiving of new evaluations and how they fit into the overall initiative is an ongoing process required for success. We envision the continuation and implementation of new studies each lasting 7-10 years to assess the biological responses of sage-grouse to management within the aforementioned hierarchy. Primary conservation practices implemented include conservation easements to alleviate sod busting and subdivision threats, grazing systems to increase hiding cover for birds, conifer removal to eliminate tall structures from otherwise suitable habitats, and fence marking and removal to reduce collisions near leks.

Outcomes with completion dates: June 30, 2015

Keywords: science advisor, **Sage-Grouse Initiative**, NRCS, University of Montana