

SAGE-GROUSE INITIATIVE

More Partners, Field Staff and Conservation

WHAT MAKES THE SAGE-GROUSE INITIATIVE (SGI) ONE OF THE LARGEST CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES IN THE WEST?

Win-Win Conservation

The SGI works to keep the greater sage-grouse off the endangered species list and help ranchers improve their lands.

Sage-Grouse Initiative Facts

- Launched in 2010 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Conserves sage-grouse and other wildlife through sustainable ranching
- Uses science to achieve the greatest biological benefits



A male sage-grouse struts on a lek – the name for traditional breeding grounds, where dozens of males dance at sunrise to attract females.

Photo: Conservation Media

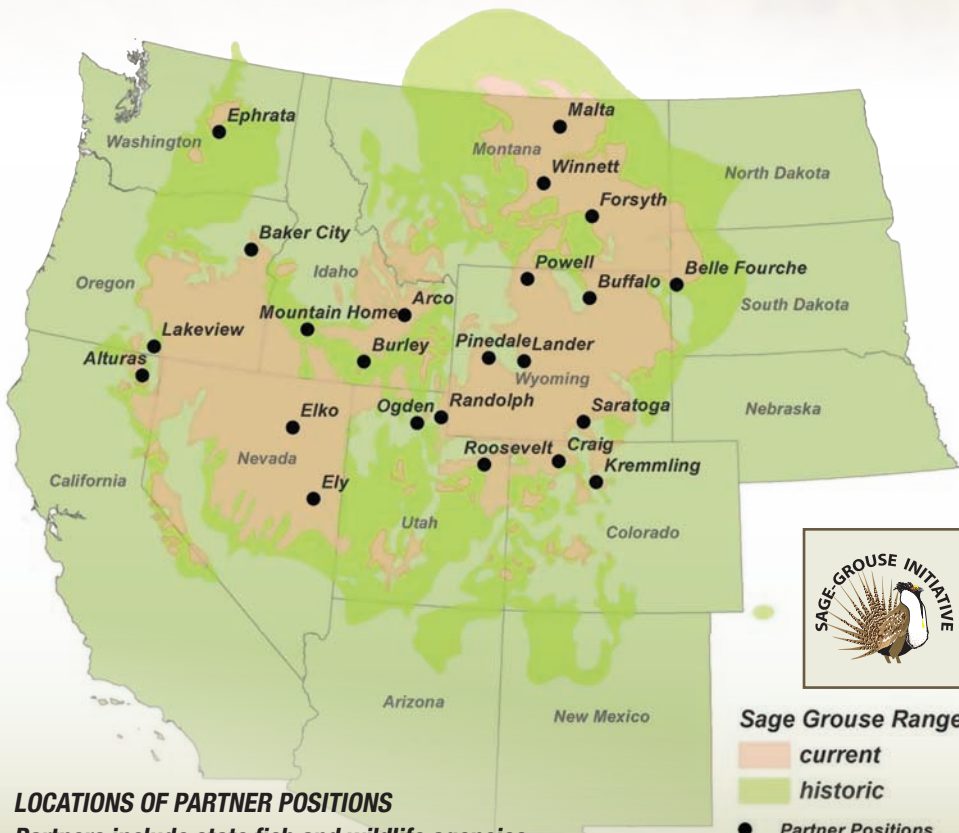
TEAMING UP FOR SUCCESS

In 2011, the NRCS teamed up with the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) and more than 30 partners to expand the field delivery, science, and communications capacity for SGI over the next three years. NRCS and partners contributed \$10.6 million.

The partnership, known as the SGI Strategic Watershed Action Team, resulted in the hiring of 23 new range conservationists and wildlife biologists, plus a cultural resources specialist. The NRCS provides day-to-day direction and field office space.

PARTNER POSITIONS ACCELERATE CONSERVATION

From Ephrata, Washington, to Belle Fourche, South Dakota, the locations for the partner positions are strategically chosen. There, new field staff can accelerate Farm Bill conservation programs in areas of high sage-grouse abundance. They will help ranchers develop custom plans with practical conservation measures and habitat improvements. SGI and partners provide funding for the increased field capacity.



LOCATIONS OF PARTNER POSITIONS

Partners include state fish and wildlife agencies, non-governmental organizations, corporations, conservation districts, and other federal agencies.

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HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

A simple premise guides the SGI: what's good for sage-grouse is good for ranching. The SGI operates on a big scale: targeting 56 million acres across 11 western states. The focus is to help ranchers improve their rangelands in areas containing the highest numbers of sage-grouse.

DEMONSTRATING SUCCESS ON THE GROUND

In 2010, the program's first year, more chicks survived, fewer adults died from hitting fences, and sage-grouse habitat expanded. Hundreds of participating ranchers reaped the rewards of healthier rangelands too.

"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



Ranchers and NRCS staff discuss a grazing rotation plan.

Photo: Conservation Media



The partner positions will work closely with private landowners who have volunteered to participate in SGI.

Photo: NRCS

SCIENCE INFORMS CONSERVATION

In addition to the new partner positions, SGI now has more resources to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of conservation practices;
2. Quantify biological benefits to sage-grouse;
3. Give the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service annual data they need to determine if sage-grouse can remain off the endangered species list.



Science field staff releases a radio-collared female sage-grouse.

Photo: Shawna Sandau



The IWJV and the NRCS entered into a three-year partnership to support the Sage-Grouse Initiative, bringing partners and matching dollars to the table to conserve bird habitat.

Contact:

Randall Gray, IWJV SGI Field Capacity Coordinator
(575) 644-2148, randy.gray@iwjv.org

Dave Smith, IWJV Coordinator
(406) 329-3120, dave_w_smith@fws.gov



Ranchers are important to sage-grouse recovery. About 40 percent of the birds' sagebrush-dominated habitat lies on privately owned lands.

Photo: Conservation Media