

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

GRANT TITLE: Sagebrush/shrub-Steppe Ecosystem Conservation and Management in Montana

AGREEMENT: SWG 01 Grant U-1

PERIOD COVERED: September 22, 2003 through December 31, 2007

Objective

The objective of this grant was to complete strategic planning efforts, and provide administrative and logistical support to implement conservation actions focused primarily on protecting Greater Sage-grouse, other sagebrush obligate species, and sagebrush-steppe habitats in Montana.

Location

Project locations correspond to sage-grouse distribution, which extends from eastern and central Montana into southwestern Montana.

Accomplishments

1) *Strategic Planning Efforts*

A. Complete and adopt the "Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana"

The state management plan for sage-grouse was adopted in October 2004. In addition to editing and finalizing the plan, adopting the plan required an Environmental Analysis and two public review periods. The state sage-grouse working group was convened. This involved development of a Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Environmental Assessment Draft and Final with two public review periods and convening the state sage-grouse working group twice during the Grant Period.

B. WAFWA Range-Wide Conservation Assessment

FWP established and refined a centralized sage-grouse lek count database, which now includes 13,000 entries for 1,700 documented leks. Lek information was compiled from FWP field offices, BLM field offices, and other sources to populate the database. Lek data, along with other habitat, harvest, and Montana-specific information were provided in support of the WAFWA Assessment.

2) Local Work Group Coordination and Local Work Groups

Three sage-grouse local working groups (LWGs) were established in 2003 and 2004. They are located in Glasgow, Miles City, and Roundup. A LWG Coordinator was hired in December 2003 to help initiate and organize the LWGs, facilitate their meetings, provide periodic newsletters and press releases, and provide update information on a local working group website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/sagegrouse/default.html>).

The local working groups participated in 23 meetings during the grant period. In addition to coordination and meeting costs, the grant funded travel expenses for 4 representatives from Montana to attend the Sage-grouse Local Working Group Workshop February 2005 (Reno, NV). Through these meetings, the LWGs developed 3 local action plans with support of the LWG Coordinator.

Adopt A Lek – grant helped support AAL coordinator and operations expenses. Implemented in part through local working groups and the National Wildlife Federation. 160 leks were surveyed over 2 year period.

3) Administrative and Logistical Support for Delivery of Landowner Incentive Program Landowner Agreements

The grant supported many essential development, logistical, and delivery components of the Montana Sagebrush Initiative (i.e., Landowner Incentive Program). These support activities included:

- Development of a GIS prioritization scheme for identifying priority private lands for enrollment into the Landowner Incentive Program.
- Develop a program prospectus for marketing program
- Mailings to landowners of priority habitats soliciting their interest in the lease program.
- Hired 3 contract biologists to follow-up with interested landowners, make field visits, map sagebrush, develop proposals, and notarize signatures.
- Establish project maps for landowner agreements.
- Partial support for a realty specialist for ordering title reviews of proposed projects, developing agreements, tracking and coordinating projects, and submitting executed contracts for recording at respective county courthouses.
- During the grant period, 30 landowners were enrolled in the 30-year lease program affecting 183,713 acres of high priority sage-grouse habitat.

4) Surveys of Important Vegetation Information

The grant contributed toward 3 graduate research projects that included important vegetation characterization components. Those projects included:

- A. Sage-grouse habitat use analysis in the Roundup area (Sika and Newell 2007). The grant supported fieldwork and follow-up habitat analysis using data points from a sage-grouse hunting effects study. The analysis documented sage-grouse use relative to vegetation, cover type, and other habitat characteristics pertaining to time of year and other considerations.
- B. Winter habitat sage-grouse study, Phillips County (Battazzo 2007) . Delineated and described wintering habitat vegetation characteristics at different scales. Compared winter habitat suitability criteria from state sage-grouse plan to actual use by radio-marked hens.
- C. Nesting and brood rearing habitat characteristics study (Woodward 2006). This project helped clarify issues arising during the state sage-grouse planning process surrounding herbaceous and sagebrush cover characteristics, primarily in brood and nesting habitats. This research worked concurrently with radio telemetry studies in different parts of Montana to identify sites for characterizing.
- D. The grant helped support low elevation natural color and infrared color digital photography in 2005, available statewide. The imagery helps in delineating sagebrush habitats, particularly in eastern Montana where earlier GIS cover type layers miss large areas of sagebrush grassland habitat. The imagery is being used for identifying cover, prioritizing and planning conservation projects.

Expenditures and Match Recap

Table 1. Estimated and actual costs and match associated with work items 1-5.

Work items and Estimated Costs	Estimated			Actual		
	SWG 01 Fed 75%	Non-Fed 25%	Total	SWG 01 Fed	Non-Fed	Total
1 MT Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy and Management Plan	\$25,210.08	\$8,403.36	\$33,613.44	\$6,478.62		\$6,478.62
2 Local Working Group Coordinator, Local Working Groups	25,210.08	\$8,403.36	\$33,613.44	\$42,011.60	\$244,926.00	\$286,937.60
3 Staff Support/Logistical Support for LIP Landowner Agreements	222,328.92	\$74,109.64	\$296,438.56	\$125,423.25	\$26,679.20	\$152,102.45
4 Collect Vegetation Information	12,605.04	\$4,201.68	\$16,806.72	\$110,173.97	\$21,288.00	\$131,461.97
5 Assist in WAFWA Range-Wide Conservation Assessment	9,243.70	\$3,081.23	\$12,324.93	\$11,500.00		\$11,500.00
TOTAL DIRECT	\$294,597.82	\$98,199.27	\$392,797.09	\$295,587.64	\$292,893.20	\$588,480.64
PLUS INDIRECT	\$55,973.59	\$18,657.86	\$74,631.45	\$51,471.59	\$0.00	\$ 51,471.59
TOTAL GRANT COST				\$347,059.23	\$292,893.20	\$639,952.23

Table 2. Breakdown of actual match associated with work items 2, 3, and 4.

	Eligible People- meetings*	Total Meetings	Hours/ member	Total Participant Hours	Hourly value	Value
Sage-grouse Work Groups Work Item 2	470	24	16	7520	\$32.57	\$244,926.00
Subtotal						\$244,926.00
Match for work item 3 from FWP staff		base rate	benef factor	hourly rate	hours	Value
20 8-hr days of work by Land Section Supervisor		24.19	1.28	30.97	160	\$4,955.20
40 8-hr days of work by Lands Specialist		17.56	1.28	22.48	320	\$7,193.60
20 8 hr-days of work by Attorney		24.56	1.28	31.44	160	\$5,030.40
5 8-hr days of work by 10 F/W biologists (non-fed overmatch)		18.56	1.28	23.75	400	\$9,500.00
Subtotal						\$26,679.00
Match for work item 3 and 4		rate	amount			
FWP License Cash (Sage Lease)						\$ 15,288.00
Value of waived overhead on contract with University		40%	15,000			\$6,000.00
Subtotal						\$ 21,288.00
TOTAL VALUE OF MATCH						\$292,893.00
Total Match Needed						180,467.47
Difference (Overmatch)						\$112,425.53

*For meeting summaries and list of attendees, see <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/sagegrouse/library/default.html>