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SAGE GROUSE FRONT AND CENTER IN UTAH

In recent weeks sage-grouse habitat restoration has been highlighted in two separate events—the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo and the Sage-Grouse Summit. Both events involved Utah NRCS wildlife biologists with assistance from the NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative ([SGI](#)) office in Montana.

The accompanying photos show (top) NRCS State Biologist Casey Burns (left) with Emmett Burroughs, founder of the Mule Deer Foundation, which heads up the annual expo; and (bottom) Natasha Gruber, SGI Biologist in Roosevelt with Dr. Terry Messmer of Utah State University, organizer of the Sage Grouse Summit. Natasha helped coordinate the NRCS sage-grouse exhibit at each event and went out of her way to construct a small-scale fence on which to hang markers that will be installed throughout Utah this year to help prevent sage-grouse collisions.



The Western Hunting and Conservation Expo drew more than 30,000 hunters and wildlife supporters at the Salt Palace Convention Center in mid-February. In his opening remarks, former V.P. Dick Cheney said “sportsmen are the true leaders on conservation in this country.” It was noted that many sportsmen are also landowners who are essential partners in the SGI effort. The expo and SGI sponsors have the foresight to see that conservation efforts for sage-grouse also benefit other species such as deer and elk who depend on sagebrush steppe habitat.

The week after the expo, the Utah Sage-Grouse Summit was attended by an estimated 250 at the Utah Department of Natural Resources in Salt Lake City. NRCS Utah was recognized frequently and was represented by 14 employees who helped with the exhibit and three presentations on SGI accomplishments to date, easements and the ESA predictability, and the future of SGI. NRCS State Biologist Casey Burns represented NRCS on a final

panel of agency representatives speaking of the future of sage-grouse restoration efforts. He said, "I have never in my career seen an effort like the one to conserve the sage-grouse, and the Sage-Grouse Summit represented the collaborative nature of the process. No one wants to see the species necessitate ESA listing, and Utah is at the forefront of the conservation effort to prevent that."

Video of all summit presentations are available at <http://www.utahcbcp.org/html/utahs-sage-grouse-summit>. Plans are underway for a rangewide sage-grouse summit on November 4-5, 2014, in Salt Lake City.

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