



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS SAGE-GROUSE INITIATIVE — NEVADA

Who We Are

NRCS collaborates with farmers, ranchers, communities, and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands.

Working side-by-side with these landowners, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quantity issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources. Funds to implement these plans are made available in Farm Bill programs that share the cost of conservation for the benefit of the farm, the watershed, and the community. Conservation easement programs, also provided for in the Farm Bill, provide long-term options to conserve land.

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NRCS BIOLOGISTS

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SAGE-GROUSE PARTNER BIOLOGIST POSITIONS

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SAM SANDERS
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KATRINA KRAUSE
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Sage-grouse hunt for insects on a grazed meadow near Austin, in central Nevada.

Photo: Steve Seigle, Nevada Department of Wildlife

Landowners Improve Wildlife Habitat and Rangeland

The NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative helps ensure the enhancement and preservation of sage-grouse habitat and the sustainability of working ranches and farms in the western United States.

Nevada ranchers have installed a variety of conservation measures to improve habitat for sage-grouse. Many of these practices also benefit other wildlife species and improve rangeland for livestock grazing.

During 2011, the NRCS obligated almost \$5 million to protect, restore and improve sage-grouse habitat in Nevada. Almost \$1.5 million was spent to implement conservation measures. \$3 million was used to purchase conservation easements for long-term protection of sage-grouse habitat.

Conservation measures by landowners included:

- removing encroaching pinyon and juniper trees on 4,000 acres, allowing optimum growth conditions for sagebrush
- removing, marking or installing over 16 miles of sage-grouse friendly fencing, reducing the chance of sage-grouse mortality near breeding sites
- implementing grazing systems to enhance sage-grouse habitat

In addition, NRCS offered special funding for wildfire rehabilitation for lands that provide critical habitat for sage-grouse and livestock grazing operations.

NRCS continues to provide conservation planning assistance to landowners.



Helping People Help the Land

HELPING PARTNERS IMPLEMENT SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION

NRCS is currently developing ecological site descriptions (ESDs) for sage-grouse habitat in northern Nevada. ESDs describe climate, soil, plant communities and topography, and the value of the site for management objectives, such as livestock grazing and wildlife management.

NRCS shares this information with partners, including the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, to help develop specific objectives to conserve, enhance or restore priority sage-grouse habitat based on ESDs and assessments.

Land health and habitat evaluations help planners implement conservation actions to manage for vegetation composition and structure consistent with ecological site potential to achieve sage-grouse seasonal habitat objectives.



Native American Youths Improve Sage-Grouse Habitat

In the middle of Nevada, miles from anywhere, eight Native American young adults spent their summer working to improve sagebrush habitat for the greater sage-grouse. Habitat for this ground-dwelling bird, native to much of the American West, has been dwindling in recent years, due to wildfires, invasive species and fencing.

The young adults, all residents of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation and the Battle Mountain Indian Colony, range in age from 18 to 26. They were happy to find work that would let them be outdoors and physically active. Their employment was made possible by a partnership with the landowner, the Bootstraps Program of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension in Lander County, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and other partners. "We couldn't have achieved this success without the help of many partners, especially the Bureau of Land Management," said Rod Davis, Bootstraps Coordinator. Most of the work was accomplished on public land.

The Bootstraps Program teaches life skills and job responsibility by combining formal classroom instruction with real outdoor work experience. NRCS' role was to provide technical guidance and financial assistance through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The eight young people are working to restore sage-grouse habitat on 1,000 acres of public land and 400 acres of private land. Restoration means the removal of invasive pinyon pine and juniper trees (*left*) in order to provide optimal conditions for the native sagebrush that provides food and cover for the greater sage-grouse.

In June, the Bootstraps workers received intensive training from Extension specialists covering use of chainsaws, two-way radios, satellite phones and GPS units, as well as safety, first aid and basic job skills. Once trained and equipped, they started work. They removed only certain pinyon pine and juniper trees, leaving old-growth trees as well as trees on steep slopes, because removing them would create other problems, like erosion. The cut trees were left on the ground to protect the soil from erosion and provide shelter for wildlife.

When the crew wasn't cutting trees, they were fencing springs and meadow areas (*left*) to protect them from overuse by livestock or wild horses. Meadows are critical habitat for young sage-grouse.

All of the young adults say they have enjoyed the experience—especially working outside, and with their hands. Most of the pinyon pine and juniper will be cut this fall, and next year a new Bootstraps crew will finish it and start work in other areas.

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