



Achieving conservation through sustainable ranching

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SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE



What's good for rangelands is good for grouse. That's the Sage Grouse Initiative brand and why hundreds of partners are teaming up to achieve world-class wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching.



Linda Poole

A new paradigm for conserving at-risk species is sweeping the western plains like a spring rain. The Sage Grouse Initiative is a partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, nonprofit groups and businesses that embrace a common vision: wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching.

Launched by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2010, the Initiative applies the power of the Farm Bill to conserve and restore lands where habitats are intact and sage grouse numbers are highest—covering 78 million acres across 11 western states. While private lands are the primary focus, the Initiative also serves as a catalyst for public land enhancements. SGI joins an unprecedented effort at local, state, and national levels to proactively conserve the species and ensure the working landscapes they require are sustained into the future.

Once numbering some 16 million birds before settlement, sage grouse numbers have dwindled to as few as 200,000 that dwell in half their historic range. The number one threat is habitat fragmentation. However, with the right conservation in the right places we can bring back sage grouse, while meeting our nation's food and energy needs.

Today, the Initiative belongs to the many partners shaping history. Working together, we are conserving habitat for sage grouse, as well as pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and songbirds that share the same landscape. We are helping to manage vast, intact ranchlands in ways that also create more nutritious forage for livestock. We are passing on our western heritage of vast skies, unbroken sagebrush-steppe, and room for wildlife and people to roam.



Conservation Easements: Assuring a Future for Ranching & Intact Rangelands

Conservation easements give peace of mind and a financial boost to ranchers who want to pass on a legacy of big open country that's vital to a thriving livestock industry in the West, and to the future of sage grouse.

Easements are voluntary perpetual agreements that provide a bright alternative to subdividing or sodbusting the land.



The NRCS-led Sage Grouse Initiative teams up with land trusts and other partners to provide funding for conservation easements in high abundance sage grouse areas. The overall aim is to maintain working landscapes for future generations.

Conifer Removal: Turning the Tide in Favor of Sage Grouse

Trees and sage grouse habitat just don't mix. Removing junipers and other conifers that are early invaders of sagebrush-steppe is a science-based and cost-effective approach to restoring sage grouse habitat.

Where historically fire kept the trees from invading sagebrush-steppe, today restoration relies on people taking action.

In the Great Basin, conifers have expanded their range by 600 percent, affecting millions of acres of sagebrush ecosystems. Since 2010, SGI has invested in conifer removal on hundreds of thousands of acres. The projects are models of partnerships working across private and public boundaries.

Follow the Sage Grouse Initiative across 11 western states to discover successes made possible through this innovative partnership. www.sagegrouseinitiative.com



John Carlson



Conservation Media

Prescribed Grazing: Enhancing Habitat For Grouse

The Sage Grouse Initiative teams up with willing ranchers to customize grazing plans that improve nesting, rearing, and wintering habitats for sage grouse, while meeting the needs of livestock. The Initiative then chips in to accelerate implementation so that the benefits of practices can be more quickly realized.

Marking and removing fences that pose collision risks is part of a conservation plan to benefit grouse. Fences pose a threat to sage grouse habitat on a small portion of their range near breeding sites (leks) and wintering areas, so marking only the high-risk fences saves time, money, and thousands of sage grouse lives.

Quick Facts (2010-2013)

- Conserved 6,000 mi² across 11 western states by >950 ranches enrolled in SGI.
- NRCS investments of \$247 million generated \$107 million in match for a total \$354 million of on-the-ground sage grouse conservation.
- Conservation easements reduce subdivision and sodbusting threats on 600 mi².
- New grazing systems increase hiding cover for nesting sage grouse on 4,060 mi².
- Removal of invading conifers restores historic sagebrush on 430 mi².
- More than 40 partners pool resources to support 24 SGI field staff that work with ranchers to speed conservation delivery.