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Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Facilitation Study



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University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Contributors

Maria Ryan, Project Coordinator, Facilitator, White Pine - Lincoln Local Planning Area

Area Specialist, Natural Resources, Las Vegas

Brad Schultz, Resource Specialist, North-Central Local Planning Area

Extension Educator, Winnemucca

Steve Lewis, Facilitator, Bistate Planning Area

Extension Educator, Minden

Jerry Buk, Facilitator, North-Central Local Planning Area

Central-Northeast Area Director, Fallon

Rod Davis, Facilitator, South-Central Planning Area

Extension Educator, Battle Mountain

Staci Emm, Facilitator, North-Central Planning Area

Extension Educator, Hawthorne

Michael Havercamp, Facilitator, Governor's Planning Team

State Specialist, Human Development and Family Studies, Reno

Marlene Rebori, Facilitator, Washoe-Modoc Planning Area

Area Specialist, Community and Organizational Development, Reno

Sherman Swanson, Resource Specialist

State Specialist, Riparian and Rangeland Resources, Reno



Consultants

William Evans, State Specialist, Human Development and Family Studies, Reno

Randy Brown, former Area Specialist, Youth Development, Las Vegas

Elizabeth Christiansen - Center for Program Evaluation & Partnership Development Services

Design and Layout

Martha Barajas and Vicki Paul, Administrative Assistants, Las Vegas

Editor

Brad Schultz, Extension Educator, Winnemucca

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Introduction

There is an increasing trend in the United States toward collaborative community-based efforts to enhance conservation for wildlife and their habitat (Berkes 2004). One reason is that the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is viewed as being restrictive. Once a species becomes listed as threatened or endangered, many landowners, managers and users can be adversely affected due to limited management options. In recent years, locally led planning efforts to create community-based conservation plans have been created to help avert species listings under the ESA. For example, in 1996, a large-scale project across Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas began with collaborative community-based efforts to create a range-wide conservation plan for the lesser prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*). Locally led community groups worked with state and federal agencies to create a plan to identify solutions and reverse the decline of the lesser prairie chicken, averting a listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Farther west, the sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been repeatedly petitioned for listing under the ESA (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2005), because the geographic range inhabited by sage grouse has declined substantially in recent decades. Sage grouse originally occupied at least 13 and possibly 15 states, and three Canadian provinces. Sage grouse currently inhabit 11 states and two provinces (Schroeder et al. 2004). In all states and provinces, sage grouse currently inhabit an area much smaller than prior to settlement.

Eleven western states began a collaborative community-based conservation effort in 2000 when the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USFWS, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. These entities promoted cooperative planning for a range-wide conservation effort for sage grouse. Using local community groups to develop plans to avert a listing, the 11 state wildlife agencies



worked to develop sage grouse conservation management plans. Their goal was to develop plans that met the criteria required by the USFWS to avoid a listing. This effort eventually led to the establishment of 64 collaborative local planning groups across the West, with each developing local conservation and management plans.

64 local planning groups range-wide participated to create conservation and management plans.

Nevada's Conservation Planning Effort

In August 2000, Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn assembled a sage grouse conservation team (SGCT) with 28 members. This team represented a wide array of interests, background and experience managing sage grouse and the habitat they use. From August 2000 through September 2001, the SGCT attempted to develop a statewide sage grouse conservation plan. The team's



eventual product was not a comprehensive statewide conservation plan, but rather a conservation strategy to guide local planning groups.

The conservation strategy initially created six local (but multi-county) planning groups. Each group was tasked to develop a conservation plan for its assigned area. The White Pine-Lincoln County planning group subsequently split into two groups, one for each county. The Governor's sage grouse conservation team remained in place to provide support, coordination and oversight. Each of the seven local planning groups was tasked to use local input to address local needs and constraints. Also, each local plan was to be incorporated into a statewide plan. The planning approach relied on a collaborative, community-based planning process model open to all interested individuals, regardless of either their profession or their knowledge about sage grouse. This strategy was designed to increase local participation and incorporate local knowledge in the development and implementation of each plan. The expected outcome was greater acceptance by stakeholders because they developed a better understanding about both the sage grouse issue and opportunities to improve resource management, and because they helped craft the conservation plan.



The Governor's SGCT used this approach because of the geographically large area and ecologically diverse scope of the project. Across Nevada's great breadth, there are many disparate and/or locally unique situations (biological and human) and issues affecting sage grouse and their habitat. Locally developed plans are considered more likely to address pertinent risks and threats to sage grouse and/or

Nevada Governor's Sage Grouse Planning Team contracted with UNCE to facilitate local planning efforts.

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their habitat, improving the quality of the state level plan. This is expressed in a goal from the Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy:

"throughout the sage grouse's range in Nevada, have locally functional, well-informed groups empowered to actively contribute to sage grouse conservation while balancing habitat, bird, and economic considerations." (Neel 2001)

In September 2001, the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) agreed to serve as facilitator for the local area planning groups and the Governor's Team. UNCE was considered a source for facilitators for several reasons. First, UNCE is viewed as an impartial party. The faculty are not a part of any land management or resource management agency, and they have no regulatory oversight for either land or resource management. Also, UNCE faculty have training and experience in the facilitation process.

The large scale (geographic coverage and long timeframe) of the facilitation effort, however, was beyond the previous experience of UNCE, the land and resource management agencies, and other organizations and individuals involved. This unprecedented planning effort lasted three years and involved seven faculty facilitators from UNCE and almost 500 participants. The primary interests represented by the participants were government agencies, ranchers and farmers, environmental organizations, hunters, outdoor recreationists and other groups (e.g., tribes, mining, local businesses). The intent of UNCE's facilitation effort was to enhance the flow of information, knowledge, ideas and concepts to enhance the ability of planning team members to develop comprehensive conservation plans for sage grouse across Nevada and eastern California. The initial planning phase ended in 2004, when each local planning group provided the Governor's Team with a draft management plan. These local plans were then incorporated into the statewide plan.

In the fall of 2004, the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) contracted with UNCE to conduct a study of Nevada's collaborative sage grouse planning process. UNCE worked with the Center for Program Evaluation and Partnership Development Services (CPEPDS) at the University of Nevada Reno to develop, distribute, analyze and summarize an evaluation survey that was mailed to each participant of the planning process. The survey evaluated three aspects of the collaborative conservation planning process: 1) the effectiveness of each participant's planning group; 2) the effectiveness of the planning process toward the conservation of sage grouse; and 3) the effectiveness of the facilitation effort. The results identify successes and shortfalls for both the planning process and the facilitation effort. This information may benefit future collaborative-based conservation planning efforts.

Almost 500 people from statewide groups participated in the conservation planning effort.

Methods Used in the Study

A survey was distributed to all participants in the planning process. The survey collected data regarding respondents' perceptions of the conservation planning process, their individual roles within the process, and assessments regarding group function. UNCE cooperated with the CPEPDS at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR) to administer the survey, summarize the data and interpret the results (Christiansen and Mitchell 2005).

36% of all people who participated in the planning effort responded to the survey.

The survey was sent to 494 individuals who participated in the planning process. UNCE faculty were excluded due to potential conflict of interest. The name and address of each survey recipient was obtained from the mailing list used by each planning group. To increase the response rate, pre-notification postcards were sent to planning group participants in February 2005, alerting them to the upcoming survey (Dillman 2000). Three days later the survey was mailed to all participants, along with a signed cover letter and pre-stamped reply envelope.

Three weeks after the first survey was mailed, a second survey and pre-stamped envelope were mailed to survey recipients who had not responded. All responses were sent directly to the CPEPDS. Respondents' replies were voluntary and anonymous (e.g., no individual specific information was collected). The response rate was 36% (n=176). The CPEPDS developed the summary statistics and initially classified the narrative responses into discrete categories. These categories were further modified by the authors.



Data were summarized across all local planning areas to create statewide mean values for each variable. The results are presented as aggregated statewide data. The summary statistics do not include data from Elko County because the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group (NNSG) began a planning process two years before creation of the other five sage grouse planning groups. The NNSG planning

process differed from the other local planning groups in that it was not facilitated by a UNCE faculty member and it used a watershed approach. The other local planning groups used the population management unit (PMU) concept initiated by the Governor's Team instead of a watershed approach. Also, the NNSG process focused on both sage grouse and other sagebrush obligate species. The strategy developed by the Governor's Team addressed only sage grouse.



The Lincoln County planning process also differed from the other groups, but not nearly to the extent of the Elko County process. Lincoln County's approach created a sage grouse conservation plan independent from White Pine County. A resource specialist from the Natural Resources Conservation Service facilitated most of their effort. A UNCE faculty member was their initial facilitator and substituted when necessary. Facilitation, however, was not performed consistently by any one individual or organization.



Respondents' Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the number and percent of respondents from each local planning group and the Governor's Team. Respondents were from 20 counties in Nevada and California. The Bistate planning group had the most respondents (30%). Fewer than 10% of the respondents were from the White Pine, South Central and Northeast planning groups, respectively. Respondents were almost evenly divided between paid (48%) and non-paid participants (52%). Most respondents were male (78%) and between 33 and 62 years old (77%).

Table 1. Planning group distribution by area

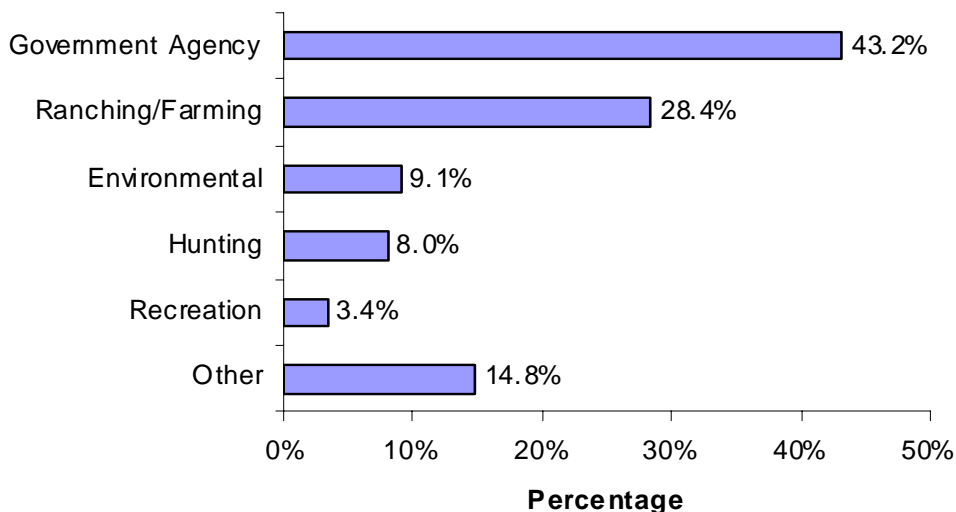
Planning Group N=176	#	%
Bistate	53	30.1
North Central Area	35	19.9
Washoe-Modoc Counties	30	17.0
Governor's Team	26	14.8
Lincoln County	18	10.2
South Central Area	15	8.5
White Pine County	12	6.8
Northeast Area	5	2.8

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Figure 1 shows the primary interests of respondents. Government employees made up the largest percentage of respondents. Of these, 46% were from federal agencies, 29% from state government and 25% from local government. Ranchers and farmers were the second largest group. This suggests that farmers and ranchers believed their participation and input to the planning process was very important. Fewer than 10% of the respondents identified their interest as environmental, hunting and recreational, respectively. Interests identified as "Other" included Native Americans, individuals associated with mining/mineral exploration and members of other natural resource related organizations and/or boards. Some individuals indicated more than one interest.

Participants who responded to the survey were almost evenly divided between paid and non-paid respondents, 48% and 52%, respectively

Figure 1. Primary Interests of Respondents



Respondents participated in their planning group an average of 22 months, but ranged from one to 60 months (including time on the Governor's Team). Most respondents (82%) participated for longer than 10 months. About one-half (52%) stopped participating in the planning process before their group completed its draft plan. Table 2 lists the respondents' reasons for ending their role in the planning process. The lack of time and/or too many commitments was the primary reason, followed closely by a change in position or job assignment. About 20% of the respondents who quit identified a suite of group process issues. These included a lack of progress and their viewpoint not being heard or valued. A small number identified communication problems that precluded them from receiving information about meeting dates and times.

Almost 70% of respondents spent between ½ hour and four hours per month preparing for meetings

Table 2. Survey respondents’ reasons for ending participation

N=99	%
Lack of time; other commitments	34
Job or job assignments changed	26
Frustrated with group; lack of progress in group	13
Felt viewpoint not being heard and/or valued; other agendas operating in the groups	12
Other	11
Travel distance too great	7
Group completed plans	6
Too much NDOW/BLM/government agency input in group	6
No longer informed about meeting dates and times	5

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer, therefore the number of responses will not equal 99 and the total percent will not equal 100.

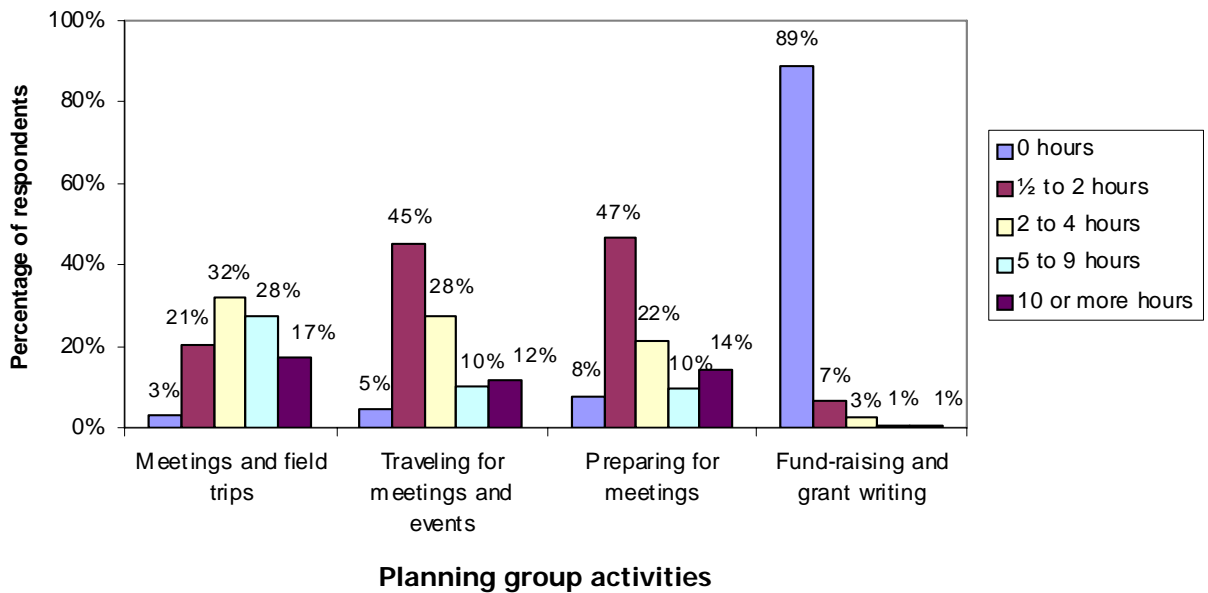
Figure 2 shows the approximate amount of time respondents contributed each month toward various planning group activities. On a monthly basis, respondents spent most of their time in meetings, traveling for meetings or preparing for meetings and almost no time in raising funds or writing grants. Survey respondents were not asked how much time they were willing to spend in different activities. The data, however, have discrete breakpoints that suggest the maximum time commitment before participation begins to decline. These are about four hours for meetings and field trips, two hours for travel and two hours for meeting preparation. Planning efforts that require longer time commitments for these individual tasks (or more than eight hours total in a month) may have fewer participants, or most of the work completed by a minority of participants.

The data in Figure 2 can be used to estimate the percent of the total work effort contributed by individuals represented by each time commitment category¹ (e.g., 2



¹This is accomplished by multiplying the midpoint of each time category by the number (percent) of respondents for that category. For example, for meetings and field trips the midpoint of the 5 to 9 hour category is 7 hours. This category had 28% of the respondents. Multiplying 7 hours by 28 indicates that respondents in this time commitment category contributed about 196 hours per month attending meetings and field trips. When the multiple for each category is divided by the total hours contributed to the task, across all time commitment categories (i.e., 478 hours for meetings and field trips), the result is an estimate of the percent of the total work effort completed by the respondents in each hourly category.

Figure 2. Time respondents spent per month in planning group activities



to 4 hours, 5 to 9 hours, etc.). About 45% of the respondents contributed 77% of the time spent in meetings and field trips. For traveling to attend meetings and events, 22% of the respondents contributed 51% of the effort. For preparing for meetings, 24% of the respondents contributed 56% of the effort. The data strongly indicate that a small number of participants contributed most of the effort toward completion of the planning task.

Changes in Respondents’ Knowledge and Abilities

Respondents were asked to indicate how much their participation in the planning effort affected their knowledge and abilities in 13 planning functions (Table 3). In each assessment category, across all respondents, responses always ranged from not affected to highly affected. At least 50% of the respondents indicated their participation resulted in a slight to high effect for 11 of the 13 planning functions. The two areas largely unaffected were “their ability to write grants” and “their ability to conduct research.” A large minority of respondents (40-49%) identified two additional areas in which their skills were not affected. These were their “ability to facilitate groups” and their “ability to create action plans.” About 76% of the respondents stated their understanding of sage grouse biology was moderately to highly affected, and 71% indicated a similar effect about their understanding of sage grouse habitat. These latter results suggest an important positive outcome of the planning process and met the goal (see page 3) of

64% of respondents said their understanding of Sage grouse biology was moderately to highly affected.

Table 3. Effect of planning group participation on respondent knowledge and abilities.

How much did your participation in the planning effort affect your knowledge and abilities in the following areas?	N*	Mean	Mean Difference	1 Not affected		2 Slightly affected		3 Moderately affected		4 Much affected		5 Highly affected	
				#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ability to write grants	167	1.25	95.2	138	82.6	21	12.6	5	3.0	2	1.2	1	0.6
Ability to conduct research	168	1.59	8531	101	60.1	42	25.0	20	11.9	3	1.8	2	1.2
Ability to facilitate groups	169	1.92	72.2	80	47.3	42	24.9	35	20.7	5	3.0	7	4.1
Ability to create action plans	169	2.03	68.6	69	40.8	47	27.8	35	20.7	15	8.9	3	1.8
Ability to provide group leadership	171	2.10	64.3	64	37.4	46	26.9	44	25.7	14	8.2	3	1.8
Ability to influence public policy	167	2.10	65.8	62	37.1	48	28.7	40	24.0	12	7.2	5	3.0
Ability to communicate in groups	169	2.17	59.2	56	33.1	45	26.6	54	32.0	11	6.5	3	1.8
Ability to help a group function	169	2.27	59.7	46	27.2	55	32.5	49	29.0	15	8.9	4	2.4
Ability to help solve natural resource issues	170	2.30	57.6	49	28.8	49	28.8	51	30.0	14	8.2	7	4.1
Knowledge of natural resources	173	2.44	55.5	33	19.1	63	36.4	53	30.6	16	9.2	8	4.6
Ability to respect different perspectives	170	2.56	48.2	35	20.6	47	27.6	53	31.2	28	16.5	7	4.1
Understanding of the sagebrush habitat	174	3.03	29.3	20	11.5	31	17.8	64	36.8	41	23.6	18	10.3
Understanding of the sage grouse biology	173	3.23	24.3	13	7.5	29	16.8	56	32.4	55	31.8	20	11.6

having well informed groups that could actively contribute to sage grouse conservation. For most of the remaining planning functions, 34% to 53% of the respondents indicated a moderate to high effect. The collective results show that most, if not all, respondents improved their planning skills and knowledge in several or more areas.

Respondents’ Perceptions and Continued Participation

Most respondents (84%) indicated they would stay involved with sage grouse conservation planning or plan implementation, following completion of the draft plans. Table 4 shows the reasons respondents stated they would either continue or discontinue their participation in the planning effort. The data do not provide insight about the organizational conditions or structure, if any, the participants may require to remain engaged throughout future planning and conservation efforts. Also, for participants who quit the process, the data do not reveal the conditions required for their return. The most common reason for continued participation was the project’s importance for the sage grouse species and/or its habitat. Results indicate that most respondents believe species and habitat concerns, along with economic and land ownership issues, are reasons to continue their participation with sage grouse conservation efforts. The most common reason cited for discontinuing participation was an ineffective planning process. Suggestions for improving the planning process are discussed on page 16.

84% of respondents said they would continue to stay involved with planning or plan implementation.

Table 4. Survey respondents’ reasons for continuing or discontinuing participation in the future

Will participate in future	#	%	Will not participate in future	#	%
Important for the species and habitat	37	37	Process was not effective	11	11
Impact on ranching; public-private land issues	28	28	Lack of time and other issues	7	7
Part of job	21	21	Changing jobs	3	3
To stay informed and see plan implemented	16	16	Other	4	4
Other	15	15			

Note: N=100; Respondents could give more than one answer, therefore the number of respondents will not equal 100 and the total percent will not equal 100.

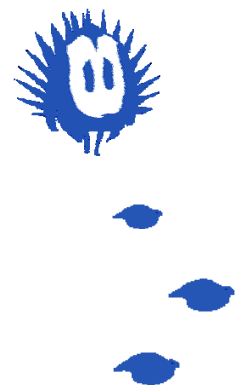


Table 5. Survey respondents' responses about group effectiveness at the beginning and completion of the planning phase.

Rate your group's effectiveness in how your group functioned at the beginning and at the completion planning phase.	Beginning and Completion	N	Mean	Mean Difference	1 Low %	2 Somewhat Low %	3 Moderate %	4 Somewhat High %	5 High %
Dealing with critical sage grouse conservation issues	Beginning	159	2.56	0.76	21.3	25.2	32.3*	18.7	2.5
	Completion	150	3.32		10.4	10.4	28.5	38.2	12.5
Preparing reports	Beginning	159	2.64	0.51	18.7	23.9	35.5	18.1	3.9
	Completion	144	3.15		7.1	18.4	34.0	33.3	7.1
Staying on task during meetings	Beginning	160	2.78	0.44	14.1	23.7	37.2	19.9	5.1
	Completion	146	3.22		8.4	14.0	33.6	35.7	8.4
Developing procedures to conduct business	Beginning	160	2.94	0.37	7.7	20.5	46.2	21.2	4.5
	Completion	146	3.31		9.3	17.6	31.6	36.5	5.0
Acknowledging success	Beginning	149	2.84	0.36	10.7	21.5	45.6	17.4	4.7
	Completion	140	3.20		9.5	10.9	39.4	29.9	10.2
Fund-raising	Beginning	142	1.57	0.33	66.2	16.5	12.2	4.3	0.7
	Completion	128	1.90		45.6	27.2	19.2	7.2	0.8
Carrying out tasks and actions	Beginning	158	2.80	0.32	9.7	24.7	42.9	21.4	1.3
	Completion	146	3.12		9.1	14.7	38.5	30.8	7.0
Communicating with external groups	Beginning	150	2.77	0.30	10.7	30.0	36.0	18.7	4.7
	Completion	144	3.07		12.8	12.8	37.6	28.4	8.5
Listening to different points of view	Beginning	162	3.17	0.24	7.1	17.3	36.5	29.5	9.6
	Completion	146	3.41		8.4	6.3	33.9	40.6	11.9
Resolving conflict	Beginning	156	2.85	0.21	20.4	19.7	34.9	21.7	2.6
	Completion	145	3.06		12.0	16.9	33.1	29.6	8.5
Involving different interests and perspectives	Beginning	159	3.07	0.16	10.3	15.5	38.7	27.7	7.7
	Completion	145	3.23		9.2	14.1	32.4	33.1	11.3
Networking with agencies, groups, and collaborators	Beginning	156	3.13	0.15	7.1	17.3	40.4	25.6	9.6
	Completion	142	3.28		10.8	10.1	28.1	42.4	8.6
Educating the group	Beginning	156	3.19	0.10	10.3	11.5	35.9	34.0	8.3
	Completion	142	3.29		10.8	8.6	30.9	40.3	9.4

* Figures in bold print indicate highest percentage

Effectiveness of the Planning Process

Respondents indicated that planning group effectiveness improved for 12 of the 13 group functions assessed (Table 5). The only function with a lower rating at the completion of the process, compared with the beginning, was “educating the public.” The mean value of 3.30, however, suggests most respondents still believed they had a moderate effect toward educating the public about sage grouse issues. The amount of improvement was statistically significant ($P \leq 0.05$) for eight of the 13 group effectiveness attributes. The largest change (mean difference = 0.77) between beginning and completion of the planning process was for “dealing with critical sage grouse conservation issues.” This was followed by “preparing reports.” These changes are important and are directly linked to the planning goal of having “...*well-informed groups empowered to actively contribute to sage grouse conservation* ...” Without increased knowledge about sage grouse and their habitat, and having a better ability to communicate that knowledge in a written plan, locally developed management plans probably would not have been completed.

Fund raising had one of the larger mean differences (0.39) and a statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) increase in group effectiveness at the completion of the process. It also had the lowest rating (mean = 1.90) at completion of the planning process, and was the only assessment category with a rating under 3.0 (moderate). Few respondents participated in this activity. This low rating, despite a statistically significant increase from the beginning of the process, suggests that collaborative planning processes may not be the format for teaching most of the participants the skills needed to raise funds for conservation efforts. Development of that skill probably requires targeted educational programming.

There were relatively small improvements (mean difference ≤ 0.20) for three group effectiveness attributes. These were resolving conflict; involving different interests and perspectives; and networking with agencies, groups and collaborators. All three of these attributes had among the highest group effectiveness ratings at the beginning of the process, with the latter two initially being rated as moderately effective. The potential for improvement during the planning process, therefore, was less than for the other attributes assessed.

Respondents identified 10 areas (n=13) of planning group activities that were significantly ($P < 0.05$) more effective at the completion of the planning process, compared to the beginning.



Personal Experiences During the Planning Process

Table 6 summarizes individual respondents' opinions about various aspects of their personal involvement in the planning process. The data show that two-thirds of the respondents felt they were listened to, were valued as a group member and made a significant contribution to their group. A smaller number (56%) stated their group's recommendations were incorporated into the final plan. These positive outcomes are probably why 74% of the respondents stated they were comfortable in their planning group. In our opinion, a high level of comfort is essential for maximizing individual participation. Additionally, most of the participants (75%) felt they had made a contribution to their planning group.

Slightly more than 70% of the respondents stated that UNCE's facilitation effort was important for the success of the planning process. The high ratings respondents identified for both their "value as a group member" (72% positive) and "having their viewpoint heard" (77% positive) strongly suggest that the facilitators enhanced the flow of knowledge, ideas, concepts and overall communication. Improved information exchange undoubtedly made the process more inclusive and open, as opposed to being dominated by a few members.

A stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was used to predict the overall effectiveness of the planning process. The independent variables were gender, length of time participating in the group, the amount of time spent in group activities, and opinions about the quality of their participation in the group. The dependent variable was overall mean effectiveness of the planning group. The regression analysis determined that the variables "I felt valued as a group member" and "I felt my group's recommendations were incorporated into the final plan" explained a significant ($P \leq 0.05$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.66$) amount of the variation in overall effectiveness. These two variables best predicted a respondent's rating of the overall effectiveness of the group planning process and predicted how the respondent rated his or her experience as a part of the process.

70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that UNCE's facilitation was important to the success of the planning process



Table 6. Survey respondents' opinions of the quality of their experience in the group planning process.

Level of agreement or disagreement at the completion of the planning process.	N*	Mean	Strongly Agree 1		Agree 2		Neutral 3		Disagree 4		Strongly Disagree 5	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
I felt my viewpoint was heard.	166	2.48	18	10.8	91	54.8	28	16.9	18	10.8	11	6.6
I felt valued as a group member.	164	2.49	15	9.1	86	52.4	40	24.4	13	7.9	10	6.1
I felt comfortable in the group.	165	2.23	21	12.7	101	61.2	32	19.4	6	3.6	5	3.0
I felt that I made a contribution to the group.	163	2.26	18	11.0	104	63.8	27	16.6	9	5.5	5	3.1
I felt my group's recommendations were incorporated into the final plan.	161	2.53	19	11.8	71	44.1	45	28.0	18	11.2	8	5.0
I felt that UNCE's facilitation was important to the success of our planning process.	161	2.19	48	29.8	65	40.4	29	18.0	7	4.3	12	7.5

Overall Experience

Table 7 summarizes respondents' thoughts about three aspects of the collaborative planning process: 1) their overall experience, 2) the effectiveness of their effort toward conservation of sage grouse and 3) changes in their level of trust of government agencies. Fifty-seven percent of respondents rated their experience in the sage grouse planning effort as "good" or "very good". More than half (53%) of the respondents stated the actions proposed by their planning group to conserve sage grouse will be "effective" or "very effective." Most respondents (71%) indicated that their sense of trust with governmental agencies did not change (i.e., improve or worsen), despite their involvement with many government employees and several agencies (county, state and federal) during the planning process. This result is difficult to interpret because the level of trust in government was not measured before the planning process began.

Table 7. Survey respondents' ratings of the group planning process

		Not good	Okay	Good	Very good	
How would you rate your experience being a part of sage grouse conservation planning?	N=171	17 (9.9%)	56 (32.7%)	69 (40.4%)	29 (17.0%)	
		Not at all	Slightly	Effective	Very Effective	
How effective do you feel the proposed actions will be in terms of conserving the sage grouse?	N=167	16 (9.6%)	63 (37.7%)	70 (41.9%)	18 (10.8%)	
		Much Worse	Worse	Stayed the same	Better	Much better
How has your sense of trust with governmental agencies changed because of this process?	N=164	7 (4.3%)	14 (8.5%)	117 (71.3%)	23 (14.096%)	3 (1.8%)

Respondents provided numerous suggestions about how to improve the collaborative planning process (Table 8). More than 125 suggestions were classified into 17 general themes. Three general themes each received comment from 10 to 13% of the respondents. These were: 1) have more collaboration and/or better consensus; 2) have fewer meetings, a shorter process, less bureaucracy, and better information dissemination; and 3) involve a wider range of interest groups. In contrast, a small minority of respondents felt the process would improve if consensus building were eliminated and there were fewer interest groups involved. Between 6 and 8% of the suggestions for improvement were to continue the process; have less government involvement; have more field trips; and have a better definition of the problem, its goals and objectives and measures of success for the process.



Table 8. Suggestions from survey respondents for improving the collaborative planning process

N=109	#	%
Involve a wider range of interest groups	14	12.8
Less government agency involvement	10	9.2
Continue to meet, plan, and implement the plan	8	7.3
Improve facilitation	7	6.4
More field trips	6	5.5
Too many people/interest groups were involved	5	4.6
Hold fewer meetings	3	2.8
Increase funding	3	2.8
Hold meetings during the evening, not just daytime hours	3	2.8
Other	53	48.6



UNCE’s Facilitation

Respondents’ comments about the strengths and weaknesses of UNCE’s facilitation effort are shown in Tables 9 and 10, respectively. The results are a compilation of written comments that were classified into categories based on their similarities. Non-repetitive responses that could not be categorized into general themes were placed in the “other” category.

Respondents had 175 comments about the facilitators’ strengths (Table 9). These were classified into eight general themes, with the most common strength (23%) being that the facilitator was good, excellent, professional or experienced. Another 20% of comments stated the facilitator reduced conflict, built consensus or allowed all viewpoints to be heard. Many comments also identified the facilitator’s ability to keep the group focused or on track, organized and moving forward.

There were 118 comments about how to improve UNCE’s future facilitation efforts (Table 10). At least 25 of the suggestions addressed issues that were not within the facilitator’s control (Table 10). Facilitators were not responsible for inviting a wider range of participants, ensuring continuity among government participants, scheduling meetings or providing administrative support. These components of the planning process were the responsibility of NDOW, other government organizations and/or individual participants (e.g., scheduling meetings).

Respondents identified over twice as many strengths from the facilitation effort, compared to suggestions for improvement

Table 9. Strengths of UNCE’s facilitation efforts, identified by survey respondents

N=113	#	%
Kept group focused/on track	34	30
Facilitator was good/excellent/professional/experienced	34	30
Conflict resolution; consensus building; allowing all viewpoints to be heard	23	20
Neutral/Objective/Fair	17	15
Provided organization	15	13
Kept things moving	14	12
Provided leadership	11	10
Brought in outside presenters; good resources	5	4
Other	34	30

Also, the suggestion that facilitators continue their involvement may, if implemented, enhance group function, but in and of itself does not improve facilitation. In effect, there were 84 comments directly related to improving future facilitation efforts. Among these comments, the two most common themes were having stronger, better or more facilitators and removing bias (13% and 11%, respectively). Nine percent of the suggestions addressed the facilitators’ need to better define the planning efforts goals, end products or successes. All other suggestions were less than 6% of the total received.

There were more than twice as many comments about the strength (n=175) of the facilitation effort as there were for improvement (n= maximum of 84: Tables 9 and 10). There were three times as many responses about the facilitators’ excellence or professionalism as about the need for stronger or better facilitators. Respondents provided an almost equal number of comments about the facilitators’ neutrality (n=14) and bias (n=13), respectively. There were many more comments about the facilitators’ abilities to reduce conflict, build consensus, or enhance the expression of all viewpoints, than the opposite. A similar result was identified for their ability to keep the group focused and on track.



The suggestion that facilitation would be improved if facilitators had more knowledge about the topic must be considered carefully. Facilitators do not need in-depth knowledge about the topic or subject matter because their role is to enhance communication and the exchange of knowledge, ideas and concepts. The more knowledge facilitators have about an issue or subject, the higher the probability they may actively or passively (unknowingly) interject their own bias and/or perspective. This may move the planning group toward the facilitator's wants or wishes, not the desire of the planning group. The suggestion that facilitators better define the goals, end products or successes of the planning process is important. Obviously, a clear understanding of these parameters is essential for having a strong and effective planning process. The comment, however, must be tempered by the low number of responses received. Only 11 comments addressed this issue, yet almost 500 planning participants could have provided suggestions for improving facilitation. The low number of responses suggests that a poor understanding of the goals, end products and definitions of success was not a widespread problem.

The suggestion that facilitators should be at all meetings requires further analysis to determine if these responses reflect a problem in a specific local planning group. If so, UNCE needs to review why that facilitator was not present at all, or almost all, planning group meetings. The result may suggest screening issues for the selection/designation of facilitators and/or scheduling or prioritization issues.

Further analyses are necessary to determine if the specific suggestions for improvement of the facilitation effort were widespread but uncommon among all planning groups, or prevalent in only one or a few groups. If the suggestions are widespread but uncommon, they would reflect a small minority opinion. In any contentious, large group process, some dissent almost always occurs. Resolving dissent among a minority of group members can always create dissent among others. Dwelling excessively about the concerns of a minority of members may solve one issue, only to create another. If most respondents are concentrated in only one or two groups, a suggestion for improvement may indicate a weakness with specific facilitators or inappropriate expectations of the planning group. The latter would suggest there was a lack of understanding about the planning process, the role of the facilitators, and/or a breakdown in communication between the planning group and the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team, which provided overall guidance and coordination. Other data will have to be analyzed to draw final conclusions.



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Table 10. Survey respondents' suggestions for improving UNCE's facilitation in the future

N=113	#	%
Kept group focused/on track	34	30
Facilitator was good/excellent/professional/experienced	34	30
Conflict resolution; consensus building; allowing all viewpoints to be heard	23	20
Neutral/Objective/Fair	17	15
Provided organization	15	13
Kept things moving	14	12
Provided leadership	11	9
Brought in outside presenters; good resources	5	4
Other	34	30

Respondents identified 10 areas of planning group activities that were significantly more effective at the completion of the planning process, compared to the beginning.

Note: Since respondents could give more than one answer, the number of responses will not equal 100 and the percentages will not equal 100.



Photos courtesy of Mike Havercamp

Summary

Collaborative community-based conservation planning efforts are increasing, but few have addressed issues across very large spatial scales. Eleven western states began independent conservation planning efforts that would address range-wide conservation needs for the sage grouse. In 2001, Nevada initiated a collaborative community-based conservation planning effort for the sage grouse that included participation from almost 500 individuals and lasted for more than three years. The structure of the planning process focused on the creation of six local planning groups across Nevada and eastern California. The local sage grouse planning groups were facilitated by faculty members from the Nevada Cooperative Extension. The products developed by these facilitated local planning groups were subsequently assembled into the Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

A post-planning survey was conducted in 2005 to assess the effectiveness of both the collaborative conservation planning process and UNCE's facilitation effort. The survey was mailed to all the participants of the planning effort. Respondents were from 20 counties across Nevada and eastern California and represented seven local planning groups and the Governor of Nevada's sage grouse conservation team. The survey response rate was 36%, with the western part of the planning area most heavily represented (30% of total respondents). The survey's objectives were to evaluate participants' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the planning process, the plans' role in conservation effectiveness and the effectiveness of the facilitation effort.

Demographics of those who participated in the survey revealed an almost even split between participants who were paid (48%) and those who were not paid (52%) to participate in the process. For paid employees who indicated they worked for the government, about half were from state government and half federal government. Substantially more men (78%) participated than women (22%).

The large amount of time that many respondents devoted to the planning process indicated a very high level of interest and commitment. Participants averaged 22 months of involvement, although some (i.e., members of the original Governor's Team) worked on sage grouse issues for up to 60 months. Survey results, however, revealed that there were limits to the amount of time participants were willing to give to the process, and the data show clear time commitment thresholds. Once a threshold was crossed, time committed to various activities declined dramatically. Although data revealed that most respondents participated for many months, analysis of the total work effort expended revealed that a relatively small number of individuals performed most of the workload.

The survey evaluated participants' perceptions about their change in knowledge, skills or abilities as a result of participating in the process. Clearly, the most affected aspect of their involvement was increased knowledge regarding sage grouse (76% of respondents) and their habitat (71% of respondents). Respondents identified improved planning skills in many other, but not all components of the planning process. Overall, respondents felt their knowledge gain enabled them to "deal with critical sage grouse conservation issues." A very large percentage of respondents (84%) indicated that they would continue to stay involved in sage grouse conservation efforts (i.e., plan implementation). This is because of their concern for the species and its habitat, and for economic and land ownership reasons.

Seventy percent of respondents stated the UNCE facilitation effort was important for achieving success, and enhancing the flow of information, knowledge, ideas and concepts. Measured variables that indicated the success and effectiveness of the facilitation effort included participants' high levels of feeling valued, being heard, and confidence that their input was incorporated into the plan. The survey provided respondents an opportunity to suggest how to improve the planning process. There were 125 responses that could be grouped into 17 themes. These provide valuable information that can be used in future collaborative conservation planning efforts. Also, respondents provided written comments about the strengths and weakness of the facilitation effort. There were 175 comments received centering on eight themes. There were twice as many statements regarding facilitation strengths as about areas that needed improvement.

Results of the survey to evaluate the collaborative community-based conservation planning effort for the sage grouse in Nevada indicate that most participants felt they had made a contribution to their planning group. Participants devoted most of their time to attending meetings and field trips, traveling and doing homework in preparation for meetings. Participants of the process identified increases in their knowledge and planning skills giving them confidence in the effectiveness of the plan and their efforts. Facilitation was shown to be highly valued and effective in supporting these efforts.

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