

Helping Both Sage-grouse and Cattle

By Larry Hyslop



Successful fire restoration provides both Sage-grouse habitat and livestock forage. Photo from the USFWS.

Land owners are implementing projects to benefit wildlife, often Sage-grouse, while also benefitting their livestock operations. Funding for such projects is available through the Nevada Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Chris Jasmine is a Private Lands Biologist with the FWS, stationed here in Elko. Since he works for the FWS, I soon started firing questions to Chris about the Sage-grouse listing, but he threw up his hands and said the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is not part of the regulatory side of FWS, and directed me to the state office. He simply works with land owners and administers the Partners Program.

Basically, the program helps pay for habitat improvement projects that benefit migratory birds, threatened and endangered species and trust species. Local projects completed have benefitted Sage-grouse, pygmy rabbits and Lahontan cutthroat trout.

“A lot of projects that benefit Sage-grouse also benefit grazing operations,” Chris said. Partners projects are expected to serve a dual purpose, help both wildlife and ranch operations. A few ranchers may enter into the program mostly to help their grazing operation but Chris says “the majority understand the importance of improving rangelands for wildlife, even on private property.”

Typical projects create fire breaks and restore meadows. Water is always important to wildlife and livestock and projects protect springs, create water developments away from riparian areas and improve stream function.

Program money can only be used on private or tribal lands, not on public lands. The rancher must come up with 50% of the cost although some of it may be in work provided. The FWS’s upper spending limit is \$25,000 per project although most projects cost them around \$7,000. In some cases non-profits also help fund the project so it is possible for one project to cost \$100,000 overall.

Chris is one of three Partners Program biologists in Nevada. In northeastern Nevada, 30 projects have been completed during the last 10 years. Such projects are completely voluntary for ranchers and the only stipulation is that the created improvement remain in place for at least 10 years.

The program is a win/win, according to Chris. He does not go around looking for problems to fix, but for opportunities to help ranchers and wildlife. In some cases, he may know what land contains a

particular threatened species and approach the land owner. Basically he tries to come up with a work plan that benefits both the rancher and wildlife.

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