

Bi-State Sage-Grouse Communications and Outreach Coordinator

Background

What is the bottleneck to success in the Bi-State?

Improving Internal and External Communication is one of the main bottlenecks to success in the Bi-State.

The Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG) has been touted as a model for conservation success. The LAWG works across jurisdictional boundaries to accomplish conservation of habitat for the Bi-State sage-grouse (BSSG). The LAWG has a demonstrated history of success, but many people in the communities near the BSSG habitat are not aware of this important work related to the sagebrush system. While being quietly successful suits this LAWG, it can lead to a lack of understanding and awareness of the commitment and dedication to the decades of conservation work that has been completed by private landowners, nonprofits, state and county governments and federal agencies.

Good communication about the BSSG, the sagebrush system both outside and inside the LAWG can lead to more support in communities, a better appreciation for the sagebrush system and more on the ground accomplishments. Not communicating accomplishments can have several negative impacts for conservation of the sagebrush system. For example, in a community, shortcomings in communication can often result in a lack of understanding for projects when they are proposed, making it more difficult to get through the NEPA process and implement projects in a timely manner. Another example is a recent discussion with a class of 7th graders in Bishop, CA. Many of the students didn't know what a grouse was, that the grouse might live in the sagebrush or really what sagebrush was. Most of the environmental education in the schools is focused on mountains, trees, rivers, wetlands. The sagebrush is not one of the main ecosystems that is taught, despite it being the dominant system.

The duties of communicating about the successes of the LAWG and the importance of the sagebrush systems falls to members of the LAWG who have both little time for this work and little expertise in getting it done. As an example, wildlife biologists spending time designing hats and creating educational curricula, instead of designing and implementing habitat improvement projects, is not an efficient use of the limited personnel to accomplish on-the-ground conservation success.

Duties

What would this person do?

Outreach about the importance of sagebrush systems to local communities such as:



- Communicate about the BSSG accomplishments, including assisting with development and completion of the accomplishment report.
- Coordinating with agency staff to outreach about projects
- Facilitate and schedule LAWG meetings and Conferences (ie conifer, TEK)
- Leading and coordinating volunteer projects
- Writing success stories and designing outreach products (brochures, videos, merchandise, posters, etc.)
- Website posts and updates (Facebook?)
- Communicating among members of LAWG such as Mailchimp newsletters to LAWG
- Educate local students/groups about sagebrush systems and all the species that benefit from a healthy system
- Campground talks about sage-grouse/sagebrush systems
- Developing and creating sagebrush interpretation for bookstores
- Assisting with merchandising/interpretation in bookstores of sagebrush system
- Staffing booths at local events such as Earth Day

Capacity Building

How does this help get projects done on the ground?

All of the above items take more time than one would think. The coordinator can help with and increase much of the coordination and communication that is currently being completed by the biologists, therefore allowing them to focus on getting conservation done on the ground. Also, because much of this work is happening across agency, private and nonprofit ownership boundaries, having a person who is not tied to a specific agency would help improve the seamlessness of the communication effort.

When local communities better understand the benefits of conserving the sagebrush system and projects designed to improve these systems, they are more supportive, more willing to volunteer assistance, and more inclined to help with the NEPA process in productive ways, provide constructive comments and assistance and understand why conservation of the sagebrush system is important.