

Featured Friend

Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative



Dynamic Partnership Restores 1.2 Million Acres of Wildlife Habitat

In Utah, as well as states across the West, conifers are marching into sage-steppe habitats and choking out wildlife communities. Due to past suppression of naturally occurring wildfires, these trees are taking hold in places where they never used to grow, pushing out sage grouse that don't tolerate them. This habitat change is one of the primary factors erasing the bird's habitat range-wide. But in Utah, a dynamic partnership is making colossal strides to cut back the trees for sage grouse, mule deer, elk, songbirds, and many other sagebrush-dependent critters.



Sage grouse using a WRI project area that was recently cleared of conifers. Courtesy of the BLM.

There are 122 partners enacting landscape-scale conservation projects with the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). Since its inception, WRI partners, including the Sage Grouse Initiative, have treated over 1.2 million acres, leveraging over \$160 million to complete 1,400 conservation projects. This includes over 400,000 acres of conifer-encroached sage-steppe that are now restored to healthy and productive sage grouse habitat.

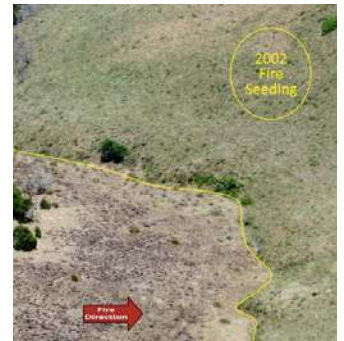
Meet the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative

About

The WRI restores and improves watershed health in priority areas throughout Utah. It enhances and protects present and future quality of life, improves water quality and quantity, reduces catastrophic wildfires, restores watersheds following wildfires, and increases wildlife habitat and forage alongside sustainable agriculture. This initiative is the definition of a collaborative bottom-up organization. Its projects are reviewed by partners and ranked by regional teams, and then funded from a variety of sources.

Role With Sage Grouse Initiative

With sage grouse as a focal species, WRI's natural partner is the Sage Grouse Initiative. One example of WRI's significant collaborations for sage grouse habitat was on the Milford Flat Fire, the largest wildfire recorded in Utah's history. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Fuels Management Specialist Paul Briggs said this fire kicked off a vast partnership by requiring an "all hands- all lands" response. "If it hadn't been for the WRI and the partners, we could not have addressed the immense scale of this fire and other large fires in southern Utah." WRI provided the BLM with native plant seed, as well as field support to remove conifers in places that did not burn completely or were too steep and rocky for drill seeding.



The 2002 Maple Springs fire was treated by WRI to seed native plants. These plants helped halt the 2013 Black Mountain fire. Courtesy of the BLM.

WRI is a crucial player in landscape conservation due to their expertise at leveraging funding among many partners and maximizing limited resources to restore the largest amount of acres. They are a shining example of an SGI Featured Friend because they work successfully in the highest priority areas to create resilient western landscapes for sage grouse and other species.

"The WRI partnership enables true landscape level management with no hard lines between federal, private and state lands," ~Paul Briggs, BLM

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