

INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
JOINT VENTURE

conserving habitat through partnerships

February 1, 2015

Ray Dotson, Acting State Conservationist
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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
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Ray & Tim:

On behalf of the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) Management Board and staff, I extend our sincere appreciation to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for partnering with the IWJV on the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT).

Please find attached the SGI SWAT NRCS Quarterly Report for October – December 2014. The report also contains the following appendix: Objectives and Evolution of the SGI SWAT.

Please give me a call at (406) 549-0287 if you have any questions. We look forward to reporting on future SGI SWAT successes!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dave Smith".

Dave Smith
IWJV Coordinator

Sage Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team

Quarterly Report: October 1 – December 31, 2014

Intermountain West Joint Venture
February 1, 2015

The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) continued to make significant gains this past quarter in each of its four focus areas: field delivery, science, communications, and partner development. The following reports on these accomplishments from October – December 2014.

FIELD DELIVERY CAPACITY

The SWAT field staff continued to expand and accelerate SGI conservation delivery this quarter with support from local and state U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, funding partners, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV). The team's dedicated and enthusiastic range conservationists, wildlife biologists, and natural resource specialists not only help get conservation on the ground but also spread the shared vision of achieving wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching throughout the West. Below are some of the incredible highlights from the SWAT field staff and the IWJV's efforts to support SGI delivery this reporting period.

Conservation Implementation

The IWJV maintains a detailed tracking system to document SWAT field staff progress on a quarterly basis. These contributions are rolled up with other NRCS actions and reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), during the annual sage grouse status review process, to ensure landowner and partner efforts are considered in Endangered Species Act listing decision reviews.

Partner Positions Accelerate Conservation—Additional field capacity support provided by SWAT partner positions across the West has essentially enabled NRCS to double the amount of SGI conservation. Partner staff have helped plan or implement:

- **1,880,714 acres** of rangeland improvement to increase sage grouse hiding cover during nesting season. Additional grass cover is expected to increase sage grouse populations by eight to ten percent.
- **226,265 acres** of conifer removal in key nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering habitats. Removing encroaching conifers from sagebrush rangelands eliminates tall structures in otherwise suitable habitat. As birds re-colonize former habitats, increased bird abundance is anticipated.
- **153.5 miles** of "high-risk" fence near leks to be marked or removed. Marking fences is expected to reduce sage grouse fence collisions by 83%.

Leveraging Farm Bill funds for Wildlife—More boots on the ground means more Farm Bill conservation funding put to work for wildlife. *Every \$1 partners invest results in \$69 put into habitat improvement!*

SGI SWAT Field Staff Rally at International Sage Grouse Forum in Salt Lake City

Sixteen of the 25 SGI SWAT biologists and range conservationists from eight states converged in Salt Lake City, Utah, during the week of November 10th to attend the International Sage Grouse Forum.



SWAT employees brave near zero temperatures as Wildlife Manager, Todd Black, explains Desert Land & Livestock Ranch's sage grouse management strategies. (Photo by Mandi Hirsch)

The week began with the SWAT field staff meeting in Evanston, Wyoming, where they spent the day touring the Deseret Land and Livestock (DLL) Ranch with Wildlife Manager, Todd Black. The tour included visiting sites where various habitat manipulations such as patch burns, brush treatments, fuel breaks, grazing management and food plots are being employed to benefit sage grouse, big game and livestock productions. After the DLL Ranch tour, the group also looked at two neighboring sites implementing SGI contracts for tree mastication and range seeding. A special thanks to SWAT employees, Mandi Hirsch (Lander, Wyoming) and Taylor Payne (Randolph, Utah) for arranging the tour and logistics.

On Thursday and Friday, the SWAT field staff attended the International Sage Grouse Forum in downtown Salt Lake City. The Forum was well attended by several hundred landowners, resource professionals and academics. Some of the plenary speakers of note included Utah Governor Gary Herbert, NRCS Chief Jason Weller and FWS Mountain-Prairie Regional Director, Noreen Walsh. Concurrent afternoon sessions incorporated opportunities to learn about the latest science regarding predation, landscape management, and weed fire management issues for sage grouse. Additional sessions delved into mitigation banking, state fish and wildlife agency sage grouse management plans, conservation planning perspectives from private landowners, as well as a session dedicated to introducing and updating attendees on the efforts of SGI.



SWAT field staff and SGI State Leads with NRCS Chief Jason Weller at the International Sage Grouse Forum in Salt Lake City, Utah, November 2014.

In addition to the scheduled events, the SWAT group had a great opportunity to network with each other, along with numerous resource professionals. Several informal events were held to build team dynamics and download thoughts and ideas with one another, including a dinner to welcome Seth Gallagher, newly hired IWJV SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator.

SWAT Position Updates

SWAT field team talent does not go unrecognized by other employers. As position vacancies arise, the IWJV works with hiring entities and funding partners to re-assess position locations to ensure technical assistance is focused where it's needed most; positions are quickly refilled to minimize disruption to conservation delivery. Here are changes that occurred this quarter:

- Scott Anderson (Montana Association of Conservation Districts [MACD] in Forsyth, Montana) has taken a permanent position with Montana NRCS as a Rangeland Specialist in Roundup.
- Brad Sauer filled the MACD position in November in Forsyth, Montana. Brad has a BS in Range Sciences and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position, having worked with multiple agencies in natural resources, range and fire management. Brad was raised on a ranch in southeast Montana and still runs cows in his spare time.
- Gillian Bee (Pheasants Forever, Inc., [PF] in Belle Fourche, South Dakota) has taken a permanent position with Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory as the Stewardship Program Director.

- Josh Uriarte (Baker Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, Baker City, Oregon) has taken a permanent position Idaho Governor Butch Otter's Office of Species Conservation as a Program Manager/Policy Advisor in Boise.

New IWJV SGI Field Capacity & Delivery Coordinator

SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator, Seth Gallagher, started in early November and hit the ground running. His first week consisted of meeting the SWAT employees in Evanston, Wyoming/Salt Lake City, Utah to attend both the SWAT Field Tour and International Sage Grouse Forum. In December, he traveled to Redmond, Oregon to spend a few days with former SGI Technical Lead, Jeremy Maestas, for a knowledge transfer and discussion of future needs regarding SGI field capacity and delivery.



IWJV SGI Field Capacity & Delivery Coordinator, Seth Gallagher

As we transition, the staff at the IWJV, as well as PF and NRCS, will continue to be a steady resource for SWAT staff and partners. The IWJV's Tina Dennison, Project Coordinator, and Lori Reed, Operations Specialist, provide assistance with accomplishment tracking and reporting, planning and logistics, as well as other administrative and operational support. Brian McDonald, Grants and Agreements Specialist, will continue to work closely with SWAT hiring entities, funding partners, and PF in overseeing site-specific funding agreements.

SWAT Field Staff Calls & Upcoming Events

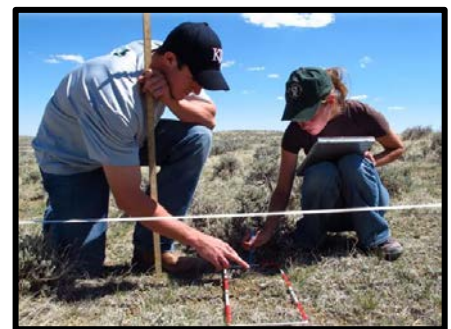
A Bi-State Pinyon-Juniper Expansion Forum – Managing Pinyon-Juniper Expansion in Sagebrush Ecosystems: Next Step for the Bi-State – will be held February 25-26 in Minden, Nevada, and hosted by the Bi-State Local Area Working Group. This technical workshop will facilitate transfer of knowledge and tools for state-of-the art management practices utilized by SGI. The IWJV is providing up to \$10,000 in non-federal funding to support this workshop (e.g., meals, bus transportation, etc.), as part of its ongoing commitment to SGI communications and partner development. Lori Reed is also providing logistical and planning assistance to the effort, and numerous SGI partners plan to attend.

The IWJV continues to host monthly conference calls in which SWAT members receive SGI updates, share accomplishments and experiences, ask questions, and receive continuous technology transfer and training.

SCIENCE CAPACITY

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is conducting research in eastern Montana to better understand how grazing practices implemented under SGI are benefiting sage grouse. Utah State University is conducting similar studies in Rich County, Utah. The results of this research will help evaluate the effectiveness of grazing practices and guide implementation of future conservation actions.

These projects are two of the longest running research efforts under SGI. The following highlights some of the results and findings from the 2014 field season.



Vegetation plot (Photo by Lorelle Berkeley, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks)

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Some preliminary results from 2014 (the fourth year of this ten-year research project) include:

- 2014 was the best year since 2011 for hen survival, nest success, and chick survival. However, relatively high mortality for hens was observed between mid-August and the end of September.
- Preliminary data shows a total of 74 nests for the year with an apparent nest success of 62%.
- 75 sage grouse chicks were marked with radio transmitters this year. Apparent chick survival was 12% for this year, but data analysis is still ongoing.
- Currently winter survival is at 96% and 98% in non-SGI and SGI areas, respectively.



Sage grouse nest. (Photo courtesy of Todd Black)

Utah State University

The focus of the research is to compare greater sage grouse responses under traditional season-long grazing to a rest – rotation system; 2014 was the fourth year of this project. Desert Land and Livestock (DLL) Ranch is managed under rest-rotation, where up to 20% of the landscape is rested annually. Three Creeks Ranch is a traditional season-long grazing proactive, where the livestock are placed into one pasture in the spring and removed in early fall.

- Overall lek counts within the entire project area increased compared to 2013.
- Although an increase in lekking males was observed, overall counts were below the ten-year averages.
- There are now 92 radio-collared hens on each study site, which exceeds sample size goals.

- Nest initiation rates were up for both areas but much higher in the Three Creeks study area. However, nest survival in the DLL study area was nearly four times higher.
- Observed brood success was at the highest levels since 2012 for both sites.
- Survival rates were similar between study sites and higher in 2014, compared to previous years.
- Utah State University completed 170 vegetation surveys in the project area, which will enable a robust analysis of the habitat data.
- Birds captured in Rich County, Utah, have been observed traveling between Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.



Stephanie Graham using radio telemetry to track collared sage grouse, as part of research by Utah State University.

COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

Summary

This quarter, SGI communications produced a new *Science to Solutions* article on wildfire and invasives that led to outstanding media coverage. Two new *Featured Friend* pieces recognized the following SGI partners: Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust. In addition, two more stories were added to the rancher success series, which have drawn excellent media coverage—featuring the Masini Family in Nevada and the Tanner Family in Utah.

NRCS Chief, Jason Weller, drew attention to a SGI communications product during his keynote presentation at the International Sage Grouse Forum (held in Salt Lake City, Utah, in November), holding up a newly published ranching story and using the messaging developed to show the success, breadth, and depth of proactive conservation.

In regards to social media, the SGI website traffic is up dramatically from last quarter at 76% more visits. The Facebook and Twitter page reach and Likes are increasing. Finally, the bi-monthly SGI E-News exhibited a very high open rate at 30 % and higher.

Science to Solutions Series – Contributing to Informed Media & High-Level Coverage

This series has proved instrumental for media, along with our partners, landowners, and managers. Putting forward easy-to-comprehend, yet thorough, science that's central to sage grouse conservation, the series has become one of SGI's most powerful tools.



There are now five *Science to Solution* articles, with a sixth in a fact sheet format. This quarter, SGI added a new (and very timely) piece on wildfire and invasives, leading up to a major conference and announcements from the Department of Interior on commitments to reduce wildfire threats in sage grouse strongholds, based on this science.

When a national sage grouse and wildfire conference – [The Next Steppe: Sage-grouse and Rangeland Wildlife in the Great Basin](#) – opened in Boise, Idaho, on November 5th, the approximately 300 attendees received copies of [a hot-off-the-press story from the November 4th E&ENews PM edition](#); E&E Publishing is a highly regarded source for stories among national policymakers. The story resulted from E&E reporter, Phil Taylor, using the *Science to Solutions* piece that translated technical science: [Wildlife and Cheatgrass: New Science Helps Reduce Threats to Sage Grouse](#).

Rancher Success Stories

SGI continues to make progress with publishing and circulating rancher success stories. More than 950 ranchers are enrolled in SGI programs, yet facts and statistics can't deliver the real stories of those individuals and what they do to make a difference. SGI is tying the facts to real life stories in a series featuring a rancher from each of the 11 western states in the sage grouse range. All are involved with SGI, many with the SGI SWAT staff. The final stories were completed in 2014; however, some of the stories will be released in 2015.

The previously published rancher success stories continue to be useful and republished. For example, the *Big Sky Journal* magazine published a longer version of the Delaney 44 Ranch (Montana) story in November: [Delaney 44 Ranch Helps Preserve Essential Habitat Where Cows and Wildlife Thrive](#).

For the quarter, the following new stories were published:

[November – Utah: Tanner Family Improves Habitat for Cattle and Sage Grouse in Prime Habitat Area: NW Utah's Box Elder County](#)

[November – Nevada: Masini Family Preserves Lush Oasis for Bi-State Sage Grouse](#)

Featured Friend

Two more partners were added to the *Featured Friend* series—displaying a partner prominently on the SGI home page, with a one-page PDF available for reprinting:

[Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation](#)

[Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust](#)

News Story Highlights from the SGI Website

Eighteen new stories were added to the SGI website this quarter. The articles are either original content or shared partner stories of significance, with a contextual introduction. Highlights include:

October 22 – [Cool Green Science: Protecting Sage Grouse Habitat: Does It Benefit Mule Deer Populations?](#)

November 3 – [Conserving Sage Grouse Across International Boundaries: Canadian Ranchers Tour Conservation Projects in Northern Montana](#) (Written by Kelsey Molloy, SGI SWAT Range Conservationist in Malta, Montana)



Jay Tanner (Photo courtesy of the Tanner family)



*Rancher, Ray Baird, in the Pioneer Mountains of Idaho.
(Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy)*

November 6 – [National Award Honors Idaho’s Pioneers Alliance for Sage Grouse Conservation](#)

November 14 – [U.S. Senator Michael Bennet Tours NW Colorado Ranches: Conserving Sage Grouse & Working Lands](#)

SGI E-News

The bi-monthly SGI E-News continues to delivery several stories within a professional template into the e-mail inboxes of subscribers. The subscriber list is now more than 3,180. E-News from the quarter include:

- [October 1, 2014](#)
- [October 20, 2014](#)
- [November 14, 2014](#)
- [November 25, 2014](#)
- [December 16, 2014](#)
- [December 23, 2014](#)

Right: From SGI’s November 25, 2014 E-News: NRCS Chief Jason Weller (left) shakes hands with Dr. Terry Messmer (Utah State University) in front of the SGI booth at the International Sage Grouse Forum. (Photo by Ron Francis, Utah NRCS Public Affairs Specialist)



Social Media: Facebook & Twitter

Facebook continues to be a great way to visually communicate SGI and the wonders of sage grouse, ranchers, and the habitat, as well as partner news. The [Facebook page](#) has over 2,300 “Likes,” and the [Twitter page](#) has more than

1,080 Followers. “Tweets” are a great way to share news, make new contacts, involve new partners, and reach the media. For those who do not subscribe to social media, the SGI website has a [Social Media page](#) (under [News & Resources](#)) that pulls in all Twitter and Facebook posts.



*Sagebrush-steppe, Owyhee County, Idaho.
(Photo by Ken Miracle)*

A Facebook post on November 12th included a [link to a video of sage grouse dancing on a lek on Oregon Public Broadcasting, together with an article, Ranchers Act To Protect Sage Grouse, Prevent Restrictions.](#)

PARTNER DEVELOPMENT

The big news of this quarter: ConocoPhillips Company (COP) recently contributed \$1 million to support the SGI SWAT over the next five years, from 2015-2019! This is the single largest non-federal funding to commitment to SGI since its inception in 2010 – and one that dramatically strengthens the durability of the SGI SWAT! The funds will support field delivery, science, communications, and partner development capacity for SGI implementation.

COP has been a key partner and strong supporter of SGI SWAT since the beginning. In addition to contributing \$450,000 to support implementation of SGI SWAT through 2014, their presence on the IWJV Management Board has helped shape a long-term vision for SGI SWAT and sage-steppe conservation. As such, it should come as no surprise that COP recently doubled-down on their commitment to SGI by providing \$200,000 per year for the next five years to the continued implementation of SGI SWAT in the West. The IWJV executed an agreement between its fiscal agent, Pheasant Forever (PF), and COP that became effective on January 1, 2015. The agreement runs through December 31, 2019. The COP contribution was announced at the recent Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Winter Meeting in Las Vegas, both at the Sage Grouse Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) meeting and the Directors and Commissioners Joint Meeting.

“Conservation of the sage-steppe ecosystem is a critical goal in the western states,” said Michael Hatfield, ConocoPhillips Rockies Business Unit Vice President. “ConocoPhillips believes that the IWJV, in collaboration with the FWS and the NRCS effectively accomplish this conservation objective through science-based, voluntary partnerships with states, landowners, and NGOs. We are excited to be a part of the partnership of dedicated conservation professionals who are implementing SGI.”

The commitment of COP to SGI and SGI SWAT was lauded by Chief Jason Weller and leaders of WAFWA and FWS. “This contribution will play a key role in transforming the initiative into a durable conservation effort,” said Chief Weller.

Virgil Moore, Director, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, who was joined by other IWJV Management Board members and staff at the WAFWA Meeting, stated, “ConocoPhillips has been a tremendous partner in our sage grouse habitat conservation work through SGI. This proactive investment demonstrates the commitment of the company and our partnership to accelerating sagebrush habitat conservation.” Director Moore chairs the WAFWA Sage Grouse EOC. Likewise, SGI SWAT partners are optimistic that the partnership will continue to produce benefits for sage grouse, sage-steppe habitat, and other wildlife for many years to come. “With this support from ConocoPhillips, this epic collaboration just got even stronger,” said Noreen Walsh, Mountain-Prairie Regional Director for the FWS.

The IWJV – with its diverse Management Board comprised of federal and state agencies, NGOs, and for-profit corporations – will continue to explore possibilities for similar investments in SGI SWAT by other corporations. We have the instruments in place to effectively deploy such resources to field delivery, science, communications, and partner development capacity in an efficient manner that continually strengthens NRCS’ capacity to implement SGI. In this vein, the COP contribution may well shape the business model of SGI for decades to come.

Beyond this major achievement, the IWJV continues to strengthen the partnership for SGI implementation through extensive coordination and collaboration among state and federal agencies, non-profit conservation organizations, and corporations – all facilitated by the leadership of its Management Board. The Partner Development element of the SGI has played a critical role in maintaining strong support for SGI across a diverse group of conservation partners.

In cooperation with PF, a key partner of the SGI, the IWJV has now executed 70 field capacity, science, communications, and management agreements. Together, the IWJV and PF closely manage these agreements to ensure successful implementation and achievement of SGI objectives. These projects encumber a total of \$6,676,641 in SWAT funds. This quarter, a new agreement with Montana State University was executed to study the benefits of rest rotation grazing on arthropods, important food for sage grouse. In addition, we welcomed

additional support for the growing SGI communications program, renewed the maintenance agreement to keep the SGI website running smoothly, and expanded the number of *Science to Solutions* articles.

The IWJV devotes significant staff time and resources to maintaining existing partnerships as well as to the development of new partnerships. Frequent communications with the NRCS SGI Coordinator, NRCS SGI Science Advisor, and SGI Field Capacity and Delivery Coordinator ensures that the implementation of the SGI is precisely aligned with NRCS objectives and has built a solid foundation for regular communication and coordination that will yield substantial benefits over the life of the SGI SWAT. We held our tenth SGI SWAT Coordination Meeting last met in July 2014. The next SGI SWAT Coordination Team meeting is scheduled for February 4-5, 2015, in Missoula, Montana.

SUMMARY

The SGI SWAT is a model for science-based, landscape-scale habitat conservation – and a model for the future. It represents a landmark step forward in helping NRCS – through partnerships with the FWS, state fish and wildlife agencies, and others – address many of the bottlenecks that have long prevented Farm Bill conservation programs from realizing their true potential for wildlife habitat conservation in the West.

NRCS SGI SWAT AGREEMENT PERFORMANCE METRICS

- a) *Efforts for outreach to, and participation of, beginning farmers or ranchers, and Native American Tribes within the project area.* The SWAT field capacity workforce worked directly with seven Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource, or Beginning Producers this quarter and three new Indian Tribal members.
- b) *Assistance provided to program participants to help meet local, state, and/or federal regulatory requirements.* The intent of SGI is to proactively conserve sage grouse habitat to negate the need for additional regulations. Participating producers are highly committed to sage grouse conservation, and the SGI provides an excellent vehicle for addressing threats to sage grouse populations at very large scales.
- c) *Numbers of NRCS program participants assisted and/or cooperating in the project effort.* The 25 SWAT partner positions made 1,409 contacts (field visits, etc.) with 641 different agricultural producers as of December 31, 2012. The reporting system was revised in 2013, and we now track Technical Assistance days. Since January 1, 2013, the SWAT provided 5,448.5 Technical Assistance days. This level of technical assistance provision is indicative of how the SWAT will ratchet up SGI implementation over the next few years.
- d) *Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) being employed through the SWAT agreement.* Thirty-six (36) FTEs (25.0 Field Delivery Capacity Partner Position FTEs, 1.0 Rangeland Inventory Support FTE, 1.0 SGI Field Capacity Coordinator FTE, 1.0 SGI Communications Director FTE, 1.0 Communications Support FTE, 3.0 IWJV FTEs, and 4.0 Science Support FTEs) were employed during the reporting period.
- e) *Acres of project area addressed in NRCS program contracts and/or extents of conservation activities implemented in the project area.* The SGI SWAT, to date, resulted in the following accomplishments: conservation planning for 1,880,714 acres of grazing systems; 226,265 acres of conifer removal; 810,841 feet (153.5 miles) and 2,827 acres of fence marking or removal; 8,541 acres of wetland restoration; 10,897 acres of rangeland seeding; and, 24,685 acres of conservation easements.
- f) *NRCS program dollars obligated in agreements in the projects area by program.* A total of \$1,328,556 in Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds were obligated during the reporting period. ***This brings the total amount contracted by the SWAT, to date, to an impressive \$48,652,598!***
- g) *Other partner or resource contributions from other agencies or organizations which help implement provisions of the agreements.* We have secured \$4.96 million in partner funding toward all aspects of the SWAT through the first three years, have secured or project an additional \$2.23 million in partner funding leveraged in Years 4 and 5, and have secured an additional \$800,000 from COP through 2019. We are in the process of securing commitments from partners for continuation of their SWAT field delivery capacity matching contributions for the out-years.

Appendix A

Objectives & Evolution of the Sage Grouse Initiative Strategic Watershed Action Team

Launched in 2010, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) is a highly targeted and science-based landscape approach to delivering enough of the right conservation practices in the right places, in order to elicit a positive sage grouse population response to management. SGI uses dedicated Farm Bill conservation program funds at appropriately large scales to alleviate threats that otherwise fragment habitats, the primary reason for the species "candidate" designation under the federal Endangered Species Act. SGI targets Farm Bill resources to high sage grouse abundance centers, or "core areas," to maintain large and intact habitats rather than providing palliative care to small and declining populations.

The SGI Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) was established to strengthen NRCS' capacity to implement SGI. The SWAT builds field capacity and strengthens the science guiding SGI, as well as bolsters communications capacity – all through partnerships that leverage the NRCS SGI funding with significant contributions from other sources. The Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV), in close collaboration with NRCS at multiple levels, continued to make significant progress toward the following objectives in launching the SGI SWAT during the reporting period:

- Increase field-level capacity by placing specialized human skill sets at critical geographic "pinch points" to increase SGI benefits.*
- Increase science capacity to better focus SGI implementation, assess biological outcomes, and continually improve program delivery.*
- Improve and enhance outreach and communication strategies to increase partner buy-in and SGI participation from landowners.*
- Expand SGI partnership to further leverage NRCS contributions resulting in increased outcomes and participation.*

This work is facilitated by execution of an Interagency Agreement (IA) between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and subsequent modifications to the IA. The \$4 million in SWAT funds were obligated in an NRCS-FWS IA, signed June 24, 2011. NRCS provided an additional \$3 million to the SGI SWAT NRCS-FWS IA late in FY 2011, from another funding source, to bring the total NRCS commitment to \$7 million. The "Phase 2" \$3 million was obligated in a modification to the IA, executed on September 13, 2011. NRCS provided an additional \$2.3 million to extend the agreement through December 1, 2016, through a "Phase 3" modification to the IA on September 28, 2012. As with all SWAT projects, the IWJV leveraged NRCS' investment by raising 25% of the funds needed to implement the SGI SWAT from an array of conservation partners, including the FWS, state wildlife and agricultural agencies, conservation districts, non-governmental conservation organizations, and corporations.

The IWJV, through the FWS, subsequently entered into a Cooperative Agreement with Pheasants Forever (PF) to facilitate fiscal administration and partnership-based implementation of SGI SWAT, effective August 9, 2011. PF works closely with the IWJV staff on SWAT implementation and is also playing a key role in building field capacity for SGI, specifically by supervising seven of the 24 positions through agreements they have negotiated with state fish and wildlife agencies and other partners. For the purpose of this and future reports, we consider the overall \$14.7 million effort as the SGI SWAT, even though only \$4 million arose from NRCS' FY 2011 SWAT appropriation.