



Featured Friend

Pheasants Forever

Counting Sage Grouse From on High



Biologists place a GPS backpack on a sage grouse, allowing them to track the bird's movements in the field.

In Douglas County, Washington, sage grouse are found in unexpected places. Spotting birds is tricky, too. The rolling topography makes it tough to locate leks where sage grouse congregate to mate.

Plus, unlike on the rest of their range, the birds in central Washington tend to court and mate in wheat fields rather than open sagebrush country. "The birds don't follow the rules here, which makes it hard to figure out where they are," explains Michael Brown, a Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) biologist in partnership with Pheasants Forever.

Luckily, Brown found a solution for this game of hide-and-seek. He worked with the Bureau of Land Management, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and SGI to conduct aerial surveys that search for sage grouse leks using infrared technology.



"Partnerships with private landowners are the key to delivering conservation results on the ground benefiting sage grouse and a host of other species in the West."

~Sam Lawry, Pheasants Forever

During late March 2015, Owyhee Air flew routes that covered 405,000 acres in just two weeks, neatly scouring hill and dale to count grouse.

"These aerial surveys not only save time, they also save a ton of money," says Brown.

Over 80% of Douglas County is private land, and the information provided by these surveys helps the area's agricultural landowners apply for cost-share programs from state or federal grant programs.

Meet Pheasants Forever

About

Pheasants Forever is a national group with hundreds of local chapters across the U.S. and Canada that are dedicated to conserving pheasants, quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs.

Role With Sage Grouse Initiative

Pheasants Forever provides key organizational support for the Sage Grouse Initiative, and administers eight SGI field staff partnership positions in South Dakota, Nevada, California, Idaho, and Washington. In addition, Pheasants Forever works closely with the Intermountain West Joint Venture to help manage SGI funds and contracts.



Pheasants Forever Board Members help track sage grouse in Idaho.



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