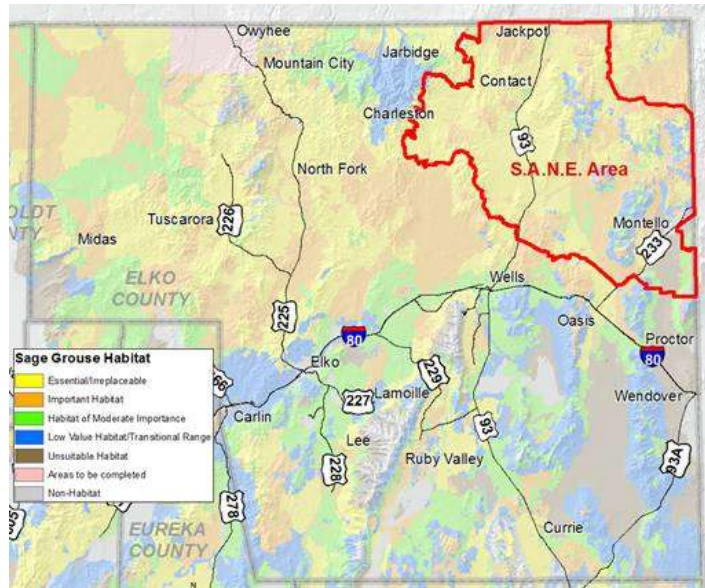


## A SANE approach to sage-grouse

By Larry Hyslop



The location of the land governed by SANE

The Stewardship Alliance of Northeast Nevada (SANE) is a group of landowners who want action on improving sage-grouse habitat. This group of eight ranches in northeastern Elko County wants to complete projects that will benefit sage-grouse. The focus for the group is on-the-ground habitat projects, but they are also want long term collaborative solutions to sagebrush habitat related conflicts.

They own or lease 1.7 million acres of prime sage-grouse habitat. Of that, 29% is private land, 69% is grazing allotments through the BLM and 2% is grazing allotments through the U.S. Forest Service.

Their target is more than sage-grouse, since the group uses a landscape and watershed approach to land management. Right now all the emphasis is on sage-grouse but they see that it will not be long before the pygmy rabbit or another sagebrush obligate species is being considered for endangered species protection. Any improvement to the sagebrush ecosystem will benefit all animals that depend on sagebrush and will help their own operations, which is as it should be. Any project benefiting wildlife has to also benefit the ranches.

SANE has been in place for one year and is organized as a working group under the Northeast Elko Conservation District. They are a consensus-based group, meaning the landowners collaborate on making decisions. A paid facilitator helps them during their meetings. A meeting in February drew 28 participants. Members of the group also include personnel from the USFS, BLM, NRCS, NDOW, NDF, UNR and USFWS. Connie Lee is NDOW's Private Landowner Incentives Program Coordinator and has been instrumental in forming the group.

The group has identified the sage-grouse habitat on each ranch's private and public land. On the eight ranches, 51% of the land is essential/irreplaceable sage-grouse habitat, and 30% is important habitat. Only 1% is non-habitat. These are based on the Nevada Department of Wildlife's sage-grouse habitat categories.

Each ranch, along with agency personnel, identified projects they would like to accomplish. These projects are now being checked to ensure they benefit to the bird by a technical team made up of the biologists from each agency who work with sage-grouse in that area. The types of projects include

green-stripping, monitoring lek status, water improvements, fence removal and flagging, spring / meadow restoration, and invasive species management.

Using the Bi-state Sage-grouse Working Group as a model, SANE is putting together a sagebrush ecosystem action plan, with help from the technical team. NDOW has four sage-grouse population management units (PMU) that are at least partially covered by the area of this group. SANE's goal is to look at each PMU, list the risks and possible actions to lessen those risks. Projects planned for each PMU will be prioritized.

A few projects were begun this summer and others are in various stages of planning and permitting. SANE hopes to demonstrate that people can work together to preserve and enhance healthy sagebrush habitats.

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