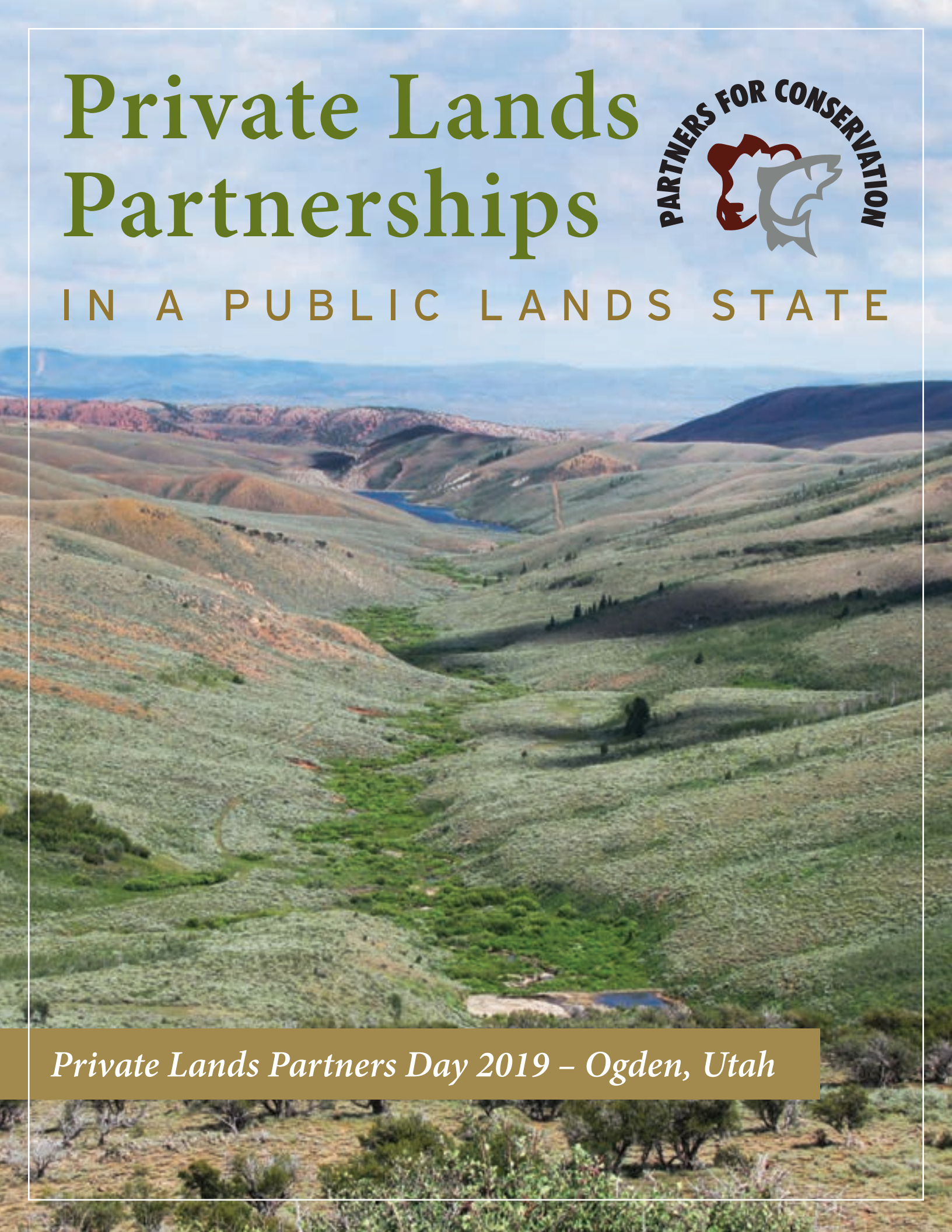
Private Lands Partnerships

IN A PUBLIC LANDS STATE



Private Lands Partners Day 2019 – Ogden, Utah

"Multiple use on public lands is a win-win if we do it right."
–Dale Lamborn, Three Creeks Grazing

Credit: Joe Milmoe, USFWS

Cover Photo: Three Creeks Landscape. Credit: Karl Fleming, USFWS

Private Lands Partners Day 2019

The 12th Annual Private Lands Partners Day (PLPD) was held September 24-26, 2019 at the Ogden Eccles Conference Center in Ogden, Utah. Almost 170 individuals from 30 different states joined together to learn more about the opportunities for private lands conservation partnerships in a public lands state.

Hosted by Partners for Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and supported by a diversity of partners, PLPD brings together private landowners implementing conservation practices and the resource professionals that partner with them in their efforts. The overall goals are to support public/private conservation partnerships and create a venue where conservation-minded landowners and partners can share their personal experiences and motivate each other on creative conservation efforts. With many private landowners working collaboratively with the public land management agencies in Utah, the 2019 conference program highlighted the opportunities and challenges faced by many western landowners.

The first day of the 2019 Private Lands Partners Day featured a field tour of Rich County, Utah, which is approximately 56 percent private lands and 44 percent public lands. The group listened to two individual ranchers talk about their operations that utilize federal lands for summer grazing. At Rich High School's auditorium, the group heard presentations about the creative efforts undertaken by the Three Creeks Grazing Management Initiative to consolidate federal grazing permits. The last stop of the tour overlooking Bear Lake included a presentation about Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative as well as collaborative efforts to restore Bonneville cutthroat trout. The group was treated to a Dutch oven barbeque dinner at the American West Heritage Center's living history museum before heading back to Ogden for the evening. The second day of the conference

Credit: Jodi Stemler

featured a series of presentations from dignitaries, landowners, and agency partners describing innovative collaborations from around the country.

Private Lands Partners Day provides a venue for partners to share their experiences in pursuit of sustainable conservation efforts, agricultural operations, and rural communities. Perhaps most importantly, it connects innovative individuals around the country who learn that they are part of a national community pursuing conservation partnerships for multiple outcomes, reinvigorating them as they return home to carry forward their vision. The 2019 meeting in Utah did not disappoint, emphasizing the value of partnerships that work for natural resource conservation while also improving the bottom line for landowners.

Private Lands Partners Day 2019 Attendance by the Numbers:

- 35% Landowners or managers
- 42% State or federal agency
- 23% Non-profit, industry, or other
- 30 Different States
- 76 were attending their first Private Lands Partners Day

Understanding the Public Landscape in Utah

Like most of the western states, Utah is a public land state with more than 70 percent of the land owned by the state or federal government. The Bureau of Land Management manages the vast majority (60 percent) of these public lands, while 21 percent is managed by the U.S. Forest Service; both agencies manage their land under a multiple use mandate. These public lands provide a number of services to the public including livestock grazing permits for area ranchers. Public lands often have the best summer grazing opportunities for these ranchers allowing for economic security for their operations. However, along with the multiple use mandate, federal land management agencies also need to maintain a "sustained yield," meaning that conservation of the resource to ensure adequate wildlife habitat and rangeland resource values is essential. As a result, public land grazing requires collaboration between ranchers and federal land managers to ensure the sustainability of both the landscape and the livestock operations.

Touring Rich County

The 2019 Private Lands Partners Day field trip exposed participants to the efforts, accomplishments, and challenges associated with private land operations in a public landscape in Rich County. Rich County lies in the northeast corner of the state bordering Idaho to the north and Wyoming to the east. As is typical in Utah and much of the West, valley bottoms in the county are privately owned, moving up in elevation to BLM lands, and then into National Forest lands at the highest elevations. The county's economy is dependent largely on agriculture, cattle, and sheep along with recreation. It is one of the least populated counties in the state with just over 2,300 residents but approximately 50,000 head of cattle. Located just 120 miles from Salt Lake City, it provides great recreation opportunities for metro area residents with increasing landscape fragmentation due to recreational second homes.

Utah's livestock industry contributes more than $600 million to Utah's economy while managing vegetation and benefiting resource health.
—Utah Department of Agriculture & Food

Credit: Jodi Stemler

Utah's Grazing Improvement Program

Utah's Grazing Improvement Program (GIP) works to improve the productivity, health, and sustainability of the state's rangelands and watersheds. The program, housed within the conservation division of the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, operates under the vision that well planned and managed livestock grazing is the most important landscape-scale tool for maintaining healthy rangelands, watersheds, and wildlife habitats. Healthy rangelands contribute to a healthy livestock industry and productive rural economies. The program's goals are:

Strengthen Utah's Livestock Industry

- Improve the sustainability of livestock grazing through science-based management principles.
- Work cooperatively with federal agencies and partners to promote efficient multiple-use management of public lands.
- Work with federal agencies and Congress to implement policies and procedures that allow maximum flexibility when addressing grazing and environmental issues.
- Curtail the decline of public lands grazing opportunity by using sustainable management practices.

Improve Rural Economies

- Maintain viable ranches as a critical contributor to the economy, customs, and culture of rural Utah.

Enhance the Environment

- Demonstrate the power of managed livestock grazing as an important tool for improving/maintaining rangeland resource health.
- Plan and implement rangeland improvement projects that improve grazing management.
- Provide technical expertise and educational opportunity for working ranches and the next generation of ranchers.

Throughout the field tour, experts from the region rode on the buses to speak to the participants during the drive about the landscape, the landowners, and the wildlife resources. Special thanks to these partners:

- **Taylor Payne,** Utah Grazing Improvement Program Northwest Regional Coordinator
- **Kenny Oswald,** USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **Aaron Romesser,** USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **Dave Dahlgren,** Utah State University, Rangeland and Wildlife Extension Specialist
- **Kris Hulvey,** Working Lands Conservation
- **Danny McBride,** U.S. Forest Service Intermountain Region Partnership Coordinator
- **Paul Thompson,** Utah Department of Natural Resources
- **Kevin Oliver,** Bureau of Land Management

Stop One: Monte Cristo Mountains
A Sea of Seabrush

The tour's first stop was high in the Monte Cristo Mountains within the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The area is well known as one of the coldest areas of the state with only 80 frost-free days per year and winter temperatures often dropping to 30 below zero. Rich County mirrors much of the state with nearly half of the 655,000 acres being publicly owned and 70 percent of the landscape in sagebrush rangelands. With so much quality sagebrush habitat, not surprisingly much of the county is a state-designated sage grouse management area and has the highest sage grouse population in Utah. This has allowed directed farm bill funding for projects through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Sage Grouse Initiative and the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, as well as through Utah's Grazing Improvement Program and Watershed Restoration Initiative.

"It is a privilege to graze on public lands—not a right, a privilege. We have restrictions that are intended to prevent overgrazing or to impact the natural systems. Our conservation efforts have been made possible due to partnerships and funding for our projects. It is necessary for our involvement and has been an insurance policy to keep the privilege of ranching and pass our ranch on to the fifth generation." –Louis Stuart, Rafter J Ranch

Credit: Heather Johnson/USFWS

Conservation partnerships have focused on a variety of grazing management practices. Solar powered water pumps provide water to keep cattle away from sensitive riparian areas — home to native Bonneville cutthroat trout — and also allow for watering in more pastures. Efforts to remove older sagebrush and reduce weed and conifer invasions increases the forage available for cattle and improves sage grouse habitat. In addition, some herd reductions have been made to sustain the rangeland resource, however with increased forage through rest-rotational grazing, weight gains on cattle during short, high intensity grazing has increased.

In a beautiful sagebrush meadow at about 9,000 feet in elevation, participants listened to two individual ranchers talk about their operations in Rich County. Both landowners agreed that improving range conditions has been accomplished with help from various entities such as the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The ranchers talked about how important it is for agricultural groups and wildlife groups to work together, and how cooperation has increased because partners are able to identify and work toward accomplishing common goals.

Rafter J Ranch

Louis Stuart is a 4th generation rancher who talked about his family's cattle operation, the Rafter J Ranch. His grandfather was granted the private lands in the 1930's and was the last homesteader in Utah, passing away just five years ago at the age of 102. Initially a sheep operation, the ranch converted to cattle in the 1980s. The operation grazes on a mix of private and public ground, with the summer range primarily on public land. The tour stop was on private land the family leased in the early 2000s and was eventually able to buy in part thanks to a conservation easement by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The location offers a high value hunting unit and the ranch has been able to diversify income by working with an outfitter to coordinate hunting experiences and minimize impacts to hunters from ranching operations.

Credit: Jodi Stemler

W.F. Goring and Son Inc.

Bill "Junior" Goring's grandfather was a professional sheep shearer in England who moved to Idaho in the 1900s. His father moved to Ogden in the 1930s after his grandfather died in a fever epidemic. In 1972, the family divided the operation with Junior's cousins and he took the sheep operation, ultimately buying 29 different operations. They run thousands of ewes on eight BLM grazing permits, state trust lands, and some deeded acreage. The sheep are moved constantly to maintain the rangelands. Through partnerships, they have installed six solar water systems with two more in development and have installed 35 miles of underground water lines in summer ranges. They have also reseeded acres destroyed by wildfire using a wildlife seed mix and worked to strip-chain and reseed areas with old sagebrush.

"These improvements would never have been possible without partners—I am thankful and grateful for that. There's simply not enough money in the livestock industry to make these changes without partner support."

—Bill "Junior" Goring, W.F. Goring and Son Inc.

Stop Two: Rich High School, Randolph
Three Creeks Grazing Management Initiative

Credit: Jodi Stemler

"We knew we had to improve or that which supports this county would be in jeopardy. If we wanted these resources to be available for our kids, we knew we had to make changes. Three Creeks has changed our valley and will continue to allow us to have vibrant agriculture for years to come."

— Dale Lamborn, Rich County Schools Superintendent and Three Creeks Grazing President

In the Rich High School auditorium, field tour participants learned about a unique collaboration that is underway in Rich County. The Three Creeks Grazing Management Initiative is a watershed-scale approach to rangeland and grazing management covering 143,000 acres. It involves 39 private landowners who have consolidated their federal and state grazing allotments into a limited liability grazing company. The partners are working collaboratively with the BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) to promote sustainable grazing and improve habitat conditions for sensitive wildlife across an entire watershed.

The concept for the Three Creeks project began in 2001 as federal grazing permits were being challenged. Standard range conditions were not being met on riparian areas leading to impaired water quality conditions. Rangeland health conditions had a measurable departure on the spring use pastures, and sensitive wildlife like greater sage grouse and Bonneville cutthroat trout that are present in the area faced deteriorated nesting habitat and water quality respectively. Area ranchers saw how sustainable grazing practices on the nearby Deseret Land & Livestock Company ranch were showing improvements for the landscape as well as for livestock.

The goal of the Three Creeks project is to sustain the ranching industry in this project area and focus efforts to create a more holistic approach to the multiple uses of these important lands. The management of the project is the responsibility of the local grazing company (LLC) on a day-to-day basis with approval of their activities through the BLM and USFS. The partners operate the 3,200 head of cattle and five bands of sheep according to an annually approved grazing plan that emphasizes time-controlled rotational grazing where 20 percent of the pastures are rested every year.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Provide livestock watering access onto areas of rangeland that have insufficient water which also draws livestock pressure away from sensitive riparian areas.
2. Install fences that create more pastures to address time and timing of grazing and allow for intensity of grazing to be managed better.
3. Work with state wildlife managers to document changes to sensitive species in the project area.

The improvements are funded through a variety of partnerships with state and federal programs. Partners have recognized that the funding is there to help with these types of projects and that it is mutually beneficial to apply the funds to improve the rangelands and watershed health in their landscape.

Early Success

Even though the management plan is not fully implemented, the partners are already seeing huge benefits. There is more water available for livestock which helps keep cattle out of the riparian areas and feeding higher on ridgelines. Fences are getting put up on time and, more importantly for big game migrations, are being let down on time in winter.

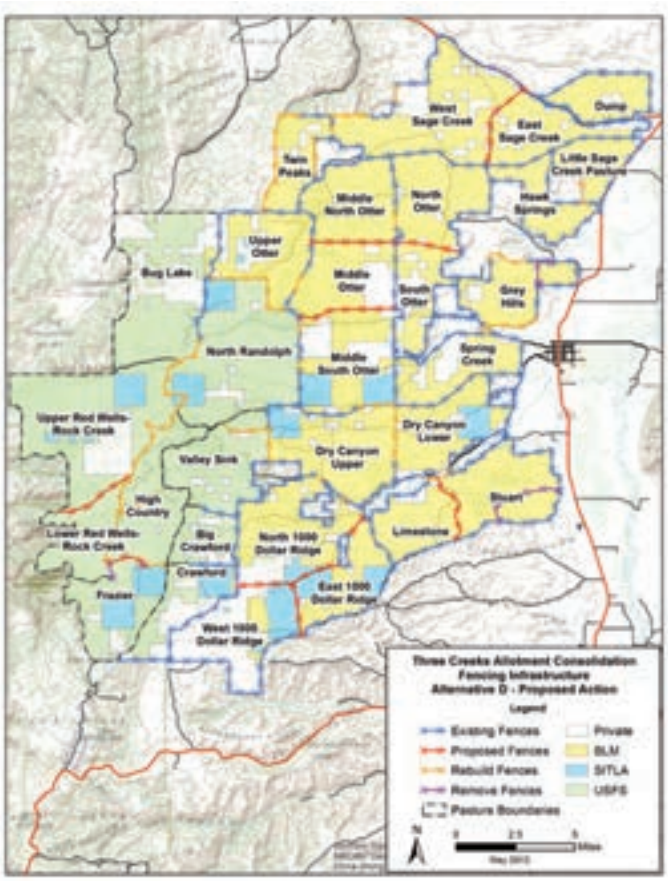
As Junior Goring pointed out to the partners, "If you cowboys stay with your animals, they'll do better." And he has been right. The LLC has hired three contracted range riders that are responsible for herding cattle six days a week and herding sheep seven days a week. This keeps the animals moving between pastures and away from riparian areas to improve rangeland and watershed health, as well as to reduce predation.

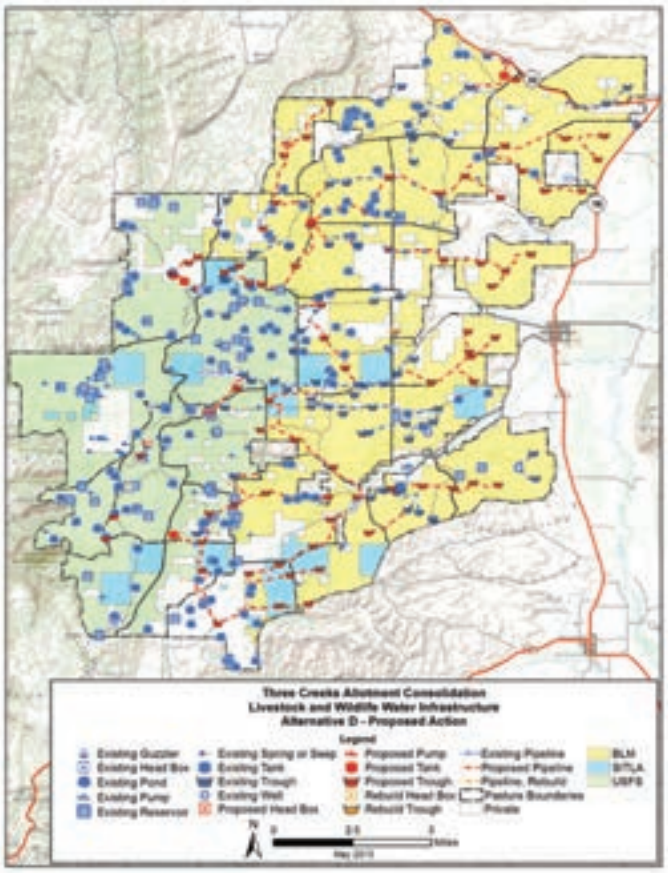
Already the partners have been able to add 15 days to their grazing plan and expect to see higher conception rates and better weight gain for their livestock. This novel approach is a new method of local control and hopefully will be replicated on other allotments across the West as a success model.

The Importance of Trust

Mellissa Wood with the Bureau of Land Management is the only individual federal partner who has been involved with the Three Creeks project from the beginning. As a range technician, she surveyed the region before the project to provide a baseline to show improvements. She notes, "I had to build the trust. So I went and worked with them, I rode the range with the permittees to build the respect and relationships that have allowed us to work together on this project."

Taylor Payne with the Grazing Improvement Program agrees. "This project took a tremendous amount of trust in the permittees, in the agencies, and the science. That trust is tough to build and easy to break. The trust is higher than when we began in 2011 and it's still growing; these partnerships have been the key in making this work."





Stop Three - Bear Lake Overlook
Partnering for Watersheds

The final stop of the tour was at an overlook above the brilliant turquoise waters of Bear Lake. This natural freshwater lake spans the border of Utah and Idaho and is a home to the state fish of Utah, the Bonneville cutthroat trout. During the stop, participants learned more details about the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative as well as partner efforts to prevent the Bonneville cutthroat from being listed as a threatened or endangered species.

Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative

Tyler Thompson, Utah Department of Natural Resources

In a dry state like Utah, water is life. Keeping watersheds healthy improves water quality and yield while enhancing the overall sustainability of the landscape. Tyler Thompson, director of the Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) within Utah's Department of Natural Resources explained how the state has pooled funding and prioritized partner-driven watershed restoration efforts for 13 years.

Projects include active landscape management such as the removal of invasive pinyon and juniper in sagebrush rangelands, stream restoration, aspen regeneration, wildfire prevention, and post-fire restoration. These projects have benefited at-risk species like sage grouse, Bonneville cutthroat trout, and boreal toads as well as high value species like mule deer and elk. Projects are allocated across the five DNR regional boundaries with regional teams made up of a broad range of stakeholders evaluating and ranking the proposals. Using an "all hands, all lands" approach, the primary goal is to work across boundaries encouraging partnership among private landowners, federal and state agencies, as well as a wide range of conservation partners.

Some of the key benefits of these rehabilitation efforts include:

- Protecting and rehabilitating vital habitats for many wildlife species
- Reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires in treated areas
- Improving water quality and increasing water yield
- Increasing forage for sustainable agriculture
- Maximizing benefits while leveraging State-level investments
- Providing economic benefits for local communities

So far, past and current WRI projects have utilized over $300 million, matched by nearly $40 million in partner in-kind funding, on over two million acres. Perhaps most importantly, over 500 agencies, organizations, and individuals have contributed to WRI projects by providing funding and in-kind assistance.

Credit: Jodi Stemler

Bringing Back the State Fish

Jim DeRito, Trout Unlimited; Cassie Mellon, Bureau of Land Management; Paul Thompson, Utah Division of Natural Resources; and Chris Penne, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Partnerships with private landowners have been critical to restoring the native Bonneville cutthroat trout – once petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) – in the Bear River watershed. Working together with Trout Unlimited, the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Bureau of Land Management, as well as the Utah Department of Natural Resources and Division of Wildlife Resources, the water projects implemented on private lands have made huge impacts. The fish that live in Bear Lake need to move upstream to spawn, so improvements to culverts and diversions as well as fencing riparian areas, and restoring streams have increased available spawning habitat. A critical component was working with landowners to ease their concerns about reintroducing a fish that could potentially be listed as an endangered species. The partnerships built the necessary trust through the stream restoration efforts, eventually allowing the stocking of young fish into the streams. The Three Creeks partnership has played a key role as many of the projects have taken place within their landscape. Today, nearly two-thirds of the trout in the watershed are a result of native propagation.

"The conservation track record that the State of Utah and its partners have put together for the species that were petitioned for listing provided the Fish and Wildlife Service with adequate information for not warranted listing decisions. It is easier and cheaper to protect native species before they drop to levels that require protection under the ESA."
—Paul Thompson, Utah Dept. of Natural Resources

Feasting on the Western Heritage

After a full day touring Rich County, the group traveled back to the Cache Valley to visit the American West Heritage Center. There they were treated to a Dutch oven barbeque meal along with re-enactments of water wars from a time not too far past. Before dinner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional director Noreen Walsh presented the 2019 Regional Director's Partnership Award to Richard Bagley and his son, Kendall, of Cedar City, Utah. Clint Wirick with the Utah Partners for Fish and Wildlife program has worked with the Bagleys for 10 years, improving grazing management, restoring stream and riparian habitat, and enhancing upland areas by seeding a variety of grasses and forbs. A wide variety of other partners have also been key contributors to the habitat restoration and management activities.

Credit: Heather Johnson/USFWS

Private Lands Conservation in Federal Land/Private Land Partnerships

On the second day of the meeting, participants had the opportunity to hear stories of success and shared challenges from Utah and around the country. The presentations spotlighted the innovative projects that are making positive impacts for landscape conservation and agricultural operations. Welcomed in the morning by Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief, Matthew Lohr, along with Utah Department of Agriculture Commissioner Kerry Gibson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Noreen Walsh, and Dave Rosenkrance, Deputy Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service, the attendees were given inspiration for their efforts.

Chief Lohr reminded the group that our collective efforts are not for us, but for those yet to come and that our smallest actions can have the biggest impact on the ground. The value of partnerships in the projects that the group toured the day before was revisited by Commissioner Gibson who noted that when people truly value those partnerships and put their money and their reputation into them, it's an amazing thing. Regional director Walsh concluded by saying that partnerships are all about the people in the end – set a big table and be inclusive because people are going to support something they build together.

Credit: Jodi Stemler

Conserving Wet Meadows and Water in the West through the IWJV's Water 4 Initiative

Joy Morris, Intermountain West Joint Venture

Credit: IWJV

Credit: Larry Kruckenberg

Water will be the most important natural resource issue, long-run, in the arid West. The Intermountain West Joint Venture's (IWJV) new "Water 4 Initiative" is intended to conserve working wet meadows and water for irrigated agriculture, wildlife and fisheries habitat, groundwater recharge, and landscape resiliency. Most important, this must be done in ways that matter to people. Flood irrigators sometimes feel vilified as wasting water, but these flooded fields provide vital habitats that are relevant to people for many reasons beyond bird habitat. Using four focal areas, including the Klamath Basin, the Big Hole in Montana, the Bear River in Wyoming and Utah, and the Rio Grande, the Water 4 Initiative is working to communicate the importance of these working wet meadows. In addition, they are working with local landowners and other partners to target conservation investments to improve wetlands stability in the areas that will be most effective.

Credit: Ian Johnson

Hoonah Native Forest Partnership in Alaska

Ian Johnson, Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) Environmental Coordinator

Every household in remote Hoonah, Alaska relies on subsistence food to offset food costs and participate in cultural activities. Partnerships were needed to achieve measurable balance for timber, deer, bears, berries, and fish to meet the community's common goals. Starting in 2015, the native partnership worked together to invest in workforce development along with resource assessments to develop a land stewardship plan that would improve the triple bottom line – social, natural resources, and economic capital. In 2018/2019, the partners finalized their watershed-scale management plan for the Spasski Watershed, which has been identified by the U.S. Forest Service as a priority watershed. Treatments, conducted by locally trained workers, are now underway to improve stands for timber and wildlife as well as restore streams to improve the fisheries. Their partnership model started with a memorandum of understanding between eight partners including tribal government, landowners, nonprofits, local, state, and federal government agencies. The agreement outlines the partners' roles and provides a path for proactive communication. To fully implement the partnership, having a community level coordinator on the ground to coordinate the local work force, serve as a liaison between the teams, and to build trust within the community has been essential.

Grazing as a Management Tool on Private and Public Wetlands

Joel Ferry, Landowner and Karl Fleming, USFWS

Joel Ferry is a fifth-generation rancher from Corinne, Utah, whose family has been grazing cattle in the private wetlands along Utah's Bear River Watershed for over 100 years. Phragmites is a problem for

Credit: Joel Ferry

wetland managers – it is very invasive and can have 20-25 percent land coverage in certain areas, clogging important migratory bird habitat. However, phragmites is very palatable to cattle and is a high-quality forage offering 12 percent protein. Working with the Bear River National Wildlife Refuge and on private grazing leases, JY Ferry & Sons Ranch has found that high intensity/short duration rotational grazing of phragmites, combined with traditional methods of herbicide application and water control, can improve biodiversity and open areas up for increased bird use. Grazing twice a year (April through mid-September and December through February), the ranchers use movable electric fencing to rotate cattle through 300- to 500-acre temporary pastures. Grid patterns are mowed into the phragmites allowing cattle to venture deeper into the thick growth to graze. The ranch uses experienced cattle to train the others to graze within the wetlands because most cattle will avoid standing in water. However, the grazing can make significant improvements in opening up the phragmites stands and allowing native wetlands grasses to regrow. The collaborative management with the Refuge has been a big success, showing increased bird use, reduced phragmites infestations, and happy cows.

"It's important to recognize that when people in the agriculture community take a chance to try something new, they're not just putting their operation on the line it's also their reputation."
—Joel Ferry, JY Ferry & Sons Ranch, Corinne, UT

Collaborative Conservation on Private Lands

Erickson Pass Habitat Enhancement Project

Chance Lyman, Landowner; Clayton Schmitz, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Alison Whittaker, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

The Sheeprock Mountains in Tooele County are a priority sage grouse management area in Utah that had declining populations of the bird due to encroaching pinyon/juniper, loss of wet meadows, and stream degradation. Coordinating through the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, a variety of partners successfully applied for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The partners identified priority areas within the project area with the goal of increasing sage grouse habitat. So far, the collaboration has directed nearly $5 million to improve 12,200 acres of sage grouse habitat through lop and scatter of invasive conifers, reseeding 9,150 acres for weed resistance (5,000 acres in progress), 16,000 acres of fuels reduction through mastication, and 1.5 miles of riparian improvements. Specifically on Erickson Pass, landowners have been engaged across federal and private land boundaries. Using a variety of lop and scatter, mastication, and reseeding efforts they are seeing great improvements to the habitat. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has successfully transplanted around 120 sage grouse to the area; with radio collaring and monitoring, partners will have more data about how birds use treatments and if it is benefiting them. By reducing conifer encroachment and increasing forage, the partners are moving toward managing the sagebrush through rotational grazing to maintain the benefits from the habitat improvements.

"Ten years prior to these efforts, I never saw a wild turkey in this area, now I see upwards of 100. Wildlife are increasingly using the treated areas—after a bullhog goes through and masticates the trees, we have seen sage grouse the very next day. These treatments are benefiting sage grouse but so many more species."
—Chance Lyman, Landowner

Credit: Chance Lyman

Wet Meadow Habitat Work, Supporting Working Lands and Conservation Priorities in Wyoming

Tim Teichert, Landowner and David Kimble, USFWS

The Bear River Wetlands complex in Wyoming provides important habitat to at least 300 species of migratory birds. About 44,000 acres are what wildlife people call "wetlands" but 65 percent of those are manmade through irrigated hay meadows. On the Teichert Ranch and Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, all of the wetlands are working wet meadows. These meadows are where livestock is fed in the winter, and these meadows are under water from April to the middle of July before producing the hay that is fed in the late winter. Working with Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the Teicherts created or improved 25 water control structures, added 5.4 miles of dike, and enhanced about 2,150 acres of flood irrigated meadow. The improvements were made on private land and more than doubled hay production, but the water flows down to the refuge providing bird habitat. In addition, they have built water solar wells to improve water availability on high country, allowing the cattle to move from the bottoms up the hills to redistribute grazing pressure. Through bird counts on the ranch, the partners have documented that the meadows where they hay and graze average 454 birds per square mile, as opposed to areas just grazed that have 250 birds per square mile.

Ranching and Wildlife Migrations Go Hand in Hand

Casey Coulter, Landowner and
Greg Neudecker, USFWS

The Coulter Family Ranch has been operating south of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR) in central Montana since 1914. It was primarily a farm until 2010 when Casey returned and began to seed cover crops and plant perennials between wheat crops, while transitioning other parts of the ranch back to native grasslands and livestock grazing. The ranch worked with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program

Credit: Greg Neudecker/USFWS

"My biggest challenge when I came back to the farm was keeping our head above water financially. Financial and ecological reasons pushed us to adopt holistic management, and we found that the more we took care of the farm the more it took care of us."
—Casey Coulter, Landowner

to remove 15 miles of barbed wire fencing and add 20 miles of electric fencing. By taking the barbed wire out, the elk and pronghorn have been able to move freely across the landscape, but the cattle stay where they are supposed to. This is important because there are significant big game wildlife migrations out of the refuge. One collared antelope traveled 350 miles from Canada, through the CMR and into the Coulter Ranch – for seven days it got hung up on a fence line. Another tagged animal made 666 fence crossings, and a camera trap on a known fence crossing captured over 1 million animals. Fences provide a variety of challenges to wildlife including stress, hair loss which can have effects during winter, as well as direct mortality. By evaluating wildlife fence crossing success, managers have learned that smooth wire fences with a bottom wire that is 17-18 inches off the ground (carabiner clips can modify that bottom wire height) can help these animals pass. On the Coulter Ranch, the improved fencing has a smooth-wire bottom that is 30 inches off the ground on single wire or 22 inches off the ground on three strand fences. These management changes are helping keep the family ranch profitable for a new generation, as well as ensuring that the ranch is wildlife friendly.

Raising Kids, Cattle, and Birds in the Willamette Valley of Oregon

Darrick Salyers and Emily Salyers Higley, Landowners; and Jarod Jebousek, USFWS

The Willamette Valley of Oregon is changing. There are 3.6 million acres with 4.26 million people, and 95 percent of the valley is privately owned, typically in small acreages. This region was historically oak/prairie savannahs with disturbances previously caused by fire and then continued through livestock grazing. The soils are rich, the growing season is long, and the region has diverse agricultural operations, however there are very few ranches left and generational succession of lands has largely stopped. The Salyers family are first generation ranchers, having purchased their 1,800 acres after Darrick Salyers used to "trespass" on what is now his family's property. His children and their children now all call the property home.

The ranch has one of the last remaining oak forests of its size (550 acres). The forest was slated to be logged in 1997 — Darrick bought the cutting contract but didn't cut which he attributes to dumb luck. The forest is Oregon white oak and there is only 2 percent of these hardwood forests left. The Salyers manage their 700 feeder steers in a high-intensity, short duration grazing rotation around the ranch focusing on maintaining a specific density and height of grass. During a bird survey, the American Bird Conservancy found that the largest known population of the Oregon vesper sparrow (petitioned for listing under the ESA in 2016) was found on the Salyers' ranch. The short clumpy grass that they maintain through their quality grazing management provides the perfect nesting habitat for these birds.

"It's important for our family to keep this property as working lands because it needs to generate income and pay taxes to local government," commented Emily Higley, Salyers' daughter. "We have passion and sense of ownership, but need people who are educated to come in and help us figure out what we could be doing better."

Credit: Darrick Salyers and Emily Salyers Higley

Credit: Darrick Salyers and Emily Salyers Higley

Relationships with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, NRCS, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and others helped the family create detailed, long-term management plans. They are implementing an oak restoration project with the goal of restoring historical oak woodlands and oak savannahs by removing conifers that choke out oak, thinning existing oaks, removing invasives, and reseeding with native grasses and forbs. The family fenced four miles of stream and are doing riparian restoration. They host a WATERS project for local middle school students who come out monthly to do restoration projects – on one planting day the kids put in 5,000 stems. Just the day before PLPD, a conservation easement on the property was finalized ensuring the ranch would be maintained as a working landscape for future generations.

Higley, who said her participation in PLPD was life changing, noted, "Our family values the working land lifestyle and being connected with the land, we want to create an opportunity for our kids to inherit the land and have the passion for the land. They help with all of our projects – we're leading by example and letting them have fun."

"Three years ago, Jarod showed up on our ranch. I liked him instantly – then he said, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help…' And that's exactly what he's done, he's been a friend and trusted advisor, we could never have done the easement without him."
–Darrick Salyers, Landowner

Outcome-based Grazing Project in Nevada

Laura Van Riper, Moderator, Bureau of Land Management National Riparian Program; Duane Coombs, Outcome-based Grazing Coordinator IWJV; James Rodgers, Ranch Manager, Winecup Gamble Ranch; Liz Munn, Sagebrush Ecosystem Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy, Nevada

Grazing on federal lands in Nevada is known around the country for being contentious. With mutual distrust between landowners and federal agencies, the idea of working through the massive backlog of grazing permit renewals is daunting. Many of the plans are outdated, and some operations don't have any, others lock permittees into bad management programs and don't often include results based on active management concepts. Ranchers and landowners are disillusioned and concerned about the future of these permits.

A visionary group of permittees, federal agency staff, and non-profit organizations is trying to change that approach. The Results-Oriented Grazing for Ecological Resiliency (ROGER) group is a rancher-led collaborative working to achieve land management systems that meet landscape objectives and support livestock grazing. There is representation both vertically and horizontally within agencies, as well as participation from a wide variety of perspectives who see collaboration as the best way to meet mutual goals. The intention is to move to a system of term permit renewals that will allow flexibility within the permit to meet livestock and rangeland sustainability goals. The challenge is the many layers of grazing regulations developed over time. Some of the layers are good, some are redundant, but the partners are hoping to develop a reasonable method to do permit renewals more efficiently.

The Winecup Gamble Ranch is a perfect example. According to ranch manager, James Rodgers, the operation utilizes about a million acres that is operating under a 1984 management plan, and, as he says, a lot has changed since then. Rodgers took inspiration from

Credit: Winecup Gamble Ranch

the Shoesole group, a collaborative group near Elko that has created a positive working relationship between the agencies and the landowners. His introduction to the Three Creeks project during PLPD was also inspiring.

"We hope to stand on other peoples' shoulders and do something innovative in Nevada," Rodgers noted. "It's all great when Washington blesses something and says go out and do it, but there's a lot of pressure to figure out how to implement it and make things work. We need to look to the triple bottom line: the ecology, economics, and social side of things. But that social aspect is critical, and that leg of the stool needs to be bigger around so that everything can be more stable."

The Nature Conservancy in Nevada is taking a leadership role in keeping these working landscapes working. Liz Munn is helping the Winecup Gamble Ranch through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and matching funding through the ranch. She admits that this IS hard, they are being innovative and trying something new to accomplish outcome-based grazing but it's hard to work through something that is different. There are no examples on what "outcome-based grazing" looks like and it is unclear in BLM's mind — how do you adaptively manage a ranch of this size to meet the ranch's needs and the BLM's needs?

The partners recognize that they are working from scratch, but they hope to produce a template that can help others in the future. Together they are working to set an ecological goal to meet resource management plan requirements, an economic goal to keep the ranch profitable and ensure that BLM efficiently stewards the resources on public lands, and a social goal to develop an inspiring process that shares ownership in decision-making. Overall, the partners see this as an incredible opportunity to manage Nevada's rangelands for wildlife, livestock, fire, and the many other issues they are facing.

"It's this idea of heartbeats that are out there on this landscape and the most precious heartbeats are the children, but also the wildlife, the cowboys, the recreationists," Rodgers concluded. "We are in charge of this place on the landscape that brings together these heartbeats. It's one thing that we are really proud of, and we're focused on making sure all these voices are heard because our actions will impact the landscape for the next 30 to 40 years."

Thank you to the 2019 Private Lands Partners Day Sponsors

Partners for Conservation
P.O. Box 1876
Blanco, TX 78606
512-663-7596
info@partnersforconservation.org
www.partnersforconservation.org

Report written by Jodi Stemler Consulting LLC., www.stemlerconsulting.com and designed by MajaDesign, Inc., www.majadesignvt.com.