

County lauds SANE group for sage-grouse conservation efforts

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ELKO — The county commission recognized local landowners who banded together to brainstorm ways to protect sage grouse.

Stewardship Alliance of Northeastern Elko is a rancher- and landowner- led effort to address the looming sage-grouse issue. Members work collaboratively with state and federal agencies to seek long-term solutions.

On Wednesday, SANE member Robin Boies talked with county commissioners about the group's plan, which includes on-the-ground projects such as creating fire breaks and planting seeds.

Many state and local officials worry if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists sage grouse as threatened or endangered next year, crippling restrictions will be placed on public and private land.

SANE states its ecological goal is to maintain sustainable sage-grouse ecosystems to provide habitat, food, shelter and water to wildlife -- including sage grouse -- and domestic livestock.

"This plan is not a sage-grouse plan," Boies said. "It's a sagebrush ecosystem plan -- that's what the state's focus is."

SANE adapted Fish and Wildlife's list of sage-grouse threats to match threats found in the group's conservation areas.

"Where we are, agricultural conversion (isn't a threat.)," said Boies. "I think they had it No. 3, but that doesn't apply to us in that respect."

County leaders have disagreed with the Fish and Wildlife Service's threat priorities, particularly the inclusion of grazing and the low placement rank of predators.

County Commissioner Grant Gerber said he appreciated SANE's reassessment and he encouraged the group to consider placing predators higher than it did.

"In some areas predators are No. 1, and in some areas I think fire is No.1," he said. "I think those two rotate depending on the area."

Commissioner Jeff Williams, who attended a couple of SANE meetings, commended the group in a letter.

Representing the Nevada Cattleman's Association, Ron Torell said he appreciated the group's proactive, inclusive and effective work.

"This approach that SANE is taking is very refreshing," he said, adding that he was raised in the area where SANE operates.

"I can tell you, that country never looked better," he said.

Even if sage grouse are added to the endangered species list, Boies said the SANE plan could be a blueprint to recovery.

"You've put a lot of work in this," Commissioner Demar Dahl said. "I think you should be commended."