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Press Release

County Hosts Sage Grouse Training

Elko, Nevada March 14, 2014: On Saturday, March 8, 2014, County Commissioners Grant Gerber and Jeff Williams rose early with 11 trainees to count sage grouse near Tuscarora north of Elko as part a cooperative effort with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) to train sage grouse counter volunteers. The group met at the County offices at 4:30 a.m. for a brief meeting then car pooled north on Mountain City Highway to learn how to spot and count sage grouse. The group traveled to a known lek, or sage grouse breeding ground, seven miles west of Lone Mountain Station. Male sage grouse congregate and strut at leks shortly before dawn to attract female mates. The male birds exhibit a bright white chest that is easily visible at several hundred yards which makes them easy to spot.

“As soon as we turned off the highway and opened the first gate, we looked up and saw three male sage grouse and several females about 100 yards away. It was amazing that they were right there and so close to the highway,” said Andy Boyer, a participant from Spring Creek. This was Boyer’s second time counting sage grouse as he had attended a sage grouse training at a lek near Jiggs about 3 years ago hosted by NDOW.

After observing the first lek, Grant Gerber led the group about a quarter mile further to a hilltop where they could view the valley below. There the group spotted another eight males and several females, as well as seven antelope. The total count was 11 male and 7 female sage grouse. Breeding usually occurs in March and April, so the group was satisfied to see sage grouse on the breeding ground early in the season. On the drive back to Elko, however, the group counted 11 ravens, demonstrating that ravens are out in large numbers. Studies have shown that predation is responsible for up to 94% of sage grouse nest failures (Moynahan et al. 2007), and ravens are responsible for 46.7% of sage grouse nest depredations in northern Nevada (Lockyer et al. 2013).

In January, the County Commission passed a Resolution declaring the common raven a nuisance, however the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to protect the raven under the Migratory Bird Act. Ted Koch, head of the USFWS for Nevada, has confirmed that the raven population in Nevada has increased by 600% in the last ten years. The County maintains that fire and ravens pose the most significant threats to sage grouse, and that controlling fire and ravens would be the most effective and least restrictive alternative to protect sage grouse.

The participants of Saturday’s training will be assigned to leks where they will be asked to count birds on three different days during the breeding season. The counts will be used to survey and monitor bird numbers. The Sage Grouse Interim Management Plan imposed by the BLM designates the majority of Elko County as sage grouse habitat and the bird will be used to restrict use and development of land in the County. The County is planning to organize more sage grouse trainings for people that are interested. More information can be obtained by contacting the County Manager’s Office.

For Immediate Release