



Photo by [Lauren Blair](#)

Northwest Colorado ranchers and landowners learn about managing greater sage grouse habitat from Colorado Parks and Wildlife habitat coordinators Trevor Balzer and Jim Garner at Colorado Northwestern Community College in Craig on Wednesday. CPW and Colorado Cattlemen's Association hosted two landowner workshops titled "Ranching for Greater Sage Grouse" in Craig and Steamboat Springs this week to share information and tools on how to preserve greater sage grouse habitat.

Sage grouse open house offers landowners tools to manage habitat

Officials work to keep bird off endangered list

By [Lauren Blair](#)

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#Craig — Northwest Colorado ranchers and landowners flocked to the “Ranching for Greater Sage Grouse” workshops hosted by [Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) and the [Colorado Cattlemen’s Association](#) in Steamboat Springs and Craig this week.

#The event brought together organizational leaders and experts from CPW, CCA, the Wildlife Services unit of the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Colorado State University Extension Office and the governor’s office to educate landowners on best practices for preserving habitat for the bird.

#The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) is considering whether to list the greater sage grouse as either threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Its close cousin, the Gunnison sage grouse, was listed as threatened in November of last year, causing some alarm amongst those who have been working to protect both types of birds for years.

#“We feel like we’re the ones standing up for the grouse,” said CPW Director Bob Broscheid. “These landowners have been doing this for 20 years ... They’re the best at managing the land. They care about wildlife.”

#Both private landowners and officials in attendance felt strongly that the greater sage grouse should not be listed, and that voluntary preservation efforts are not only better for landowners, but more effective for the sage grouse as well.

#“As agencies, federal and state government are keenly aware, private landowners and their landscape is fundamentally critical in the maintenance of these species,” said T. Wright Dickinson, past president of the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association and local rancher. “The private landowners, we have always said that we are very much in favor of

voluntary conservation efforts. We do not see a heavy-handed regulatory approach or mandates (as the best approach). Said another way, we respond well to carrots, we do not respond well to whips.”

#Landowners, CPW representatives and Gov. Hickenlooper are presenting a united front to the Fish and Wildlife Service in favor of not listing the bird. With data showing that the bird’s populations in Northwest Colorado are doing well in response to current efforts, all involved would prefer to keep the federal government out of the mix. The Fish and Wildlife Service will make its decision by September of 2015.

#“The landowners are a significant part of helping us achieve that goal to get a no-list decision,” Broscheid said. “We’re doing everything we can to reach that goal.”

#The workshops were organized by CPW to update landowners on the latest scientific data about local greater sage grouse populations and to offer them tools and support for managing their land to promote healthy habitats. With support from the CCA and the Moffat County Farm Bureau, more than 60 people attended the workshop in Craig, at least 35 to 40 of whom were private landowners.

#Since Colorado is home to only 4 percent of the nation’s population, the fate of the bird’s — and landowners’ — future will not hinge on Coloradan’s efforts alone, however. Greater sage grouse habitat spans 11 states throughout the Rocky Mountain region and northwestern United States, with the largest populations residing in Wyoming, Nevada and Montana.

#Politics surrounding the issue can get heated, as John Swartout pointed out, who serves as Gov. John Hickenlooper’s sage grouse senior advisor.

#“The bottom line is this issue is so polarized, but this is the middle ground, this is where the work gets done to save the species,” Swartout said, referring to the landowner workshop. “This is where we have the greatest impact on the bird... We can have a

strong local economy and protect the grouse.”

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I do not understand why these birds cannot be raised and released. It is done with many other species of birds and ducks.

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