



*Photo Courtesy of Leslie Spicer*

## **Live Lightly on the Landscape**

### **~ for the Sake of the Gunnison Sage-grouse**

You've found the spot for your dream home, high on a sage-covered hill or near a little stream in the valley below. Before you begin your building process, Gunnison County would like to introduce you to your beautiful, yet unassuming neighbors—the Gunnison Sage-grouse.



#### **A particular bird**

The Gunnison Sage-grouse inhabits much of the sagebrush hill and valley landscape in the Gunnison Basin. A unique species of bird, the sage-grouse has adapted to this often harsh environment over thousands of years. You may have been lucky enough to notice one as you admired your property, but they are scarce. With its habitat shrinking as more people are drawn to live here, efforts have been underway since 1995 to reverse its population decline and help ensure that it remains a part of our natural surroundings.

#### **...with particular needs**

Sage-grouse are a charismatic species, known for their elaborate springtime mating displays. Sage-grouse breed at clearings in the sagebrush called leks, where males “dance” to attract females in the early morning hours. They use these same leks year after year. There are many leks in the basin, about a third of which occur on private land, so cooperation with private landowners is crucial to the conservation of the species.

Nesting occurs in the spring. The sage-grouse hen needs adequate sagebrush cover to protect her nest from disturbance and predators. In summer, the Gunnison Sage-grouse raises its young near riparian areas and sometimes frequents the edges of hay meadows. Later on, it needs sunny hillsides to shelter it from

harsh winter storms and deep snows. It likes some of the very places we like to live, but with careful attention to its habitat needs, we may be able to coexist even as its habitat mixes with ours.

### **Cooperation counts**

In choosing your building site, location matters to this sensitive bird. Visibility and noise can impact their life cycle, so Gunnison County has created guidelines in its Land Use Resolution (LUR) to assist you in finding a spot that satisfies your needs as well as alleviate disturbance to the birds. The County has a Sage-grouse Conservation Coordinator, who can assist you as you prepare your plans. The County coordinates its efforts with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to find creative ways to mitigate any impacts that might arise.

County regulations ask that you keep your building(s) more than 0.6 miles from a lek, but where this is impossible, that you do your best to lessen the impact of your structures and other impacts such as lighting, construction scheduling, pets, landscaping, etc. If your building location, driveway or other development is within 0.6 miles of a lek, the County may require specific design components, landscaping or other mitigating aspects to avoid impacts to the lek. These are good practices to follow no matter where in sage grouse habitat you build.

Gunnison County's land use regulations are fair and compliance is not very difficult. The key to success is planning early and consulting experts in the field. The County offers a "Pre-application Conference" opportunity which is designed to allow a landowner an early

planning interface with sage-grouse experts. This is coordinated by the County and is strongly encouraged to be accomplished *before* you finalize your development location or design. With your cooperation, the Gunnison Sage-grouse, our County's signature bird, will continue to be our close neighbor for generations to come.



### **Contact Information:**

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