

# Airport gives \$30,000 for sage grouse study

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JACKSON HOLE DAILY

The Jackson Hole Airport Board approved \$30,000 Friday for a sage grouse study that looks at how the birds fare in and around Grand Teton National Park, including a lek on the north end of the airport's runway.

Craighead Beringia South executive director Howard Quigley asked for the funds after showing the results of an ongoing monitoring effort that uses Global Positioning Systems and radio collars to track the birds' movements. The study is designed to answer questions about nesting success; the mortality of adults, chicks, and eggs; movements between leks; and winter habitat.

Earlier this year, a team of scientists captured 55 grouse, including 31 females. The scientists captured some of the birds at a lek near the airport. A lek is a clearing in the sagebrush where male sage grouse gather to put on displays for hens during mating season.

Quigley said the research is important to the airport because sage grouse could become protected under the Endangered Species Act if populations continue decline. Quigley said the listing could affect how the airport uses critical sage grouse habitat within its boundary.

Board member Jerry Blann agreed. "We all have to recognize that this [an Endangered Species Act listing] could be quite onerous in terms of existing and future operations for this airport," he said.

Blann pointed to the Beringia research that showed more nesting success around the airport than around Antelope Flats Road, where bison are thought to cause problems

for nesting hens. "There is a positive thing that is keeping them here that I think we would like to understand a little better," he said.

In a telephone interview after the meeting, Quigley said that the link between bison and poor nesting success is preliminary, but makes sense given how much forage bison eat.



Blann

"One of the things that correlates with nesting success is forb cover under sage and if you look at Antelope Flats there's not much of a forb understory left," he said.

Airport board director Ray Bishop said the airport could afford to fund the study this year, and recommended that the board revisit the issue year-by-year for subsequent funding requests.

The total Beringia project budget for three years of field work and one year of office work is \$528,000. The Kelly-based research institute is looking for \$146,000 for 2007. The airport's \$30,000 contribution gives them \$130,000 for this year so far.

The local biologists received \$62,000 for the study from the Upper Snake River Sage Grouse Working Group, and have partnered with the National Park Service, the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming, Wyoming Game and Fish, the National Elk Refuge, and the National Forest Service.

The Beringia study is part of a larger effort by the state to learn more about sage grouse as their habitat becomes threatened by residential sprawl and industry such as oil and gas development.