**Purposes or circumstances for which the Utah Sagebrush Condition Assessment**

**is PROPER and IMPROPER to use**

A brief summary statement of the Utah Sagebrush Condition Assessment (USCA) is as follows:

Management of sagebrush habitats is an important natural-resource issue in Utah, and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Sagebrush shrublands support many human uses or values, and provide habitat for a diverse array of non-game wildlife species and plants, including the greater sage-grouse. The amount of sagebrush has declined in Utah since the beginning of European human settlement, though sagebrush shrublands are still quite extensive in relatively undeveloped parts of the state. Given the importance of sagebrush in Utah, land and resource managers need information to direct scarce funds toward effective conservation, management, and restoration of sagebrush habitats. Accordingly, The Nature Conservancy developed the **Utah Sagebrush Condition Assessment** (USCA). The purpose of the USCA is to measure the current condition of sagebrush habitats as an important initial step in identifying where managers should consider projects for conservation, management, and restoration of sagebrush in Utah.

The USCA has three features that influence determinations about its proper or improper usage:

1. Large and Comprehensive in Scope: The USCA covers the whole state, and is intended to show the condition of sagebrush everywhere that it occurs in Utah.

2. You Get What You Pay For: The USCA is constructed with free off-the-shelf LANDFIRE spatial data at face-value, accepting that these data contain errors in their attributions of Biophysical Settings\* and (especially) Vegetation Classes.

3. Coarse in Scale: Its spatial data consist of 30-m pixels, and its measure of condition (Ecological Departure) is reported within HUC-8 polygons that range in size from 273,000 to 3,500,000 acres. Ecological Departure is **not** a site-scale measure (10s to 100s of acres).

**The USCA is properly (or better) used for**

• Strategic/regional-level planning, e.g., drawing attention to potential problem areas within large administrative areas such as BLM Field Offices, USFS Ranger Districts, or DWR Regions ...

* based on the “integrated” condition-measure of Ecological Departure itself, including the underlying cause of the Departure in terms of imbalance in Vegetation Classes – i.e., which Classes have too much acreage, which too little acreage, relative to reference condition.
* based on the underlying “raw” data of distribution of individual Vegetation Classes, including particular Classes that may be targets for projects such as areas with extensive or advanced juniper encroachment into sagebrush.

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\* Biophysical Setting is the term used in the LANDFIRE data. In the USCA report, and hereafter in this document, the synonymous term Ecological System is used instead.

• Inferences where sagebrush Ecological Systems occur in large, ±contiguous blocks.

• Planning to conserve or restore “sagebrush” as a coarse-scale vegetation type in and of itself.

• Planning for projects to enhance or restore “sagebrush” as a provider of habitat- or lifecycle-needs of sagebrush-dependent species, ONLY IF those needs are well represented by (well correlated with) sagebrush Vegetation Classes.

**The USCA is improperly (or poorly) used for**

• Project-level planning, i.e., fine-scale determinations of where to work and what to do.

• Inferences where sagebrush Ecological Systems occur in small, discontinuous patches.

• Planning for projects to enhance or restore “sagebrush” as a provider of specific habitat- or lifecycle-needs of sagebrush-dependent species, where such needs are NOT represented by the pre-defined Vegetation Classes of the LANDFIRE reference models.

• Supporting claims that proposed sagebrush-treatment projects are beneficial or harmful to Greater sage-grouse; this is usually a fine-scale determination, noted three points above.