

Color Country Adaptive Resources Management (CCARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group

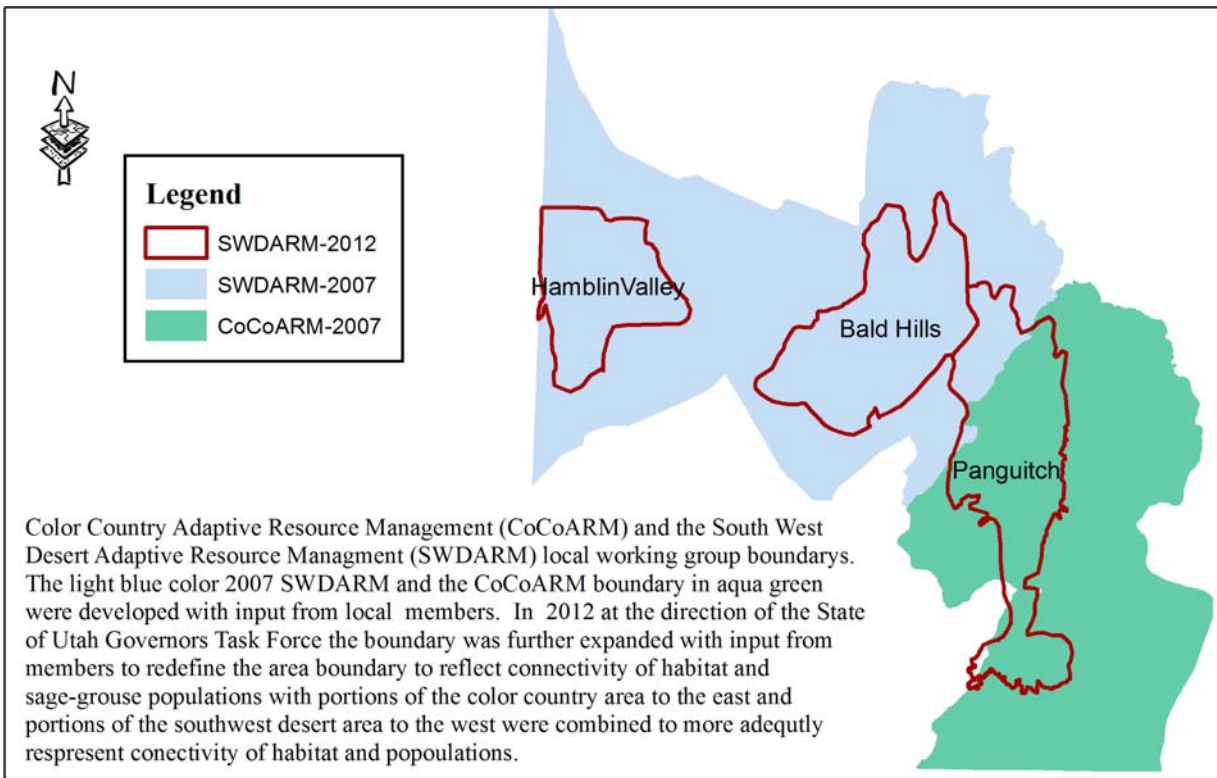


Figure 5. The Color County Adaptive Resource Management (CCARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area.



The Panguitch Management Area is located in southern Utah, in Kane, Garfield, Piute and Wayne Counties, incorporating more than a dozen, often connected leks. The group is facilitated by Dr. Nicki Frey. Due to the population exchange throughout this Management Area, and its incorporation of the southern-most sage-grouse lek, it is considered an important population for Utah.

This population uses a series of leks throughout the habitat area, with some males visiting more than one lek per season. The population is distributed north-south in a series of linked valleys and benches, and constrained by mountains and canyons. There is a large range in the number of males in attendance among these leks. Movement of sage-grouse from one valley or bench to another among seasons is necessary to meet their seasonal habitat requirements in the highly variable annual weather conditions of this region. Movements among valleys are not present in each group of sage-grouse, and not all used areas are known to managers.

One of the main purposes of our LWG plan is to provide a framework of strategies and associated actions that can be implemented to abate threats, address information gaps, and guide monitoring efforts. Several other documents and publications provide recommendations and guidelines for management of sage-grouse populations and their habitats, many of which were

reviewed in the Introduction of our Plan. Strategies developed by CCARM were designed to be specific to the local area while taking into consideration the guidelines at a range wide level.

The CCARM meets every other month, more frequently if necessary. In the fall of 2011, members of CCARM developed a short list of action items to focus their efforts on in 2012. The strategies and actions that were addressed in the past year are provided below. Additionally, CCARM participated in 2 consultation activities in 2011. Members of CCARM assisted in developing the Panguitch SGMAs maps and management plan for the Governor's Task Force planning process, through monthly meetings and e-mail correspondence. Additionally, because of our involvement with the Alton/Sink Valley sage-grouse population management and research, we assisted with the BLM's Alton Sink Valley EIS process, and continue to do so. The process is currently being spear-headed by SWCA, with regular consultations with our CCARM working group.

2012 Conservation Strategies and Actions

Strategy: Reduce threat of predators on sage-grouse over ten-year period.

Action: Avoid creating or improving raptor-nesting habitat in sage-grouse habitat.
Remove raptor perches when possible.

The current concern regarding raptor populations in sage-grouse habitat is focused on the lease proposal for coal mining in the Sink Valley area. To address this concern, we provided several recommendations and strategies to avoid and remove raptor nesting habitat and raptor perches, and decrease road-kill that would increase raptor activity in the area of mining activities. The UDWR continues to consult with Department of Transportation and the BLM to develop partnership opportunities to reduce the impact of increased road traffic as a result of mining activities.

Strategy: Improve age distribution of plants within sagebrush-steppe communities by 2016.

Action: Coordinate among agencies and landowners to fund implementation of projects and monitoring.

The CCARM members collaborated to introduce habitat treatments project proposal to the Utah Partners for Conservation Development. Furthermore, we have proposed important habitat improvement areas that could be addressed through the Alton Coal EIS mitigation process.

Strategy: Increase participation of public and private landowners within the Resource Area.

Action: Develop partnerships with landowners and interest groups to increase visibility of sage-grouse management.

Action: Host open houses, field tours, and presentations.

Our facilitator, Nicki Frey, developed a greater sage-grouse education presentation for the Upper Sevier River Watershed Management Group's Natural Resource Days. Dr. Frey presented an interactive program to over 500 elementary school children, introducing them to sage-grouse natural history and conservation strategies.

Project and Research Highlights

With the introduction of Alton Coal LLC's coalmine in Sink Valley, we stopped conducting research on sage-grouse in the area. However, CCARM continues to be interested in the

relatedness among different lekking populations, winter habitat use locations, and responses to habitat treatments throughout our management area. In 2012 the BLM funded a new project to initiate a ground survey and GPS telemetry study on the sage-grouse in the CCARM area. In particular, we will conduct bird dog surveys to determine sage-grouse winter use of areas we have long suspected of harboring grouse, but have never had the opportunity to confirm. Additionally, we will deploy 6 GPS transmitters to begin the process of answering the questions of relatedness and movement patterns among our grouse populations.

Revision of Threat Matrix and Strategies Sections of Local Plan

In addition to these activities, CCARM members updated our threats matrix from 2005, in response to habitat and human development changes in the area (Table 3).

Map Revisions

During the Governor's Task Force process major changes were made to the CCARM sage grouse occupied areas from the 2006 plan. The change reflect current known occupied habitats and areas where there is the potential to expand the habitat base. The CCARM working group will continue to work with UDWR and other agencies to modify and improve these areas as more information becomes available and is needed.

Summary of Major Issues and/or Concerns

The Alton Coal Mine will result in direct impacts to birds that inhabit this area. The CCARM will continue to work with all partners to monitor sage-grouse response and identify, implement, and evaluate mitigation opportunities.

Table 3. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the CCARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

Threat	Aspects of Sage-grouse population in the CoCARM Resource Area							
	Reduced population size	Population distribution	reduced lek habitat quality	Reduced nesting/early brood-rearing habitat quality	Reduced summer/late brood-rearing habitat quality	Reduced winter habitat quality	Reduced connectivity of seasonal habitat types	Reduced connectivity of populations & sub-populations
Enhanced native and domestic predators	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Recreational use	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	Medium	Medium
Invasive/alien vegetation species	High	High	Medium	Very High	High	Medium	High	High
Concentrated wildlife and/or livestock use	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Fire and vegetation management	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
Development of roads or utilities	High	Medium	Medium	Very High	High	High	High	High
Lack of communication among public parties	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Diseases and parasites	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Alternative land uses (mining, wind power, water development)	High	High	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
Dramatic weather events	Low	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High	High