

Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resources Management (MSARM) Local Sage-grouse Working Group

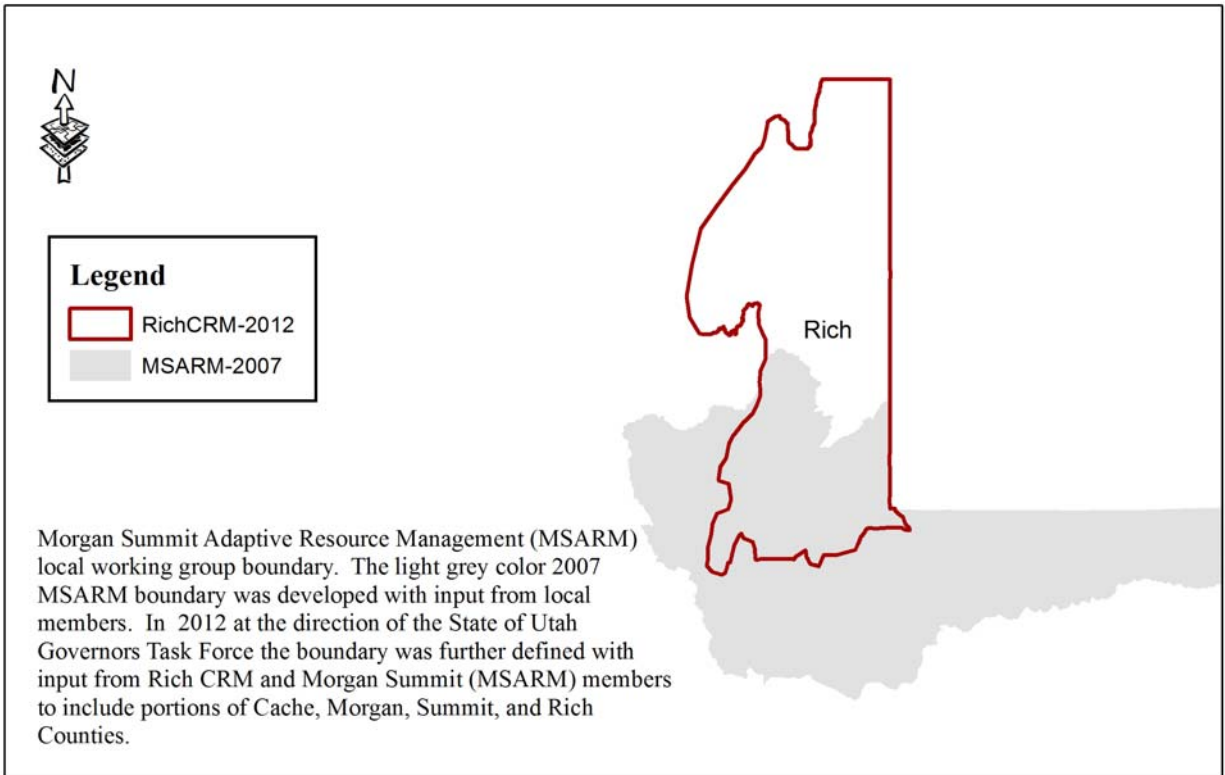


Figure 6. The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). The MSARM has been incorporated into the Rich-Morgan-Summit SGMA.



The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) sage-grouse local working group is facilitated by Ms. Lorien Belton. The group met four times in 2012, with several additional meetings of subgroups to address specific issues. The group continues to meet on a regular schedule to review and update their conservation plan.

This year the LWG outlined research and information needs in advance of implementing projects. The focus of specific projects has primarily centered on the Henefer-Divide lek, with direct mortality threats being addressed through public information signage. The group continued to work to expand these efforts to increase awareness of grouse that lek on or near the highway. Future projects will likely address fence collisions and the behavior of visitors to the lek, as well as working with local landowners to begin habitat improvement work.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The LWG area includes all of Morgan and Summit Counties. The two counties consist largely of privately-owned land, particularly where sage-grouse are found. Sage-grouse habitat in these areas occurs at higher elevations and is usually more mesic than some of Utah's other sage-grouse areas (Note: during 2011-2012, the area experienced a severe drought.). Although our knowledge of sage-grouse populations in the area is incomplete, the UDWR believes the birds in this area are connected to populations in Rich County and southwestern Wyoming. During the development of the Utah Plan, maps of the MSARM area were combined with the Rich County area to reflect this population connectivity. The exact boundaries of these maps are still being finalized.

2012 Conservation Strategies and Actions

The MSARM group continued to develop projects and conduct outreach according to the revised strategies and actions in the local conservation plan. In the upcoming year, particular focus will be placed on:

- Continue to develop proposals for private lands projects to improve sage-grouse habitat where needed
- Continuing to consider funding opportunities for research on local sage-grouse populations
- Working to implement public information and outreach activities identified in the revised strategies and actions
- Revise the local conservation plan to address new information
- Continue efforts to engage and assist counties in sage-grouse planning processes, particularly with respect to county-level participation in the governor's sage-grouse planning efforts
- Work to expand private landowner awareness of sage-grouse issues in the MSARM area and encourage use of SGI funds for project implementation, where appropriate.

Revision of Threat Matrix and Strategies Sections of Local Plan

The threat matrix was revised by the group over a series of meetings extending through the past year and a half (Table 4). Each individual threat level (the intersection of a specific threat and a specific element of the sage-grouse life cycle) in the chart was considered separately. The group debated whether additional information was known, or if conditions had changed from when the plan was written, when considering adjustments to any threat level. Numerous threat levels were adjusted accordingly. Some of the key adjustments to the threat matrix included:

- Addition of a separate column labeled "Lek Quality/Existence"
- Increasing the potential threat level posed by invasive annual grasses, specifically bulbous bluegrass, in winter habitat
- Lowering the stated threat level potentials from roads and energy development, to more accurately reflect pressures on existing populations and habitats

- Increasing the threat levels associated with sagebrush removal on specific aspects of sage-grouse life history
- Clarification of how threats and aspects of sage-grouse life history were stated in the chart

Map Revisions

During the Governor's Task Force planning process, as noted previously, draft statewide maps for sage-grouse management areas were developed. Sage-grouse populations from Morgan and Summit counties were included in the Rich County management area. The areas outlined differ from the best understanding of actual habitat use areas by sage-grouse for several reasons. First, they include both "opportunity areas" and known habitat areas, making the boundaries slightly different than the existing working group boundaries and from current "occupied habitat" maps based on UDWR mapping work, which previously formed the basis of the group's working area. Second, because the intent of the task force process was to focus sage-grouse efforts on areas where the most value could be obtained for work done in those areas, some known sage-grouse areas now fall outside the boundaries of those draft maps. Specifically, leks and associated habitat in the Kamas area falls into that category. The MSARM working group will move into the future working with two sets of maps: understanding that the Governor's Task Force process provided strong direct for focused conservation efforts, MSARM will target habitat and population work in the management area boundaries. However, the exact details of populations in the MSARM area are still unknown, largely due to the high percentage of private land in the area. As increased landowner involvement and more research provides an avenue to potentially identify new or larger populations, and connectivity between populations, MSARM will also continue to work to improve understanding of sage-grouse populations inside and outside the boundaries of the current state draft management areas, in order to increase the accuracy of UDWR habitat maps (breeding, winter, and occupied habitat polygons) and provide a resource for future mapping revisions.

Summary of Major Issues and/or Concerns

The LWG will work jointly with the Rich County group as needed to assist with implementation of the newly developing state sage-grouse plan, but plans to focus primarily on issues specific to the Morgan-Summit area. Key concerns in the area continue to be development/sale potential of important lek areas in both counties and a lack of specific information on population and seasonal habitat use. Developing ways to protect and enhance sage-grouse populations on private land continues to be one of the primary challenges for the MSARM group.

Table 4. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the MSARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005). A “-“ means that MSARM either feels that the threat will not negatively impact the sage grouse population OR that there is not sufficient information regarding that threat’s impact.

Threat	Aspects of Sage-grouse population in the MSARM Resource Area								
	Lek quality/ existence	Population size	Population distribution	Nesting habitat quality and quantity	Brood- rearing habitat quality and quantity	Summer/Fall habitat quality and quantity	Winter habitat quality and quantity	Connectivity of seasonal habitat types (<i>very little known</i>)	Connectivity of populations & sub- populations (<i>very little known</i>)
Drought and weather	-	High	Medium	High	High	High	Low	Medium	Low
Existing and new fences	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Home and cabin development	Very High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Very High
Power lines and other tall structures in key areas	High	Medium	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	High
Energy development/ infrastructure (renewable and non-renewable)	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Roads (mortalities and fragmentation)	High	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Conversion of sagebrush (vegetation management that degrades habitat)	Medium	High	High	High	High	High	Very High	Medium	Medium
Illegal harvest	-	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fire	Low	High	High	High	High	Medium	Very High	High	Medium
Livestock grazing	-	-	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
OHV recreation	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Weeds (particularly annual grasses)	-	-	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very High	Medium	-
Parasites and disease	-	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unusual predation levels (<i>very little known</i>)	-	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pinyon-juniper encroachment	-	-	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low