

Southwest Desert Adaptive Resource Management (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group

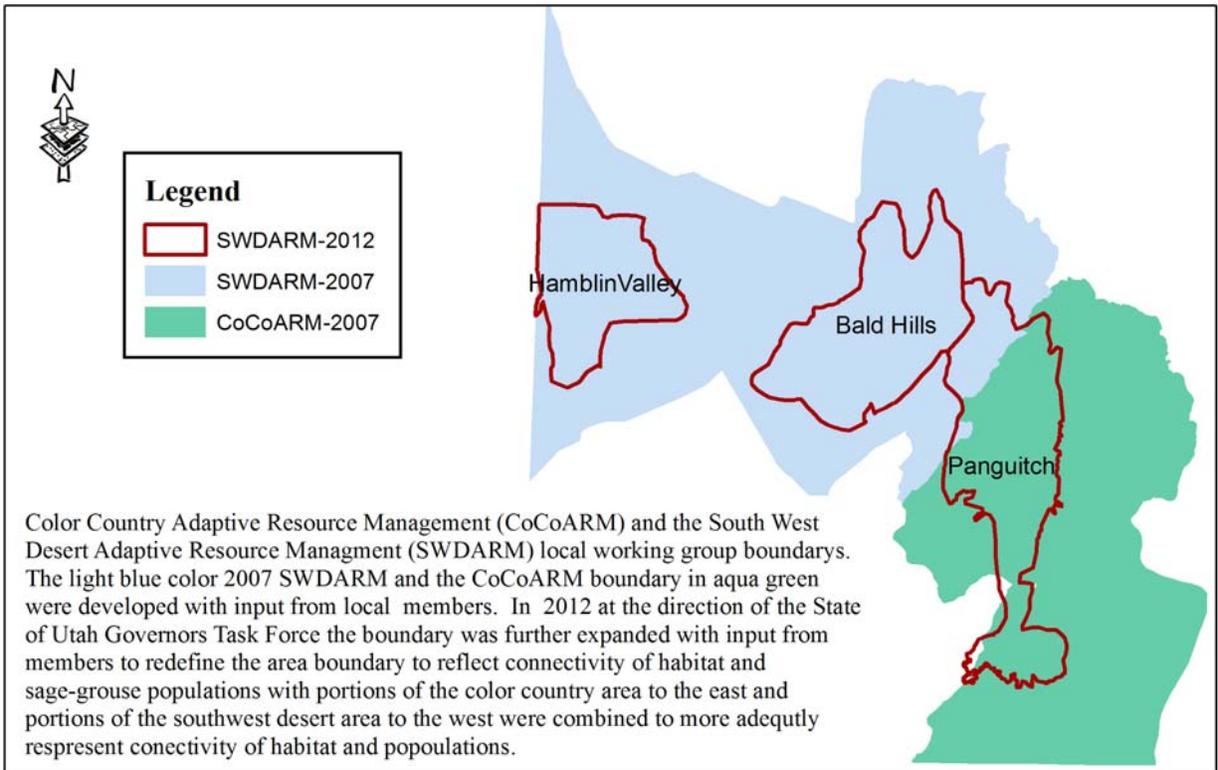


Figure 9. The Southwest Desert Adaptive Resource Management (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). The SWARM area includes the Hamblin Valley and Bald Hills SGMA.



The Southwest Desert Adaptive Resource Management sage-grouse local working group (SWARM) consists of community members from Beaver and Iron Counties and is facilitated by Dr. Nicki Frey. SWARM meets bi-monthly, more frequently if necessary. In the fall of 2011, members of SWARM developed a short list of action items to focus their efforts on in 2012.

One of the main purposes of 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. The Governor’s Task Force has recommended the development of two SGMAs in the LWG conservation area; Hamlin Valley and Bald Hills (Figure 9).

Description of Area and General Population Information

The Bald Hills Management Area is located in southwestern Utah, in Beaver and Iron Counties, and is considered a population stronghold for this region of Utah. This population uses a series of leks throughout the habitat area, with males visiting more than one lek per season. Currently, the population is constrained to the Management Area by vegetation fragmentation and human development; however future improvements could connect this population to the Hamlin Valley Management Area to the west, and further north into Beaver County. The primary land uses in this Management Area are grazing, agriculture, and swine production; predominant land ownership is Bureau of Land Management and private. The BLM manages the Bald Hills for multiple uses including conservation, recreation, energy development, and big game hunting. Residential development is present in Minersville, in the north of the Management Area, where most of the agriculture production also occurs. There is potential for wind energy production as well as current and future power transmission lines.

The Hamlin Valley Management Area is located in southwestern Utah, in Beaver and Iron Counties, on the border of Utah and Nevada and is considered a population stronghold for this region of Utah. Although currently isolated from other habitat areas, habitat restoration could link this population to the Bald Hills Management Area. The primary land use in this Management Area is grazing; predominant land ownership is the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM manages Hamlin Valley for multiple uses including wild horse conservation, recreation, and big game hunting. Development is limited to scattered houses, generally in the southern portion of the Habitat Area.

2012 Conservation Strategies and Actions

Strategies developed by SWARM are designed to be specific to the local area while taking into consideration the guidelines at a rangewide level. SWARM participated in 2 consultation activities in 2012. Members of SWARM assisted in developing the Bald Hills and Hamlin Valley SGMA maps and management plan for the Governor's Task Force. Additionally, USUEXT, UDWR, and BLM have been cooperating to assist in the development of the Sigure-Red Butte transmission line mitigation plan.

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

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

Nile Sorenson and Clint Wirick have been actively engaging landowners in the SWARM area, especially in areas targeted by the SWARM group. They have several projects in Hamlin Valley at this time.

Action: Monitor the response of sage-grouse to changing habitat conditions.

Both the Bald Hills and Hamlin Valley telemetry projects have been instrumental in documenting sage-grouse of habitat reclamation via removal of pinyons and junipers as well as reclamation post-fire. Continued research in this area will increase our knowledge of sage-

grouse response to what we hope is habitat improvements.

Strategy: Increase participation of local public and private landowners with SWARM over the next ten years.

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

This summer, SWARM conducted a field tour of the Minersville area, highlighting fire reclamation sites and research results. The BLM and UACD coordinated to conduct an informative and interesting trip. This fall, SWARM hosted a very successful open house. Members sponsored a dinner prior to several light-hearted presentations, including updates on fire reclamation and graduate student research. More than 40 people attended the event.

Action: Involve the Conservation District representatives more regularly.

Our attempts to involve the Conservation Districts more regularly were very successful. By improving the list serve and making a few phone calls, the UACD greatly increased their involvement, as evidenced by their attendance and support of the both the field tour and the open house.

Strategy: Manage unwanted plant species in sage-brush steppe habitat by 2016.

Action: Evaluate and utilize chemical applications where appropriate to restore habitat dominated by cheatgrass, unwanted species, and/or noxious weeds.

Chad Reid, the USUEXT Iron County agent has been conducting research on different chemical applications for several years. He continues to update SWARM on his research findings, and involves members of SWARM on the research site selection and application support.

Strategy: Minimize impacts of new land developments and/or recreational uses on sage-grouse populations during the next ten years.

Action: Provide input into management plans for federal, state, and local agencies.

Our facilitator provided Iron and Beaver county commissions with updates on annual SWARM activities this year. In addition, we supported UDWR with their presentations and updates of the Governor's Task Force planning process. During the planning process, we consulted with the Iron and Beaver county commissions to provide them with the information necessary for them to submit county and regional management suggestions to the sage-grouse management task force.

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

Action: Determine predator community composition and depredation rate.

USUEXT is currently concluding a study on avian predator communities and the factors that influence fence use in Hamlin Valley.

Project and Research Highlights

The BLM has funded research in the Bald Hills study area. As a result, Dr. Frey and her

graduate student were able to provide USFWS, BLM, and Rocky Mountain Power with key information regarding sage-grouse habitat use and movement patterns in relation to potential power line development. Furthermore, the BLM has continued to fund this research in Hamlin Valley and the Bald Hills to continue to gather information on winter space use and movement patterns in the SGMA areas.

Revision of Threat Matrix and Strategies Sections of Local Plan

The threat matrix was revised by the group over a series of meetings held in 2012 (Table 7). 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. Several threats were modified and the levels of the threat were adjusted accordingly.

Map Revisions

During the Governor's Task Force planning process, as noted previously, draft statewide maps for sage-grouse management areas were developed. The LWG will continue to work with UDWR and other agencies to modify and improve these areas as more information becomes available.

Summary of Major Issues and/or Concerns

Balancing contemporary lands uses and emerging wind energy development and transmission with sage-grouse conservation remains a paramount concern for the LWG.

Table 7. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the SWARM 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 SWARM Resource Area							
	Lack of key habitat type connectivity	Poor condition of surrounding communities	Degradation of winter habitat quality	Loss of breeding quality (leks and nesting) habitat	Loss of brood-rearing habitat quality	Loss of riparian area quality	Reduction of population size	Reduction of population distribution
Enhanced native and domestic predators	Medium	Low	Low	High	High	Medium	High	High
Recreational use	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	Medium	Medium
Invasive/alien vegetation species	High	High	High	Very High	High	Medium	High	High
Concentrated wildlife and/or livestock use	High	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	Low	Very High	High	Medium	Medium	High
Lack of communication among public parties	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Diseases and parasites	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High	High
Alternative land uses (mining, wind power, water development)	High	High	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
Dramatic weather events	High	Medium	Medium	Very High	High	High	High	High