

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

The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) sage-grouse LWG is facilitated by Lorien Belton. The Morgan-Summit group focuses on southern half of the Rich-Morgan-Summit Sage-Grouse Management Area (SMGA).

Description of Area and General Population Information

The LWG area falls in 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. 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.

MSARM Meetings and Field Tours, October 2014 – January 2016

Type	Date	Location	No.	Comments
Meeting	December 11, 2014	Coalville, UT	14	State plan implementation, research project, east canyon area development
Meeting	February 10, 2015	Morgan, UT	11	East canyon development, research updates, easement conversations, predator info
Field Tour	cancelled	East Canyon area	-	
Meeting	November 4, 2015	Coalville, UT	11	Preliminary research findings, easement strategy, and USFS plan implementation
Landowner dinner	January 26, 2016	Morgan, UT	38	New research findings presentation, Q&A

Project and Research Highlights

During 2014, several private developers who own land in sage-grouse habitat in Morgan County brought forward a proposal to the county for steps to be taken toward allowing the land to be developed. The local working group was involved as a center for information provision and discussion for those interested in the issue. Many MSARM members attended county planning and council meetings in addition to regular local working group meetings, and helped ensure that county officials had relevant science and information regarding the sage-grouse to make in their decision. The county eventually declined to change the County General Plan as the owners had

requested, so the sage-grouse habitat area remains for the time being in an agriculture and recreation area, zoned agricultural-160.

The MSARM group was pleased to have a research project initiated in the area in 2014. Brandon Flack, a graduate student at USU working with Terry Messmer, has been trapping and radio-marking of sage-grouse in MSARM area, and has almost one full year of data on bird movements, habitat selection information, and other information. This information will be useful for helping understand where areas are key habitat for local sage-grouse populations in different seasons. It is also crucial to beginning to understand where best habitat projects might improve the situation for sage-grouse. Because until recently we have had very little information about the birds' seasonal movements, habitat projects have generally not been being done in the area due to an abundance of caution and the likelihood that they were using some areas year-round.

A final topic of considerable discussion in the MSARM group has been easements. There are a large number of individual landowners in the general area of the sage-grouse habitat in Morgan and Summit counties would have expressed interest in conservation easements. However, due to limited funding, high demand, and uncertainty about which areas sage-grouse needed most critically, fewer easements have been put in place than might otherwise have been. A small sub-team of the MSARM group has been working to articulate the interest levels and need, so that it can be combined with newly emerging data on grouse habitat use. This information may be helpful in future funding or information requests about needs in the area.