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

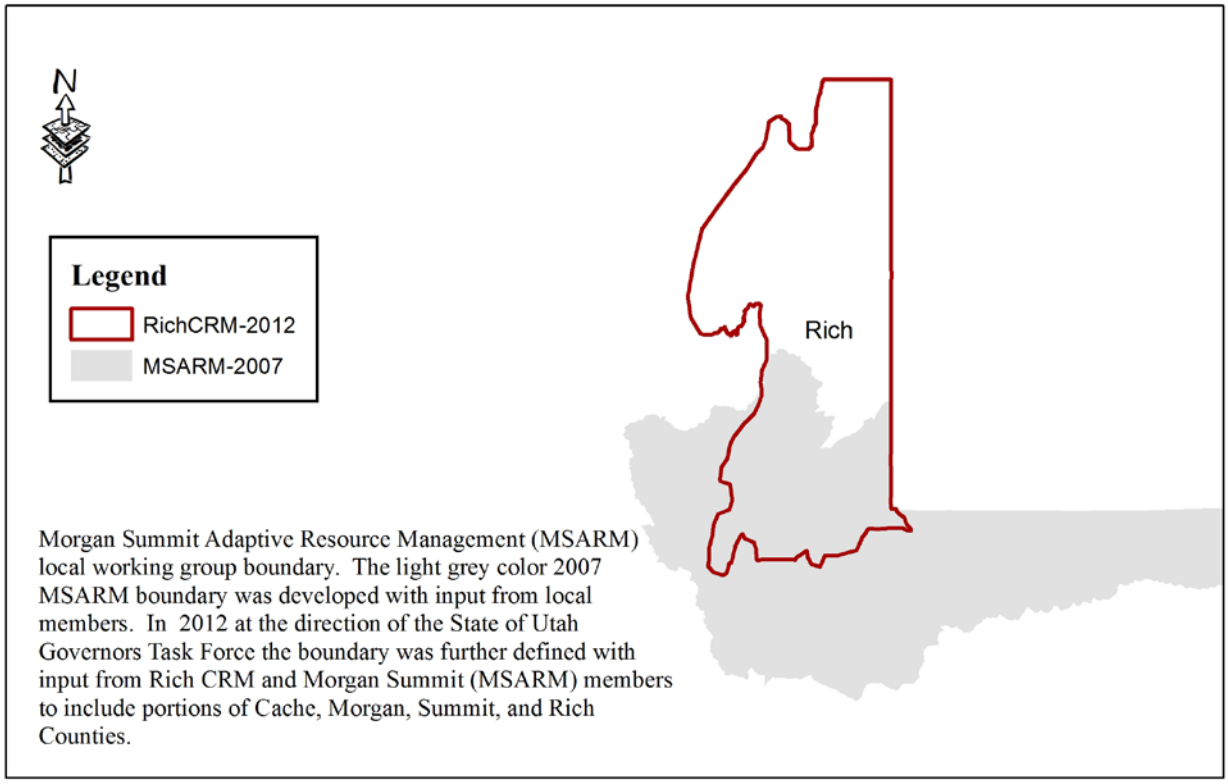

Figure 6. The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). The MSARM has been incorporated into the Rich-Morgan-Summit SGMA.

The Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resource Management (MSARM) sage-grouse local working group is facilitated by Ms. Lorien Belton.

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. 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.

Project and Research Highlights

Early in the reporting period, this group experienced a great deal of turnover, with changes within key positions at UDWR, both counties, NRCS's SGI, and the conservation district. The strength of the local working group model, however, is the group provides a structure for new people to quickly learn about local sage-grouse issues and become quickly linked in to a network that would otherwise take many years to build personally. Introductions are made quickly and new participants have access to past minutes and other information stored on the Utah CBCP website.

Updates regarding both state and federal planning processes, as well as implementation details for the Utah state sage-grouse plan, were presented and discussed at all pertinent meetings. In several cases, clarification questions or concerns that arose during meetings were relayed to appropriate authorities in the state government.

After several years of planning, a research project has been funded to study the sage-grouse population in the MSARM area for the first time. This is a critical first step in understanding the birds' movements in the area. Data collection will begin in the spring of 2015, using both radio collars and GPS collars on the birds. The knowledge gained in this study will be instrumental in designing future habitat improvement projects.

Several sage-grouse habitat improvement projects on private land in the area have been done or are in the planning and implementation phases. These include firebreaks in known sage-grouse nesting habitat, which will likely also improve understory diversity and quality, grazing changes designed to improve visibility on lek areas, and grazing improvement and water development efforts that will benefit both sage-grouse and livestock.

County planning staff from both Morgan and Summit Counties have been receptive to information about sage-grouse. Ensuring that County staff and other local government officials are aware of sage-grouse issues has been a long-term goal for the MSARM group. During the reporting period, members of the LWG have worked together to ensure that county staff have access to and knowledge of critical sage-grouse information. This is important since the majority of land in both counties is private, and conservation measures are voluntary. Therefore, county actions based on full knowledge of the sage-grouse ecological and political context is critical to conservation efforts in the area. Most recently, the MSARM LWG has become a clearinghouse for information regarding a potential development in the East Canyon reservoir area. LWG members have attended county planning meetings to help ensure that accurate information is available.

Of most immediate concern to the MSARM group is the potential development in the East Canyon area. LWG members attend appropriate public meetings, provide information on sage-grouse to local officials, and will continue to monitor the situation. The new research project will be critical to many future efforts within the group. Development, conservation easements, and strategic protection of sage-grouse in the primarily private land areas with the MSARM boundary will continue to be an ongoing challenge. Additional efforts will be made to ensure that MSARM area livestock producers with interests in other areas (for example, Strawberry

Valley or West Desert grazing leases) with sage-grouse habitat are given the opportunity to comment on and understand sage-grouse issues in appropriate non-MSARM areas.

As relevant, MSARM will review UPCD/WI projects proposed in the area. In 2013-14, only one project was applicable. The group provided design and implementation suggestions for the project, which focused on mowing sagebrush strategically for fire protection in a sage-grouse habitat areas. The project was subsequently removed from WRI funding channels and managed by the Grazing Improvement Program.

The Morgan Conservation District will sponsor the 2014 field tour as an extension of an existing event generally well-attended by local livestock producers and landowners.

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.

	Aspects of Sage-grouse population in the MSARM Resource Area								
Threat	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 ***(very little known)***	Connectivity of populations & sub-populations ***(very little known)***
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 ***(very little known)***	-	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pinyon-juniper encroachment	-	-	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low