

Parker Mountain Adaptive Resource Management (PARM) Local Sage-grouse Working Group

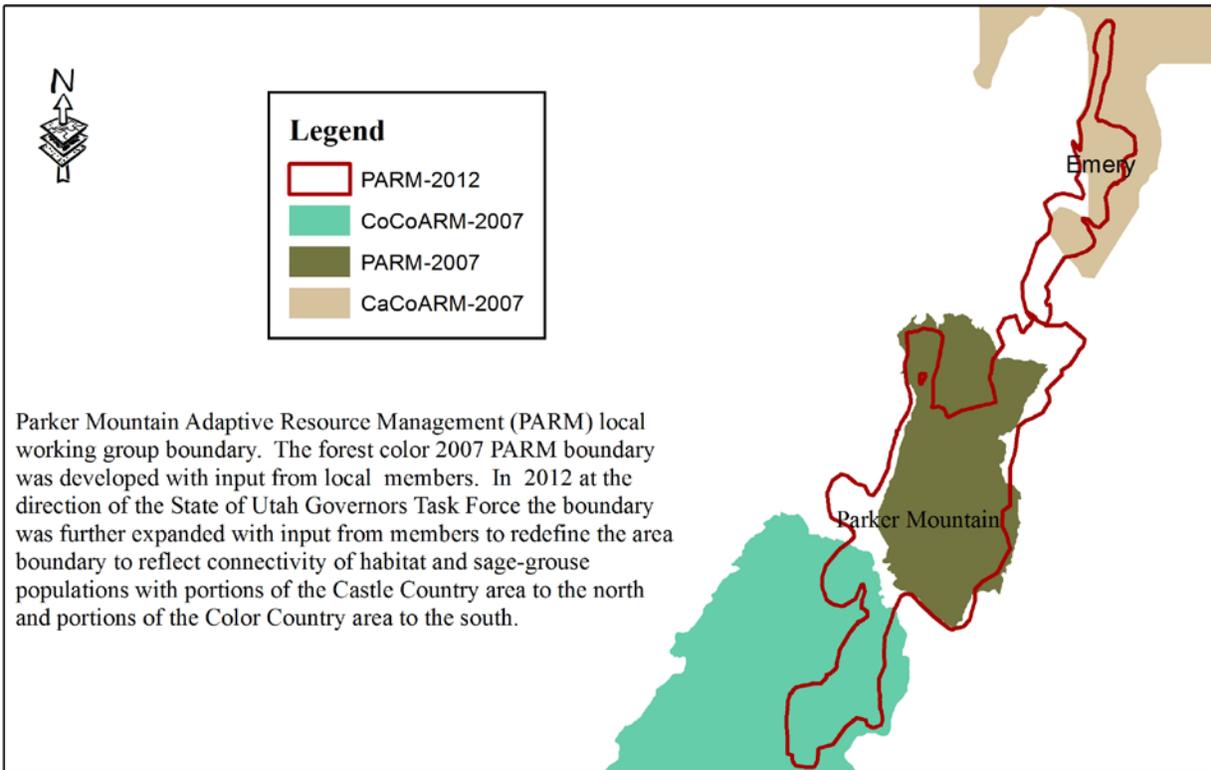


Figure 7. The Parker Mountain – Emery County Adaptive Resource Management (PARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). Emery County has been incorporated into Parker Mountain – Emery SGMA.



The Parker Mountain Adaptive Resource Management Plan (PARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group was organized in 1998. PARM consists of state and federal agency personnel, representatives from local government, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, private industry, and private individuals. This LWG is currently facilitated by Dr. Dave Dahlgren.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The PARM LWG area covers portions of Garfield, Piute, and Wayne Counties that contain occupied sage-grouse habitats. Sage-grouse habitat in this area is well connected and the majority of the sage-grouse can be found on the Awapa and Aquarius plateaus. It is broken down into three sub regions; the Parker, Fish Lake, and Grass Valley. See <http://utahcbcp.org/files/uploads/parm/PARMfml-10-06-web.pdf> for maps and figures.

The PARM area has been the most studied population of sage-grouse in Utah going back to 1998 and there have been several publications made available through these research efforts in addition to annual reports. See <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups/parkermountain> for more information.

Meetings:

Nov. 7, 2013 – 18 attendees (Loa Courthouse)

Feb. 4, 2014 – 20 attendees (Loa Courthouse)

Apr. 14, 2014 – 16 attendees (Loa Courthouse) – meeting and morning Lek Count

Field Tours:

Date: Aug. 8, 2013 - Attendees : 21 (Organizations Represented: USFS, UDWR, BLM, USFWS, Grazing Association, Wayne County Commission, SITLA, GIP, USU Extension)

Topics: We discussed sage-grouse use of livestock areas for lekking habitat. Parker Mountain has a long history of sage-grouse males selecting areas where livestock have bedded or watered in combination for their leks. We visited a recently renovated pond where a new sage-grouse lek began in 2013. We also discussed Utah Prairie Dog issues, and why the USFWS cannot count dogs on SITLA towards recovery goals. We visited Forshea Draw which was treated with Spike Fall 2012. We discussed treatment and kill rates on sagebrush. Some felt the effect was just right, others felt like the overall kill on sagebrush was a little too much. All agreed that in the long run it probably wouldn't hurt the sage-grouse population overall, and that mountain big sagebrush communities on Parker Mountain tend to recovery rather quickly (< 10 years) and continued sagebrush treatment in mountain sagebrush communities at the higher elevations should be part of future conservation efforts both for sage-grouse and livestock.

Date: June 26, 2014 - Attendees: 29 (Organizations Represented: USFS, UDWR, BLM, USFWS, TNC, Grazing Association, Wayne County Commission, Emery County Commission, SITLA, GIP, RC&D, Farm Bureau, USU Extension)

Topics: Utah Prairie Dog habitat was discussed and future management on USFS lands, especially near Big Lake on the Dixie National Forest. SITLA received a proposal from TNC and USFWS to purchase land through a federal grant near the Tanks Colony and Forshea Draw on the Parker SITLA Block for prairie dog conservation. Approximately 1500 acres was proposed in total. Discussions ensued to consider concerns over such a purchase. Local grazing association and county commissioners were concerned about philosophical differences for using federal funds to purchase private lands, future grazing rights, past investments, and maintaining current grazing regimes. USFWS and UDWR expressed interest in purchasing the land so that prairie dogs within those areas could be counted towards a delisting of the species. Currently only dogs on federal or conservation easement lands are counted towards population objectives within the Utah Prairie Dog Recovery Plan. All involved came to a better appreciation of local concerns as well as larger scale issues for prairie dogs. Sagebrush treatments, especially past large scale spike treatments in Butte, South, Nick's, Forshea, and Chicken Springs pastures were discussed. We discussed USU's, in association with SITLA and GIP, vegetation study within

these areas. USU is monitoring vegetation response over time scales (time since treatment – each pasture was treated in a different year going back to the mid-2000s) by treatment, response of passerine sagebrush obligates and sage-grouse as well.

Projects Proposed with benefit for sage-grouse:

| Name | Treatment Type | Proposed Date | Partners | Comments |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| Cedar Groves | Pinyon-Juniper removal | Fall 2014 | BLM, UDWR, WRI | Near multiple sage-grouse leks |
| Grass Valley East Rim | Pinyon-Juniper removal | Fall 2014 | BLM, UDWR, WRI | Sage-grouse winter and nesting habitat |
| Bar J Ranch | Dixie Harrow Pinyon-Juniper Removal | NA | UDWR, WRI, Private | Expanding fragmented sagebrush areas |
| Mormon Peak | Pinyon-Juniper removal | 2015 WRI Cycle | WRI, UDWR, SITLA | Expanding space in sage-grouse habitat |
| Mytogi Mountain Watershed Restoration | Pinyon-Juniper removal, Spike, Aspen Regeneration | TBD | USFS, BLM, UDWR | NEPA would need to be completed for USFS and BLM |

Project and Research Highlights:

Currently there is a research project being conducted by USU in association with SITLA and GIP. Large (~500 – 1000 ac) sagebrush areas on Parker Mountain were treated with Tebuthiuron (i.e., Spike) over the last 10 years, each in a different year, in the upper elevation Nick’s, Chicken Springs, South, Forshea, and Buttes pastures. Nearby untreated reference areas have also been established to provide baseline information within pastures. Time since treatment is successively different for each pasture. Therefore, we can consider forage, vegetation community, and wildlife response to these treatments over successive recovery periods. The objectives are to; 1) model a forage response curve against shrub cover for time since treatment, 2) evaluate herbaceous and shrub cover since treatment, and 3) monitor sagebrush obligate bird use of treated areas. Additionally, random vegetation sampling transects across the entire sage-grouse breeding habitats on Parker Mountain have been established based on historic nesting data. These transects will be used to describe sage-grouse breeding habitat on the mountain.

PARM proposed a boundary change to the Parker-Emery SGMA in February 2014. An exclusion for agricultural lands in Fremont River Valley (near Loa and Bicknell) was proposed (~35,000 ac). An addition (~28,000 ac) north of Koosharem Reservoir encompassing Mormon

Mountain and other SITLA, USFS, and private lands was also proposed. The Public Lands and Policy Coordination Office is currently reviewing this request. Articles in the local newspaper and The Communicator (USU Extension) were published detailing PARM's proposal.

PARM includes a diverse group of stakeholders. Federal, State, and County level personnel regularly attended and participated in this local community-based process. During the June 2014 field tour multiple private landowners and permittees attended to discuss issues with state and federal agency personnel. Additionally, an uncontested candidate running for the Wayne County Commission also attended and commented how impressed he was with how PARM addresses complex issues. The LWG process helps with local and regional communication, not only for project implementation but to resolve conflict and increase communication between constituent groups. For example, the proposed boundary changes for the Parker-Emery SGMA demonstrated to local stakeholders that PARM has their interest at heart while also providing important data-driven justification for proposed changes to fit within regional and statewide sage-grouse conservation objectives. This is an example of a benefit the LWG process provides which is difficult to quantify and assess impact.

Table 5. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the PARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

| Threats | Reduced population size | Population distribution | Reduced breeding habitat quality | Reduced late summer/fall habitat quality | Reduced winter habitat quality | Reduced connectivity of seasonal habitat types | Reduced connectivity of populations and sub-populations |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Hindrance of ability to maintain and implement local management decisions | High | High | High | High | High | High | High |
| Power lines and other tall structures | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | High | High |
| Natural resource exploration and development | High | High | Low | High | High | Medium | Medium |
| Excessive hunting pressure | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Prolonged drought and extreme weather shifts | High | - | Low | High | High | - | - |
| Lack of proper range management | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Altered fire regimes | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Herbivory practices that are detrimental to the habitat (wild/domestic) | High | High | Low | High | High | Medium | Medium |
| Incompatible OHV and recreation | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Medium |
| Invasive/noxious weeds | High | High | High | Very High | High | Medium | Low |
| Parasites and disease | Very High | Very High | Low | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Extraordinary predation | Very High | Very High | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium |
| Lack of vegetation management | High | Medium | High | High | High | High | Medium |
| Pinyon-juniper encroachment | High | High | High | High | High | High | Medium |
| Livestock grazing | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |