Rich County Coordinated Resource Management Sage-grouse Local Working Group

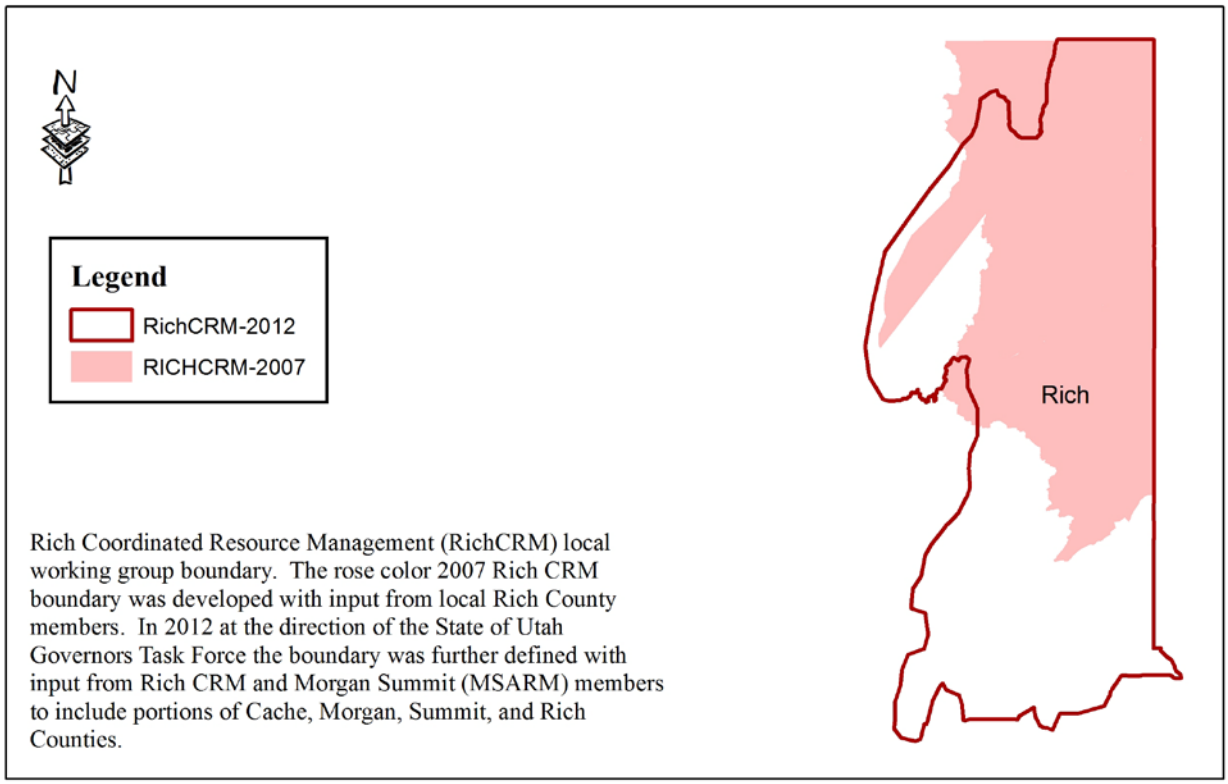

Figure 8. The Rich County Coordinated Resource Management (RICHCO) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and the new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). The SGMA includes portions of Morgan and Summit Counties.

The Rich County Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group (RICHCO) is facilitated by Dr. David Dahlgren. The RICHCO consists of state and federal agency personnel, representatives from local government, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, private industry, and private individuals.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The Rich CRM is located in northeastern Utah, and is a significant population center for grouse in three states – Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming (Figure 8). The SGMA management area includes Cache, Rich, Weber, Morgan, Summit and Wasatch Counties. The area boundary was determined by consulting with adjacent states, UDWR, and the Morgan-Summit Adaptive Resources Management Local Sage-grouse Working Group, and the CRM. It incorporates vegetation types used by sage-grouse.

Currently, there are 51 known active leks counted in the CRM boundary. The average number of sage-grouse attending these leks exceeds 20 males. One lek found on the Utah/Idaho border is one of the largest in the state with male counts often exceeding 150 grouse. The population

remained stable with a slight decline in population numbers and male lek attendance since 2010. The area remains one of four areas in the state that still allows conservative hunting of sage-grouse. This follows similar trends throughout the state of Utah. This population is regarded as one of the most stable in Utah with a potential for growth. Sage-grouse in this area show resiliency to known threats, and are not regarded as being in jeopardy.

Meetings:

Nov. 21, 2013 (Board Meeting) – 10 attendees
Dec. 2013 – weather delay
Jan. 2014 – weather delay
Apr. 10, 2014 – 20 attendees

Field Tours:

Date: July 16, 2013- Attendees: 18 (Organizations Represented: UDWR, UDNR, USFS, USU Ext., BLM, QRM, NRCS, Conservation District, Grazing Association)

Topics: We met at the DLL Ranch gate just south of Woodruff. We visited an alfalfa seeding on DLL, where sage-grouse broods have been spending the summer. We also visited the UDWR Woodruff Coop Wildlife Area and looked at recent and older sagebrush treatment sites. We talked about sage-grouse and big game use of these areas. Sage-grouse primarily use the area in the winter with some lekking present on the Coop. We then visited some historic treatment areas on DLL at lower elevations. They had crested wheatgrass in them, and were at one time crested wheatgrass monocultures, but sagebrush has returned, albeit at lower sagebrush canopy cover than ecological site descriptions. The area is used as wintering grounds as long as snow pack is not too much. We talked about sage-grouse winter habitat and future management within WRI.

Date: Sept. 4-5, 2013- Attendees: 21 (Organizations: Region 6 USFWS Staff, UDWR, Box Elder and Rich County Commissioners, USU Extension, Landowner/Producers, UDAF GIP, BLM)

Topics: The primary purpose of this tour was to show Region 6 USFWS staff the efforts Utah was making to implement the Sage-Grouse Plan and to connect federal staff with local government and landowners. We visited multiple sites in West Box Elder County on the first day. We visited PJ treated sites across the SGMA. We saw high quality sage-grouse habitat on private lands and talked about the importance of private land conservation in our very public land state. We visited low elevation sagebrush sites in Box Elder County used as winter, lek, and nesting habitat, and how we are using fire-breaks to protect these areas. We then returned to Logan, and had a presentation by UDAF GIP on the Three Creeks project in Rich County. We talked about grazing systems and how they might influence vegetation across the landscape. We visited Rich County the following day, visiting Three Creeks along Big Creek where future projects are planned. We also visited DLL, and talked about various management practices they have used to work within sagebrush systems. During the entire 2-day tour we discussed the use of science and monitoring to help evaluate implementation of Utah's Sage-Grouse Plan and how they related to sage-grouse conservation.

Date: June 24, 2014 - Attendees: 13 (Organizations Represented: UDWR, USFS, USU Ext., BLM, QRM, NRCS, Conservation District, Grazing Association)

Topics: We met in Woodruff and drove south to a private land property where a bullhog was in the middle of treating a Pinyon-Juniper stand. We witnessed how the bullhog works up close. We traveled through the proposed treatment site, which would connect lekking and nesting habitat to higher elevation summer habitat, and possibly serve as wintering area. We then traveled up to the USFS property north and west of Big Creek. A sagebrush treatment with Dixie Harrow (2-way) was implemented the previous growing season. We looked at the treatment response and how a mosaic of treatment can take place within mountain big sagebrush for sage-grouse brooding habitat. We then traveled to a lower elevation site just west of Randolf, where Adam Brewerton (UDWR Sensitive Species Biologist) had set traps for pocket gophers. We witnessed the trapping of an Idaho Pocket Gopher. Adam explained the biology of this rodent and how Idaho Pocket Gophers have been recently rediscovered in northern Utah.

Projects Proposed:

Name	Treatment Type	Proposed Date	Partners	Comments
North of Woodruff	Pinyon-Juniper removal	Summer 2014	NRCS – SGI, producers	Near a couple sage-grouse leks
Water Improvement and PJ removal	Tank and waterline development	Fall 2014	NRCS – SGI, Producers, DLL	Sage-grouse Habitat
USFS Aspen Regeneration and Fuels Reduction	Fire – Aspen Stands	Fall 2014	BLM	Douglas Fir encroachment
Three Creeks – Grazing Improvement	Grazing System Changes	2015	GIP, Producers, SGI, USU	High Intensity – Short Duration Grazing System

Project and Research Highlights:

Total male lek counts during the spring of 2014 are up by 74% compared to 2013 counts. After a successful trapping season, USU graduate student Seth Dettenmaier and his technicians captured over 90 female sage-grouse, and ended up with 28 and 21 hens remaining on Three Creeks and DLL, respectively. Nest initiation rates continued to be lower than expected on DLL, while Three Creeks improved considerably with 52% (n=11) and 85.7% (n=24) of radio-marked hens initiating nests on DLL and Three Creeks, respectively. Modeled nest survival was 39.5% (n=6) and 10.6% (n=6) on DLL and Three Creeks, respectively. There were also 3 renest attempts after first nest failures at Three Creeks. Brood survival was particularly good this year compared to previous years.

The Rich CRM includes a diverse group of stakeholders from private and public organizations. The communication and collaborative process of the CRM allowed for increased understanding of various view points as well as oversight to upcoming projects. The Rich County Commission considers the CRM its official body for reviewing and approving projects that occur within the county. For example, all WRI projects that are going to be implemented are reviewed by the CRM with at least one county commissioner present. This allows for much greater inter-organizational communication of projects and more informed representatives of all participating entities.

Table 6. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the Rich CRM 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
Home and cabin development	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Power lines, fences, and other tall structures	High	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Renewable and non-renewable energy development	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Low	Low
Roads	High	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Drought and weather	High	High	Medium	High	Low	High	High
Hunting pressure	Low	Medium	-	-	-	-	High
Incompatible fire management practices	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
Incompatible livestock grazing management	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
Incompatible OHV and recreation	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Invasive/noxious weeds	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Parasites and disease	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	High
Predation	Medium	Medium	Low	-	-	-	Medium
Vegetation management	-	-	High	High	High	High	Medium
Pinyon-juniper encroachment	-	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low