

**Utah's Adaptive Resources Management
Greater Sage-grouse Local Working Groups**

Accomplishment Report

2009-2010



Photo by Todd Black

November 2010

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Submitted to

Michael, J. Styler, Executive Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources

Jim Karpowitz, Director, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Submitted by

**Noelle Cockett, Vice President for University Extension and Agriculture,
Utah State University, Logan**

Staff Members

**Terry A. Messmer, Lorien Belton, Todd Black, S. Nicole Frey, Rae Ann Hart
Utah Community-Based Conservation Program, Jack H. Berryman Institute
Department of Wildland Resources, Utah State University, Logan.**

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Preface

This report summarizes the 2009 and early 2010 accomplishments of Utah's Adaptive Resource Management Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*, hereafter referred to as sage-grouse) Local Working Groups (LWGs). These groups were facilitated by staff affiliated with the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program (CBCP). This report incorporates the information requested under 50 CFR Chapter IV, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) When Making Listing Decisions (USFWS 2003). Specific topics addressed by the LWGs plans include:

1. Staffing, funding, funding sources, and other resources necessary to implement LWG's plans.
2. Legal authority of the partners to implement the plan.
3. The legal procedural requirements (environmental reviews) needed to implement the plans and how this will be accomplished.
4. Authorizations or permits that may or will be needed and how these will be obtained.
5. The type and level of voluntary participation (number of landowners involved, types of incentives used to increase participation).
6. Regulatory mechanisms (laws, ordinances, etc.) that may be necessary to implement the plans.
7. A statement regarding the level of certainty that the funding to implement the plans will be obtained.
8. An implementation schedule to include incremental completion dates.
9. A copy of LWG's approved management plans (These reports are available on our web site www.utahcbcp.org).

The conservation plans discuss the level of certainty that the management efforts identified and implemented will be effective. Specific topics addressed in the conservation plans include:

1. The nature and extent of threats to be addressed by the LWG's plans and how management efforts will reduce the threats described.
2. Explicit objectives for each management action contained in the plans and dates for achieving.
3. The steps needed or undertaken to implement management actions.
4. The quantifiable, scientifically valid parameters by which progress will be measured (e.g., change in lek counts, improved habitat conditions).
5. How the effects of the management actions will be monitored and reported.
6. How the principles of adaptive management resource management are being implemented.

The LWG sage-grouse conservation plans, previous annual reports, and meeting minutes can be accessed at www.utahcbcp.org.

Executive Summary

The Community-based Conservation Program (CBCP) encompasses the historical range of sage-grouse in Utah as identified in the 2002 (2009 revised) Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse (Figure 1). The plan, approved by the Utah Wildlife Board on 1 June 2002 (revised 2009), mandated the organization of local sage-grouse working groups (LWGs) to develop and implement sage-grouse conservation plans. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) in cooperation with Utah State University Extension (USUEXT), private landowners, public and private natural resource, wildlife management, and conservation agencies and organizations have implemented the CBCP.

In 2009-2010, Utah's Adaptive Resources Management Greater Sage-grouse (hereafter referred to as sage-grouse) LWGs continued implementation of their Sage-grouse Conservation Plans (Plan). The LWGs include representatives from state and federal agencies of land and resource management, non-governmental organizations, private industry, local communities, and private landowners.

In this report we summarize efforts of the LWGs to implement the conservation strategies and actions outlined in their Plans. Please note that if a strategy or an action number is missing from this report or no comments are reported under a specific strategy; it means that no action(s) were reported during the period towards its completion. These strategies meet the guidelines set forth by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in their Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) standards. The conservation strategies and actions address the five USFWS listing factors as they apply to sage-grouse in each LWG area. Plan recommendations and guidance are voluntarily being implemented by all LWGs. The LWGs meet regularly to review actions and encourage adoption of Plan conservation strategies and actions. In 2009-2010, additional emphasis was placed on identifying population and habitat conditions and issues specific to each LWG conservation area.

Each LWG plan contains a table of ranked threats that currently or potentially affecting sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats in their area. This threat analysis, combined with recommended strategies and actions, provided a framework for LWGs to implement their Plans over the next ten years. Plans are being implemented using an adaptive resource management approach. As new information emerges from local and range wide conservation efforts, the LWGs are using it to update management strategies, and priorities in their area. All 10 Utah LWGs have completed sage-grouse conservation plans. These plans and summaries of LWG activities can be found online at www.utahcbcp.org.

In 2010, the USUEXT/UDWR LWG partnership (Utah Community-based Conservation Program) was recognized by the Utah Center for Rural Life at Southern Utah University with a 2010 Utah Rural Honors Award. The award was presented by Gov. Gary Herbert at the 2010 Utah Rural Summit, held in Cedar City, Utah on the SUU campus. The award recognizes the unique partnership for engaging Utah rural communities in proactive efforts to conserve sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

Staff

Project Director:

Terry A. Messmer, Professor and Associate Director, Jack H. Berryman Institute, UMC 5230, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-5230. Phone 435-797-3975, Fax 435-797-3796, E-mail terry.messmer@usu.edu

Project Staff:

S. Nicole Frey, Research Assistant Professor, Jack H. Berryman Institute, Department of Wildland Resources, Utah State University (station in the Department of Biology – Southern Utah University, Cedar City).

Todd Black and Lorien Belton, Community-based Conservation Extension Specialists, Utah State University, Logan.

David Dahlgren, Post-Doctoral Fellow, and Rae Ann Hart, Program Assistant, Department of Wildland Resources, Utah State University, Logan.

Funding:

In July 2006, Utah State University entered into a 5 year agreement with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to develop and facilitate the Utah Community-Based Conservation Program. This agreement provides up to \$136,000 annually in funding and in-kind matches through June 30, 2011, to conduct the program. Additional funding of up to \$160,000 a year is provided through by the Jack H. Berryman Institute through Utah State University Extension. Additional support in terms site and agency specific grants and contracts in the amount of \$300,000 were entered into in 2009-2010 to support local working group activities, project monitoring and evaluation.

Legal Authority

The LWG Plans implement Utah's Sage-grouse Strategic Management Plan (Strategic Plan) that was approved by the Utah Wildlife Board in 2002 (UDWR 2002, revised 2009).

Project Goals

1. Protect, enhance, and conserve Utah sage-grouse populations and sagebrush-steppe ecosystems.
2. Establish sage-grouse in areas where they were historically found and the current sagebrush-steppe habitat is capable of maintaining viable populations (Utah Sage-Grouse Management Strategic Plan 2002).
3. Protect, enhance, and conserve other sensitive wildlife species that inhabit Utah

sagebrush-steppe ecosystems.

4. Sustain and enhance socio-economic conditions in affected local communities.
5. Complete actions that make listing sage-grouse as threatened or endangered unwarranted and/or assist in recovery if the species are listed.
6. Increase local stakeholders and community involvement and ownership in the species conservation planning processes.
7. Increase LWGs awareness, appreciation, and the application of the use of science in making land use and population management decisions.

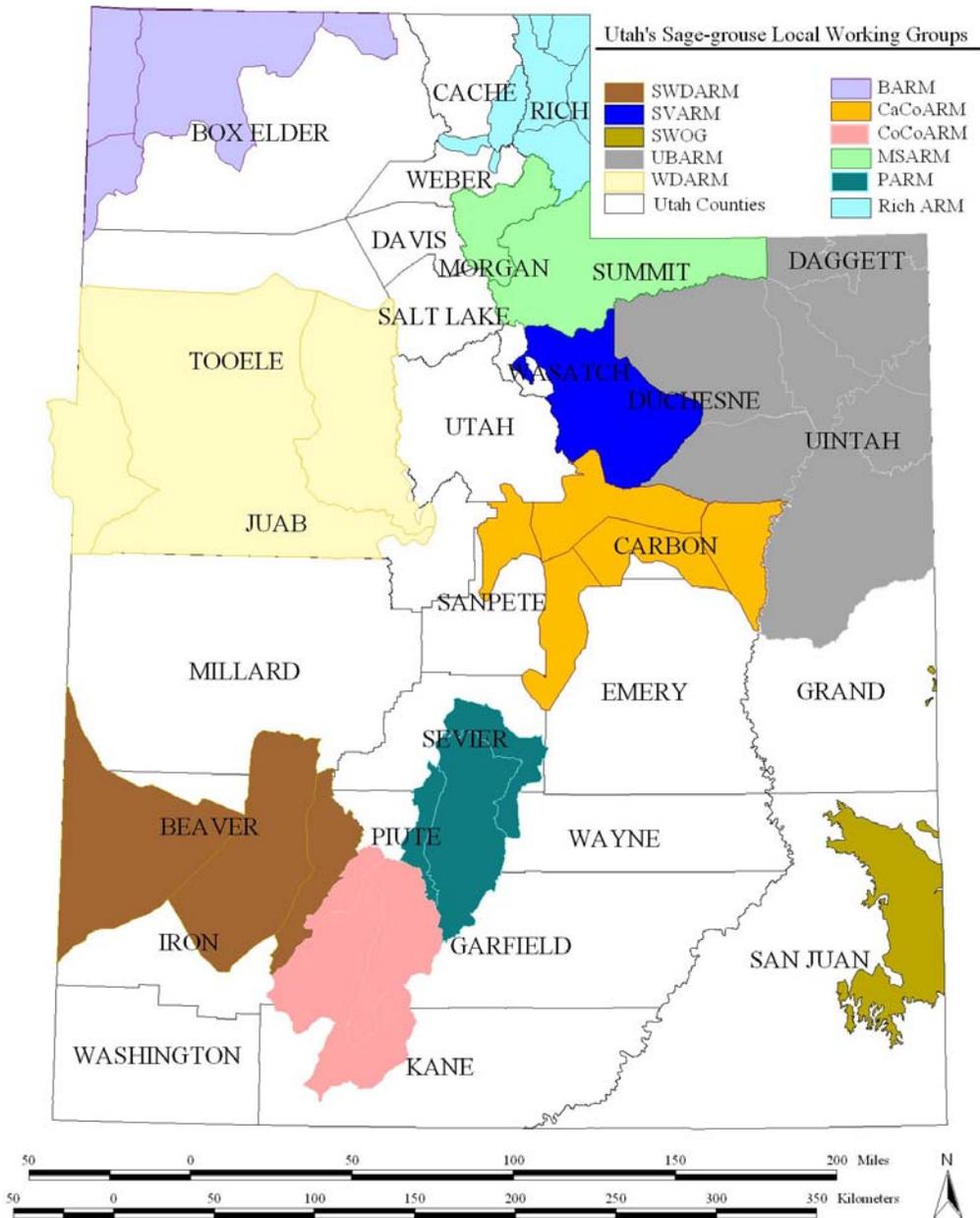


Figure 1. Utah Sage-grouse Conservation Areas, Utah Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse (UDWR 2009). (Note this report summarizes conservation actions completed to benefit greater sage-grouse. Thus it does not include Gunnison sage-grouse conservation actions. This species inhabits San Juan County).

Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group

The Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) sage-grouse local working group is facilitated by Ms. Lorien Belton. SVARM meets three times yearly: a spring meeting, a summer field tour, and a fall meeting. The group may meet more frequently as the need arises.

Conservation Strategies and Actions: 2009-2010 Accomplishments

1. **Strategy:** Provide a system and the reasonable extent of domestic livestock grazing that maintains and improves both the long-term stability of Greater Sage-Grouse populations, and habitats and the livestock industry in the Resource Area.
 - 1.1. **Action:** Coordinate grazing management with livestock operators to reduce resource and timing conflicts on leks and prime nesting habitat when possible.
 - 1.2. **Action:** Apply grazing management practices to achieve desired conditions including maintenance of residual herbaceous vegetation appropriate for the site.
 - 1.3. **Action:** Encourage implementation of grazing systems that provide for areas and times of deferment, while taking into consideration the resource capabilities and needs of the livestock operator.
 - 1.4. **Action:** Manage livestock to enhance riparian conditions.

Most of area is not grazed. No new grazing projects have been implemented, but spring grazing on the UDWR land purchased from Alan Smith continues. The goal of this grazing management is to recover sagebrush in areas with crested wheat grass.

2. **Strategy:** Maintain and, where possible, improve grass/forb component in the understory in nesting and brood-rearing areas.
 - 2.1. **Action:** Reclaim and/or reseed areas disturbed by treatments when necessary, using seed mixtures with appropriate grasses and desirable forbs.
 - 2.2. **Action:** Restore understory vegetation in areas lacking desirable quality and quantity of herbaceous vegetation, where economically feasible.
 - 2.3. **Action:** Conduct vegetation treatments to improve forb diversity (e.g., harrowing, aerating, churning) and reclaim or reseed disturbed areas, if needed.
 - 2.4. **Action:** Develop management techniques to increase forb diversity and density in sagebrush steppe, within limits of ecological sites and annual variations.



Figure 9. The Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group Conservation Area consists of 948,568 acres located in north-eastern Utah.

The UPCD Chicken Springs Ridge project is a sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat project, part of a multi-year effort to treat key areas of sagebrush in the Strawberry Valley. The Chicken Springs project treatment occurred in the fall of 2009.

- 3. Strategy:** Enhance existing riparian areas or create small wet areas to improve nesting and brood-rearing habitat.
 - 3.1. Action:** Identify opportunities or needs to create small wet areas, implement such projects where economically feasible.
 - 3.2. Action:** Design and implement livestock grazing management practices to benefit riparian areas.
 - 3.3. Action:** Modify or adapt pipelines or developed springs, to create small wet areas.
 - 3.4. Action:** Locate projects to minimize the potential loss of water table associated with wet meadows.
 - 3.5. Action:** Protect existing wet meadows and riparian areas where necessary.
 - 3.6. Action:** Manage vegetation and artificial structures to increase water-holding capability of areas.
 - 3.7. Action:** Install catchment structures to slow run-off, hold water, and eventually raise water tables.

As noted in the 2008 report, implementation levels of these projects were reduced because many key areas have been addressed already. Two Strawberry River restoration projects through UPCD took place in the larger sage-grouse habitat area. Water is not a major limiting factor for sage-grouse in the area as it has relatively high water availability compared to many sage-grouse areas elsewhere in Utah.

- 4. Strategy:** Manage pinyon/juniper stands to reduce encroachment into sagebrush/grass communities.
 - 4.1. Action:** Remove encroaching trees and tall shrubs mechanically (chainsaws, chaining, etc.) or by other methods, to maintain visibility at lek sites and security from predation in other seasonal habitats.
 - 4.2. Action:** Brush-cut or treat with other mechanical methods specified areas and re-claim or re-seed as necessary.
 - 4.3. Action:** Coordinate with State Forester to expand defensible space programs to improve sage-grouse habitat where possible.

No P-J removal projects occurred in the area as much work has already been done. In the Northeast DWR region, plans for more lop and scatter projects are in development, to be implemented in future years.

- 5. Strategy:** Improve lek vegetation conditions to allow for predator recognition and visibility.
 - 5.1. Action:** Open lek areas that have been invaded by sagebrush and other shrubs.
 - 5.2. Action:** Map and inventory leks with potential for restoration.
 - 5.3. Action:** Maintain and enhance desired conditions for leks.
 - 5.4. Action:** Coordinate vegetation management to maintain desired conditions
 - 5.5. Action:** Evaluate/monitor treatment effects.

No lek-specific vegetation work was done in 2009-2010. The Chicken Springs treatment is nearby the lek. The area continues to be monitored for any satellite lek possibilities.

- 6. Strategy:** Maintain and improve habitat conditions in winter range.
 - 6.1. Action:** Treat decadent stands of sagebrush (harrowing, aerator, brush beating, chain, spike), where appropriate, to create uneven aged stands of sagebrush across the Resource Area.
 - 6.2. Action:** Establish easements or other land protection in crucial sage-grouse use areas.
 - 6.3. Action:** Work with county planners and county council to establish zoning ordinances for crucial winter habitat that protect those areas from inappropriate development.

Most winter habitat is in the Fruitland area, where lop-and-scatter projects have been done that will maintain sagebrush dominance in the area. Discussions with SITLA about potentially acquiring more winter habitat are ongoing.

- 7. Strategy:** Protect crucial habitat from inappropriate development.
 - 7.1. Action:** Work with county planners and county council to establish zoning ordinances for crucial habitat that protect those areas from inappropriate development.
 - 7.2. Action:** Establish easements or other land protection in crucial habitat.
 - 7.3. Action:** Work with USFS and other federal agencies to protect crucial sage-grouse habitat from renewable and non-renewable energy development.
 - 7.4. Action:** Maintain or reestablish sagebrush patches of sufficient size and appropriate shape, to support sage-grouse between agricultural fields.
 - 7.5. Action:** Work with NRCS and others to maintain and enroll important sage-grouse habitats involved in Farm Bill programs currently in agricultural production.
 - 7.6. Action:** Encourage use of sage-grouse friendly seed mixes, including bunchgrasses, forbs, and big sagebrush, in plantings.
 - 7.7. Action:** Encourage interest and enrollment of key sage-grouse habitats in the Farm Bill programs.

SVARM commented on a potential windmill construction within 2 miles of the lek related to a cabin development. SVARM members stay aware of potential development concerns and will continue to work between landowners and agencies so protect key parcels from development. No purchases or decisions occurred in 2009-2010.

- 8. Strategy:** Minimize impacts of noxious and invasive weeds.
 - 8.1. Action:** Identify areas where noxious/invasive weeds are encroaching on sage- grouse habitat
 - 8.2. Action:** Treat areas where noxious/invasive weeds and non-desirable introduced species (e.g. smooth brome) have become, or are at risk of becoming, a factor in sage-grouse habitat loss or fragmentation.
 - 8.3. Action:** Work with existing weed management programs to incorporate sage-grouse habitat needs.

- 8.4. Action:** Identify large areas of noxious/invasive weeds and non-desirable introduced species (e.g. smooth brome), that are not meeting sage-grouse habitat needs and reseed where appropriate.
- 8.5. Action:** Manage burned areas, transportation, utility, and pipeline corridors, and vegetation treatments to minimize undesirable vegetation where possible.
- 8.6. Action:** Work with County weed board to increase awareness of weed problems in sage-grouse and other important wildlife habitat.

Through UPCD, SVARM continued the second phase of the Wallsburg knapweed project, mapping and spraying approximately 920 acres, County weed management continues to spray and monitor musk thistle on the shoreline and at the Trout Creek site. In the Northeastern Region, UWDR treats their property (formally Alan Smith's land) as needed, as well as in the Currant Creek area. Additional coordination in those areas with county weed management will be explored in the future.

- 9. Strategy:** Minimize impacts of utility lines, fences, and roads in sage-grouse habitat.
 - 9.1. Action:** Avoid new construction during important periods and re-route lines where technically and economically feasible to avoid impacts.
 - 9.2. Action:** Schedule maintenance to avoid important periods, however, maintenance in emergency situations will be unrestricted.
 - 9.3. Action:** Install raptor deterrents when applicable

The possibility of power transmission lines coming through the area is in the beginning stages of development. The EIS is not available yet but group members will remain aware of possible concerns for sage-grouse related to alternative routes.

- 10. Strategy:** Minimize sage-grouse habitat loss to oil and gas activities.
 - 10.1 Action:** Increase/encourage participation by private oil/gas industry in SVARM.
 - 10.2. Action:** Encourage use of central tanks and locate those in areas with least impact to sage-grouse.
 - 10.3. Action:** Use directional drilling where feasible to minimize surface disturbance, particularly where well density exceeds 1:160 acres.
 - 10.4. Action:** Minimize pad size and other facilities to the extent possible, consistent with safety.
 - 10.5. Action:** Plan and construct roads to minimize duplication.
 - 10.6. Action:** Cluster development of roads, pipelines, electric lines and other facilities.
 - 10.7. Action:** Minimize noise disturbance (directing mufflers, glass packs, etc.) in and near lek and nesting habitat.
 - 10.8. Action:** Use existing, combined corridors where possible.
 - 10.9. Action:** Use early and effective reclamation techniques, including interim reclamation, to speed return of disturbed areas to use by sage-grouse.
 - 10.10. Action:** Reduce long-term footprint of facilities to the smallest possible.
 - 10.11. Action:** Avoid aggressive, nonnative grasses (e.g. intermediate wheatgrass, pubescent wheatgrass, crested wheatgrass, smooth brome, etc) in reclamation seed mixes.
 - 10.12. Action:** Eliminate noxious weed infestations associated with oil and gas development disturbances.

- 10.13. Action:** Minimize width of field surface roads.
- 10.14. Action:** Avoid ridge top placement of pads and other facilities.
- 10.15. Action:** Use low-profile, above-ground equipment, especially where well density exceeds 1:160 acres.
- 10.16. Action:** Avoid breeding/nesting season (March 1 – June 30) construction and drilling when possible in sage grouse habitat.
- 10.17. Action:** Limit breeding season (March 1 – May 1) activities near sage grouse leks to portions of the day after 9:00 a.m. and before 4:00 p.m.
- 10.18. Action:** Reduce daily visits to well pads and road travel to the extent possible in sage-grouse habitat.
- 10.19. Action:** Utilize well telemetry to reduce daily visits to wells, particularly where well density exceeds 1:160 acres.
- 10.20. Action:** Locate compressor stations off ridge tops and at least 2,500 feet from active sage-grouse leks, unless topography allows for closer placement.
- 10.21. Action:** Avoid locating facilities within a quarter mile of active sage-grouse leks, unless topography allows for closer placement.
- 10.22. Action:** Plan for and evaluate impacts to sage-grouse of entire field development rather than individual wells.
- 10.23. Action:** Study, and attempt to quantify, impacts to sage-grouse from oil and gas development.
- 10.24. Action:** Evaluate need for near-site and/or off-site mitigation to maintain sage- grouse populations during oil and gas development and production, especially where well density exceeds 1:160 acres.
- 10.25. Action:** Implement near-site and/or off-site mitigation as necessary to maintain sage-grouse habitat quality.
- 10.26. Action:** Share sage-grouse data with industry to allow planning to reduce impacts.

As in previous years, oil and gas is of minimal concern in the SVARM area.

- 11. Strategy:** Minimize the impact of extraordinary predation.
 - 11.01. Action:** Modify power lines and wood fence posts (to remove raptor perches) in important sage-grouse areas, where feasible, and where predator concerns have been identified.
 - 11.02. Action:** Remove trees, remove/modify raptor perches, and maintain quality sagebrush habitat, where predation concerns on sage-grouse have been identified.
 - 11.03. Action:** Begin site-specific predation management considering all predator species (especially common ravens and red fox) where necessary and appropriate.
 - 11.04. Action:** Work with County planners and private developers to incorporate trash minimization and domestic animal control measures in CCNRs.

Raven control continues in the area but may be reduced in future years to better understand the effects of predation on the local population. In 2009 and 2010, DRC 1339 egg efforts were moved to earlier in the season to target more concentrated raven populations. Raven populations appear to be down considerably in the last two years, suggesting that there may be a residual effect lasting longer than previous later (spring) treatments. These treatment changes occurred in both the Strawberry area and in Fruitland, where raven control was

recently expanded. Focusing on distributing poisoned eggs earlier in the season, if the observed effectiveness is accurate, is much more effective than pre-baiting since it takes advantage of naturally occurring raven concentrations rather than a requiring a labor-intensive artificial process (pre-baiting) to concentrate the predators. For red fox, this predator was targeted in both spring of 2009 and spring of 2010 at gradually reduced rates. There have not been flights to look for red fox as in the past, but den work and trapping has been ongoing. Formal control efforts for red fox will be ended in 2011 to observe the impact on sage-grouse populations.

12. Strategy: Improve knowledge of diseases and parasites in sage-grouse populations.

12.1. Action: Collect sage-grouse parasite and disease organism samples while handling birds for other research, when possible.

12.2. Action: Monitor radio-collared and other sage-grouse for West Nile Virus and other disease outbreaks.

As in previous years, researchers from BYU take blood samples of every radio collared bird. During high West Nile times, they also take fresh-killed birds in for necropsy.

13. Strategy: Improve knowledge of genetics in sage-grouse in minimum viable populations.

13.1. Action: Collect samples for genetic research from all known breeding complexes (including hunted and un-hunted areas) when possible.

See Strategy 12. BYU does this when doing other blood tests. Feathers are taken from chicks when possible to augment this effort.

14. Strategy: Increase size of sage-grouse population in the Resource Area.

14.1. Action: Continue translocation efforts as called for by UDWR, BYU, and other participating agencies and organizations.

14.2. Action: Continue existing predator management activities as called for by UDWR, USDA-WS, BYU, and other participating agencies and organizations.

The translocation project has been completed. No translocations were done in 2009 in order to determine the effect of other influences on population survival.

15. Strategy: Maintain and increase long-term habitat and population monitoring and research.

15.1. Action: Maintain long-term habitat monitoring sites on the Resource Area (as monitored by the Utah Big Game Range Trend Studies program).

15.2. Action: Maintain and increase radio-monitoring of translocated sage-grouse.

15.3. Action: Work with agency partners to maintain and increase funding for research and monitoring.

15.4. Action: Continue to monitor sage-grouse populations through use of lek counts.

15.5. Action: Increase lek search activities to find new lek sites in the Resource Area.

15.6. Action: Work with USDA-WS to monitor populations of sage-grouse predators.

As in past years, monitoring efforts continue as a joint effort between BYU and UDWR. No new leks have been found in the area. Big Game Range Trend Studies are ongoing in the

area. Predator reduction monitoring is anecdotal but communication continues between UDWR, SVARM, and APHIS. Future monitoring plans for impact to ravens is under discussion. Three UPCD projects in the Fruitland area were monitored for sage-grouse activity and pellets in late summer 2009: East Santaquin Draw 2006 chaining, the Santaquin 2009 sagebrush chaining, and the 2-Bar chaining from 2007. All monitoring occurred post-treatment so effects of treatments on sage-grouse will be difficult to determine. Final results will be available in the late 2010.

16. Strategy: Increase public education about sage-grouse ecology, conservation, and management.

16.1. Action: Work with Audubon Society to increase educational opportunities regarding sage-grouse in the Resource Area.

16.2. Action: Develop educational materials (brochures, presentations, etc.) and deliver to Friends of Strawberry Valley, Strawberry Anglers Association, Daniels Summit Lodge, Strawberry Water Users and other potential stakeholders to increase awareness

16.2. Action: Encourage use of signage in appropriate areas to increase awareness of crucial sage-grouse habitats.

16.3. Action: Develop sage-grouse identification materials for distribution to recreationists, bird watchers, and other stakeholders

Summer field tours continue regularly, including a 2009 summer tour and a 2010 tour which included Central Region UPCD. Tours continue to be an excellent way to share information about projects and engage other partners in SVARM's work. In addition, SVARM designed and installed (in June 2010) an informational kiosk at Trout Creek highlighting information on sage-grouse biology and populations, recreation impacts to sage-grouse, and habitat treatment projects. A second kiosk will be installed at a nearby location soon.

17. Strategy: Minimize negative impacts of incompatible OHV (ATVs, snowmobiles, 4WD trucks, etc.) recreation and other recreation on sage-grouse populations and habitats.

17.1. Actions: Work with County planners and other agencies to restrict seasonal OHV access to crucial sage-grouse use areas

17.2. Actions: Coordinate with enforcement agencies (Sheriff, parks, USFS, COs) to increase awareness of negative impacts to sage-grouse

17.3. Action: Create opportunities and use existing avenues to increase awareness in participating public about negative impacts of OHV use in crucial sage-grouse areas

17.4. Action: Coordinate with enforcement agencies to increase awareness of poaching and to minimize sage-grouse poaching opportunities

17.5. Action: Encourage use of signage to identify areas closed to hunting; language in proclamation that specifies closed area

The new kiosk prominently displays a message that recreationists should take care in sage-grouse areas by staying on trails, not harassing the birds, etc. The Trout Creek kiosk targets summer ATV riders, whereas the future second kiosk will be placed to attract the attention of snowmobilers in the winter.

18. Strategy: Maintain and increase coordination and communication between state and federal agencies and private partners.

18.1. Action: When possible, present all brush management projects at regional UPCD meetings in advance, to facilitate information sharing and coordination

18.2. Action: Annually provide maps of crucial sage-grouse habitat to SVARM partners

18.3. Action: Meet annually to visit habitat projects in the field

18.4. Action: Hold annual coordination meeting prior to the start of spring field season

18.5. Action: SVARM representative to report on UDWR-USFS coordination meetings

18.6. Action: Coordinate with the County through public lands coordinator and committee

18.7. Action: When possible, comment, as a group, on proposed actions that may impact sage-grouse or their habitats.

Numerous coordination meetings occur throughout the region. The Central Region UPCD takes a very active role in promoting projects appropriate to wildlife. Brush management projects are reviewed for their impact to grouse. Field tours to the area usually highlight sage-grouse habitat projects, even beyond the official work of SVARM. The public land committee has a representative who is active in the SVARM group.