

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

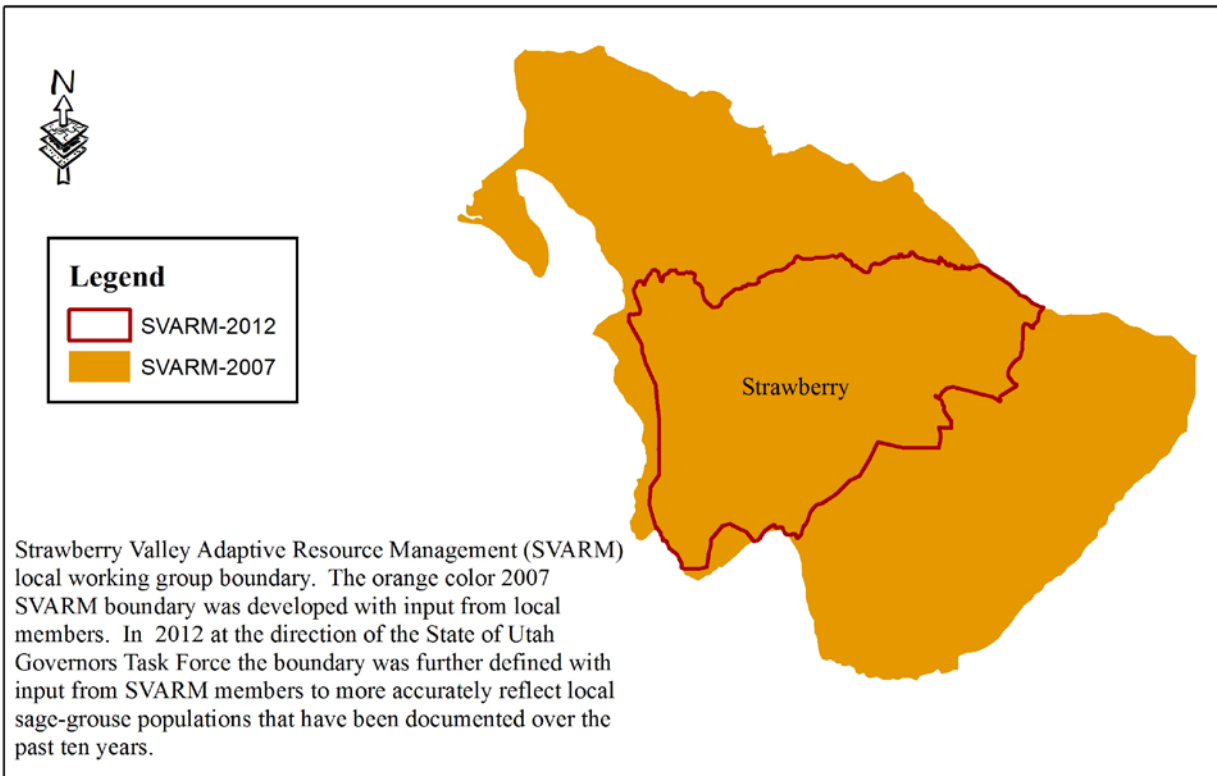


Figure 10. The Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area.



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.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The LWG conservation area covers Wasatch and Duchesne Counties. There are leks and associated nesting/brood-rearing areas both at high elevations around the Strawberry Reservoir, as well as in the lower-elevation Fruitland area in Duchesne County. The birds winter primarily in Fruitland. In recent years, the population has grown increasingly stable, estimated to number between 400-500 birds. Predator control efforts, particularly with regard to red fox control, have played a large role in helping the sage-grouse population rebound from previous lows.

Project and Research Highlights

The SVARM group participates in reviewing projects proposed by the Central Region team of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development. In the 2013-2014 project cycle, SVARM reviewed proposed projects in sage-grouse areas, to ensure that projects intended to improve sage-grouse habitat were appropriately designed, and to identify any projects which might create concerns for sage-grouse. Although only a few projects each year are proposed, the LWG provides key input on the appropriateness of the projects, and any needed additional detail, such as post-project weed management plans for coordinating with Wasatch County weed management.

The SVARM group also pays attention to ongoing developments which could impact sage-grouse. Although action may not be needed frequently, the group continues to educate itself about potentially concerning issues, such as proposed disturbances or developments in sage-grouse habitat.

SVARM has supported a series of habitat projects (primarily sagebrush mowing in high-elevation, high-precipitation zones) over the last 7-8 years. The NEPA which covered those multiple project phases has expired, and a new NEPA document for future habitat improvement projects in the Strawberry area is being developed. Although potential development concerns occasionally arise, the group has generally been able to focus on proactive work to improve conditions for sage-grouse on the ground.

BYU students continue to work on analysis and publishing peer-reviewed studies based on more than 13 years of research in the area. Among the questions their work addresses is how sage-grouse use the previous habitat treatments in the SVARM area. The SVARM group reviewed key sections of the BLM-USFS draft sage-grouse EIS for Utah and provided comments during the winter 2013-14 comment period.

A new lek was confirmed during 2014 in the Fruitland area.

Table 8. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the SVARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Rankings are as follows: Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

Threat	Aspects of Sage-grouse population in the SVARM Resource Area							
	Reduced population size	Population distribution	Reduced nesting habitat quality	Reduced brood-rearing habitat quality	Reduced summer/fall habitat quality	Reduced winter habitat quality	Reduced connectivity of seasonal habitat types	Reduced connectivity of populations & sub-populations
Drought and weather	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
Existing and new fences	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Home and cabin development	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Very High
Power lines & other tall structures	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
Renewable & non-renewable energy development	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Roads	Medium	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	High
Historical vegetation treatments	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	High
Hunting	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fire	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Livestock overgrazing	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
OHV recreation	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very High	Medium	Medium
Invasive/noxious weeds	-	-	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low	-
Parasites and disease	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Predation	Very High	Very High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Conifer (pinyon-juniper) encroachment	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	High