

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

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.

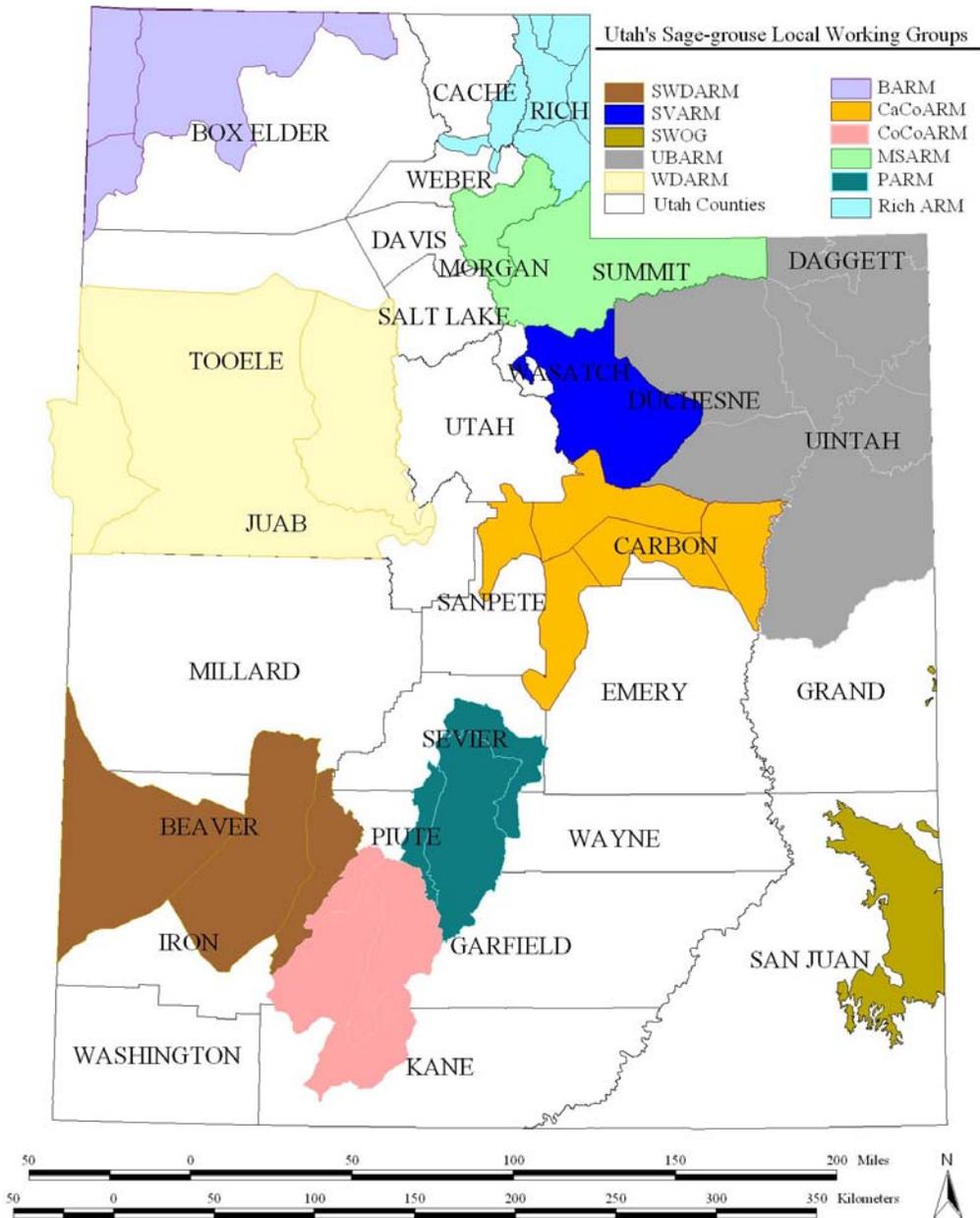


Figure 1. Utah Sage-grouse Conservation Areas, Utah Strategic Management Plan for Sage-grouse (UDWR 2009). (Note this report summarizes conservation actions completed to benefit greater sage-grouse. Thus it does not include Gunnison sage-grouse conservation actions. This species inhabits San Juan County).

Southwest Desert Adaptive Resource Management (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group

The SWARM Local Working Group is facilitated by Dr. Nicole Frey. SWARM is comprised of state and federal agency personnel, representatives from local government, academic institutions, private industry, and private individuals.

The following strategies and their action steps were identified by the SWARM local working group as having been initiated or completed during 2009-2010.

Conservation Strategies and Actions: 2009-2010 Accomplishments

1. Strategy: Improve age distribution of sagebrush-steppe communities by 2016.

1.1.Action: Identify and prioritize target areas needing improvement.

Each year, all projects are presented to Utah Partners for Conservation Development. Partners of SWARM present their projects to the group for approval before presenting them to UPCD. Thus all projects meet with the approval of SWARM and the southern region.

1.2. Action: Monitor the response of sage-grouse to changing habitat conditions.

The proposal to monitor greater sage-grouse in Hamlin Valley was funded by UDWR. The group is working toward a group project with BLM and USU EXT for this project in the future.

A proposal to monitor grouse habitat use in anticipation of wind energy was granted by the BLM to USU EXT. This project was initiated in Spring 2010.

1.3. Action: Implement treatments to change age class distribution of sagebrush.

Over 445 acres of private lands were treated in Hamlin Valley. 1525 acres of land around Minersville, UT were treated to restore sagebrush community; a coordinated project among NRCS, UDWR, UDAF, BLM and private landowners.

1.4. Action: Assist agencies in assessing wildfires in focus areas and restoration needs for sagebrush seed in mixes.



Figure 8. The Southwest Desert Adaptive Resource Management (SWARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group Conservation Area consists of 5,672,052 acres located in south-western Utah.

NRCS, UDWR and BLM members of SWARM activity coordinate to address these issues each year.

2. Strategy: Improve water availability in brood-rearing habitat by 2016.

2.1. Action: Consider new water developments that are multi-use and multi-purpose.

NRCS has addressed new water developments in the EQUIP and WHIP grants it has worked on this year. This includes installing new pipeline and modifying old lines to create wet meadows for grouse during the course of other vegetation treatment projects.

2.1.1. Action step: Construct guzzlers in areas identified as needing water.

2.2. Action: Coordinate with private landowners to protect current water availability that benefits brood-rearing habitat.

NRCS has addressed new water developments in the EQUIP and WHIP grants it has worked on this year. This includes installing new pipeline and modifying old lines to create wet meadows for grouse during the course of other vegetation treatment projects.

3. Strategy: Improve wildlife and livestock distribution in winter and brood-rearing habitat throughout the next ten years.

3.1. Action: Implement habitat improvements and direct management actions to improve distribution.

In Hamlin Valley and Pine Valley, the NRCS and BLM both worked with landowners and permittees to improve cattle and wildlife distribution, by installing new fences, adjusting permittee allowances, and modifying existing spring and well structures.

4. Strategy: Increase participation of local public and private landowners with SWARM over the next ten years.

4.1. Action: Develop partnerships with landowners and interest groups to increase visibility of sage-grouse management.

4.1.1. Action step: Develop fact sheet to distribute to special interest groups concerning sage-grouse natural history and threats to populations.

Using Dedicated Hunter support, the group was able to post 3 informational billboards at key trails and road intersection, to inform the local public about grouse and also SWARM.

4.1.2. Action step: Identify regional groups and their contact person to promote cooperation from these groups.

The mailing list and listserv were updated to ensure that current county commissioners and local leaders were receiving notices and meeting invitations to SWARM.

4.2. Action: Support partnership efforts for special designations that promote sage-grouse

habitat.

4.3. Action: Host open houses, field tours, and presentations.

In 2009 and 2010, SWARM hosted a field tour that highlighted habitat restoration projects focused in Minersville, as well as fire rehabilitation around the Bald Hills and Greenville Bench.

4.4. Action: Distribute annual reports to local management agencies, county commissioners, and other interested parties.

4.3. Action: Develop incentives for landowners and interest groups.

4.3.1. Action step: Host educational field trips and provide interpretive areas.

In 2009, SWARM created 3 displays for hiking trailheads and driving pullouts around key grouse habitat areas.

Strategy: Locate and monitor new active lek sites over the next ten years.

4.4. Action: Survey landowners and land users to determine sage-grouse distributions.

4.5. Action: Investigate possible new lek sites based on local reports.

4.6. Action: Survey for new lek sites during lek counts and survey historic sites for new activity.

The SWARM group, through UDWR and volunteers investigates potential new leks each spring.

5. Strategy: Maintain or increase sage-grouse populations through direct management.

5.1. Action: Evaluate potential of translocation to supplement local populations.

5.2. Action: Work with enforcement agencies to prevent illegal harvest of sage-grouse.

5.3. Action: Monitor the presence of West Nile Virus or other diseases in sage-grouse populations.

5.4. Action: Identify and implement steps to reduce presence of West Nile Virus.

6. Strategy: Manage unwanted plant species in sage-brush steppe habitat by 2016.

6.1. Action: Remove juniper and pinyon pines from brood-rearing habitat.

6.2. Action: Reduce abundance of unwanted and/or invasive plant species.

6.2.1. Action step: Re-seed area after land disturbances such as mechanical treatments, fire, and human development.

6.2.2. Action step: Utilize dedicated hunters to help with re-seeding and rehabilitation efforts.

6.3. Action: Evaluate and utilize chemical applications where appropriate to restore habitat dominated by cheatgrass and/or noxious weeds.

6.4. Action: Evaluate the use of fire as a tool in areas where cheatgrass has been established or is prone to establish.

These are routine actions that are performed within each agency, and coordinated and discussed through SWARM.

7. Strategy: Minimize impacts of new land developments and/or recreational uses on sage-grouse populations during the next ten years.

7.1. Action: Provide consultations and recommendations for new land developments and/or recreational uses.

7.2. Action: Regularly discuss new developments and alternative land uses to management agencies at local working group meetings.

7.3. Action: Identify and maintain list of contact people involved in land and recreational developments.

7.4. Action: Involve local county and city planning commissions in SWARM meetings.

7.5. Action: Provide input into management plans for federal, state, and local agencies.

These are routine actions that are performed within each agency, and coordinated and discussed through SWARM.