

Uintah Basin Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group

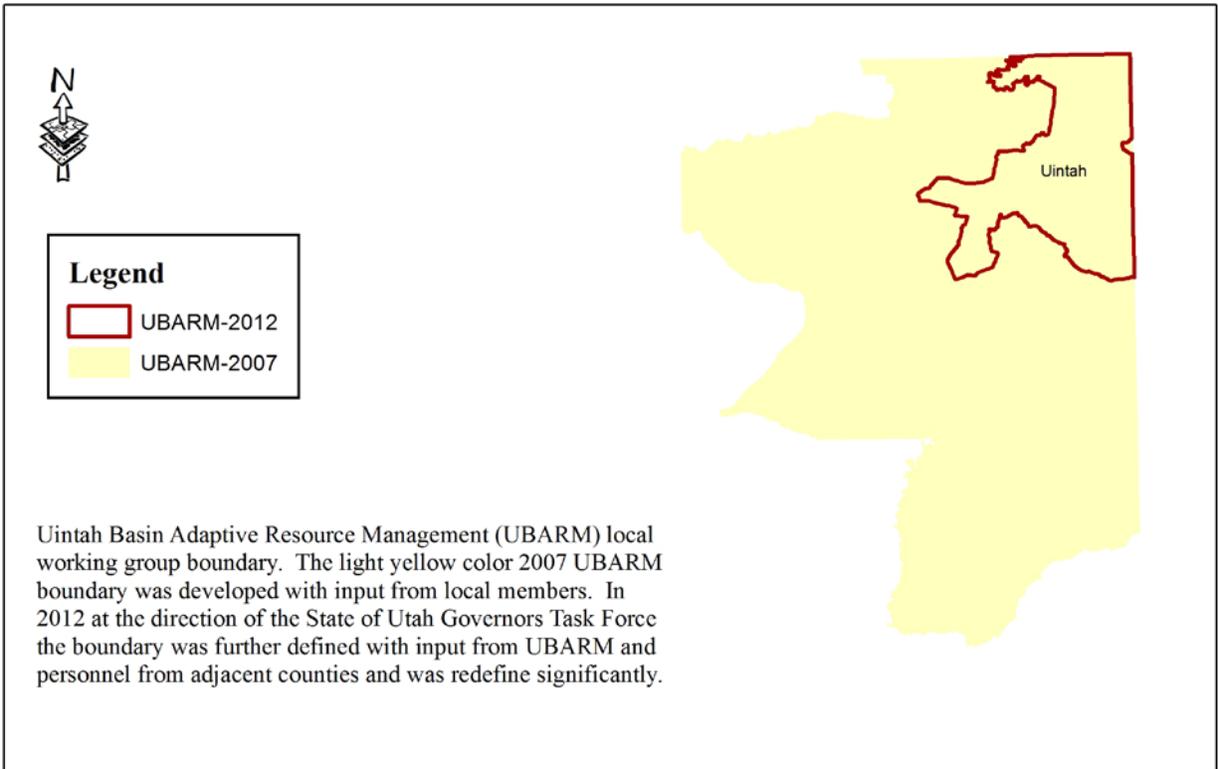


Figure 11. The Uintah Basin Adaptive Resource Management (UBARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area.



The Uintah Basin Adaptive Resource Management (UBARM) sage-grouse local working group is facilitated by Ms. Lorien Belton. UBARM 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. Upcoming meetings will address plan revisions and updates.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The Uintah Basin sage-grouse group covers parts of Duchesne, Uintah, and Daggett counties. A large population with multiple leks inhabits the Diamond Mountain area north of Vernal. This area has mixed landownership, including private, state, and federal lands, and is used primarily for agricultural purposes. The Diamond Mountain population is one of the few populations in Utah that is robust enough to support a limited sport hunt in the fall. Additional sage-grouse populations occur south and west of Vernal in areas including Forest Service land on Anthro Mountain, and BLM land further south. The southern populations in particular are in areas that have been highly impacted by oil and gas development. Some populations also occur farther

south into the Book Cliffs. Populations on Seep Ridge, Deadman Bench, Little Mountain, Anthro Mountain, and Diamond Mountain have been the subject of research studies in recent years.

Project and Research Highlights

The UBARM group coordinates closely with the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development northeastern region team based in Vernal. Generally, the two groups merged meetings in order to discuss the many projects related to sage-grouse habitat. During the meetings, projects were presented and discussed. In some cases, recommendations and adjustments to the techniques, seed mixes, etc. were suggested and incorporated into the project plans by the project managers in attendance. At least 14 projects related to sage-grouse were reviewed in the most recent project cycle. The LWG facilitator is a member of the ranking subcommittee for northeastern region WRI projects. LWG meetings are generally held on the same day as UBPCD meetings.

The UBARM group has increased coordination across the border with the Colorado LWG, beginning with a well-attended field tour in September 2013 on Blue Mountain. The state line crosses Blue Mountain, but sage-grouse use both sides. On the field tour, led by a local rancher, individuals from both states learned from one another about project possibilities, local landscape history, and other topics which will allow more educated project designs. Several project proposals were developed as a direct result of the conversations during that field tour. In addition, Dinosaur National Monument employees have now joined the LWG. They share data resources, suggestions for projects, and local knowledge about on-the ground habitat condition and project needs with other LWG members.

Scott Chew, a local rancher, has done extensive on-the-ground mapping of sage-grouse habitat on Blue Mountain. He has showcased his work around the state as an example for others interested in supporting both wildlife and livestock. The mapping information was shared and discussed during the Blue Mountain field tour noted above.

The UBARM group reviewed key sections of the BLM-USFS draft sage-grouse EIS for Utah and provided comments during the winter 2013-14 comment period. The facilitator also worked with Uintah County and others between meetings to better understand the alternatives presented in the draft EIS.

The LWG serves as a useful point of contact for the energy industry in the area. Although most energy company representatives do not attend regularly, they stay informed and attend meetings where specific agenda items (such as BLM comment periods) are pertinent to their work.

UDWR biologists in the UBARM group have been very proactive, keeping up with data from Colorado, and working to collar and track small numbers of birds in areas where additional information can assist with the development of key habitat projects. For example, based on birds collared on Little Mountain, the LWG was able to better understand how to design a project to address limiting factors for that population of sage-grouse. Projects designed using that information have been submitted to the UBPCD/WRI funding mechanism.

NRCS has a substantial local presence and assists local landowners with a variety of projects, such as pinyon-juniper treatments and sage-grouse-friendly grazing management plans. During the reporting period, many miles of fence in sage-grouse habitats have been marked with fence markers. SGI/NRCS biologists have primarily coordinated these efforts, utilizing Dedicated Hunters, Boy Scouts, and many other volunteer groups.

NRCS and Sage-Grouse Initiative biologists have been instrumental in involving local landowners in sage-grouse projects, generally funded by the Sage-Grouse Initiative. These include pinyon-juniper removal and making long-term, sage-grouse friendly grazing plans. Due to confidentiality requirements for NRCS, those projects cannot be formally recorded in this report.

Sage-grouse lek attendance numbers in the reporting period have increased dramatically, particularly in the spring of 2014. Two new possible leks on Diamond Mountain were identified during 2014, and will be checked again in 2015.

UBARM continues to focus on the extensive conifer encroachment into sage-grouse habitat, and the group's role in coordinating with the UBPCD group will continue to be an important part of many discussions. The group is also very interested in the implementation strategy and details for the state sage-grouse plan. Additional upcoming topics of interest will be mitigation and federal land management agency planning changes resulting from the EIS process.

Table 9. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats (given current and foreseeable scenarios) to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the UBARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

Threat	Aspects of Sage-grouse population in the UBARM Resource Area							
	Reduced population size	Population distribution	Reduced lek habitat quality	Reduced nesting/early brood-rearing habitat quality	Reduced summer/late brood-rearing habitat quality	Reduced winter habitat quality	Reduced connectivity of seasonal habitat types	Reduced connectivity of populations & sub-populations
Home and cabin development	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Powerlines & other tall structures	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Fences	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	-	-
Oil & gas development	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Roads	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	High	Medium
Drought and weather	High	-	Low	High	High	High	-	-
Hunting pressure	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Incompatible fire management practices	-	High	High	High	High	High	High	Medium
Incompatible livestock management (overgrazing)	-	Low	Low	High	High	Low	-	-
OHV recreation	-	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	-	-
Invasive/noxious weeds	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Very High	High	Medium	Low
Parasites and disease	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Predation	Very High	High	-	-	-	-	-	Low
Incompatible vegetation management	-	-	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Pinyon/juniper encroachment	-	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	High