

Box Elder County Adaptive Resources Management (BARM) Sage-Grouse Local Working Group

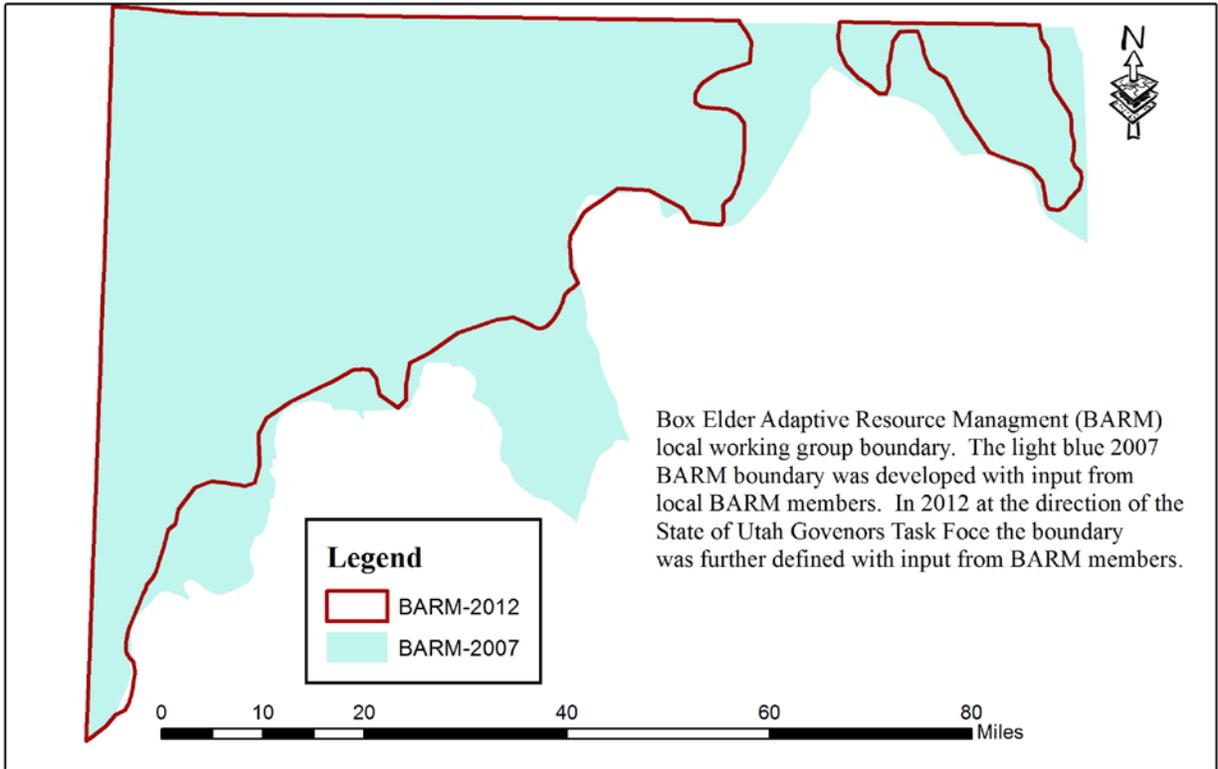


Figure 3. The Box Elder Adaptive Resource Management (BARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area.



The Box Elder Adaptive Resource Management Plan (BARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group (LWG) was organized in 2001. In 2011 the West Box Elder Coordinated Resource Management (WBECRM) was formed. The WBECRM plan provides overall direction and guidance for habitat projects within the conservation area and SGMA. The CRM established a sage-grouse subcommittee as part of the plan. The committee meets during the year to address and discuss sage-grouse specific issues of concern, management actions, and strategies. The subcommittee reports these to the WBECRM. Dr. David Dahlgren is the sage-grouse committee representative to the CRM group.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The WBECRM encompasses western Box Elder County, from the Snowville area west to the UT/NV border and south to the shore line of the Great Salt Lake. Sage-grouse habitat in this area is broken down into 3 sub regions, the Grouse Creek, Pilot, and Raft River range. See http://utahcbcp.org/files/uploads/BARMSAGRPlan_Final.pdf for maps and figures.

Although our knowledge of sage-grouse populations in the area is incomplete, research efforts in the area continue to map sage-grouse movements and habitat-use patterns in the Grouse Creek

and Raft River Mountains. These research efforts have identified important brooding and winter areas.

CRM/Sage-grouse Committee Meetings:

- Jul. 16, 2013 – 10-15 attendees
- Sept. 17, 2013 – 15-20 attendees
- Nov. 19, 2013 – 20-25 attendees
- Jan. 21, 2014 – 20-25 attendees
- Apr. 15, 2014 – 15-20 attendees
- Jun. 17, 2014 – 15-20 attendees

Field Tours:

Date: Sept. 3-4, 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 conifer removal 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 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: July 9, 2014 - Attendees: 15 (Organizations: BLM, GIP, Conservation District, USU Ext, UDWR, UDNR, Private Producers, USFWS Partners Program)

Topics: Our primary objective was to revise the Dry Basin Proposed Project (Pinyon-Juniper [PJ] treatment and fire breaks). This project was set to be completed in the Fall 2014. However, there was disagreement on how the fire breaks were going to be implemented, and the project was postponed. We discussed the importance of the area for sage-grouse, as a very large lek is located within the basin. Plans were made for two different firebreaks along the outside edge of the basin. We also discussed the PJ treatment and how much area would be removed with various methods.

Projects Proposed by the CRM and Sage-grouse Committee:

Name	Treatment Type	Proposed Date	Partners	Comments
Dry Basin Project	Pinyon-Juniper removal and fire break	Fall 2015	Cons. District, GIP, UDWR, USFWS, BLM	Near a large sage-grouse lek, fire breaks evaluated by GIP

				and USU Ext.
BLM PJ Park Valley	Pinyon-Juniper Removal	Fall 2014	BLM, UDWR, USU Ext.	Being evaluated by USU Ext.
Multiple SGI PJ Removal on Private Lands	Pinyon-Juniper Removal	Fall 2014	NRCS-SGI, GIP, Cons. District	This includes various PJ projects across West Box Elder

Project and Research Highlights:

USU graduate student, Charles Sanford, and technicians trapped and marked over 50 sage-grouse this last late winter and spring. Of the marked birds, 42 were tracked throughout the field season. Nest initiation was 79% (n=33), and apparent nest survival was 72% (n=24). These are higher than average reproductive rates compared to reported literature and past years. Brood survival was also good this summer, and we expect a good population going into the fall. Notably, 5 radio-marked females suffered mortality during reproductive activities. PJ removal areas were monitored with sage-grouse pellet counts and vegetation transects, and then compared to nearby untreated PJ areas and intact sagebrush communities. So far it looks like many treated PJ areas are being used, even newly treated locations, but not to the extent of intact sagebrush. Untreated areas have by far the least amount of pellet detections. Raven surveys were set up in Grouse Creek Valley, Lynn Valley, Park Valley, and Dove Creek (heading south) areas. These are in an attempt to consider raven control measures in West Box Elder. No data is available at this time.

The West Box Elder CRM group is an active and self-sufficient group, with a local facilitator (i.e., Diane Tanner, local landowner). They have been meeting regularly to discuss project in support of the Utah Plan implementation. They have also dealt with conflict and setbacks in a productive way. For example, the Dry Basin Project hit a road block this last spring because of regulatory decisions and lack of communication within the group. Instead of letting this experience dissuade them, the group decided to come up with a better communication system for project planning and a yearly schedule of meetings, each with a specific purpose and some for projects, was set up so that clear and open project planning could occur between all stakeholders. This demonstrated a resiliency for the group as a whole, and provides confidence in future endeavors. Additionally, the sub-committees are meeting regularly and many projects are moving forward, specifically PJ treatment projects. The landscape is clearly changing across West Box Elder where PJ has encroached into sagebrush communities. West Box Elder continues to be the place where significant amounts of NRCS-SGI funds are being spent on PJ removal, not only within the state but across sage-grouse range.

Table 1. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the BARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

Threat	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
Altered water distribution	-	Very High	Very High	High	Low	Low	Low
Prolonged drought and extreme weather shifts	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Low	Low
Power lines and other tall structures	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	-	Medium	-
Second home and cabin development	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Excessive use of existing roads or newly developed roads	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Existing and new fences	-	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Low	Low
Renewable and non-renewable energy development	-		Medium	Medium	-	Low	Low
Incompatible vegetation management practices	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Hunting	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Incompatible OHV and other recreation uses	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	Medium	Medium
Invasive/noxious weeds	Very High	Very High	Very High	High	High	Medium	Medium
Parasites and disease	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Predation	Very High	High	-	-	-	-	-
Wild fire	-	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	High	Medium
Pinyon-juniper encroachment	-	-	High	High	High	High	-
Incompatible grazing of wild and domestic ungulates	-	-	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Conversion of agriculture	-	-	Low	Low	-	-	-