

West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group

The West Desert Basin Adaptive Resource Management (WDARM) sage-grouse LWG is facilitated by Lorien Belton. The group covers two areas: Ibadah and the Sheeprock. Due to alarm over recent population declines in the Sheeprock, the WDARM group has also become the Technical Committee tasked for overseeing a series of enhanced efforts in the Sheeprock to reduce threats to sage-grouse and help the population rebound. Since July 2015, WDARM has increased its meeting frequency from three-four times a year to every 1-2 months. The group will continue its increased activity until the urgent need for coordination and implementation returns to lower levels. Although the focus is on the Sheeprock, the group has one meeting per year, normally in the spring, in the Ibadah area.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The West Desert Adaptive Resource Management LWG conservation area encompasses sage-grouse habitats in Tooele and Juab counties. The two primary population locations are far apart: one in western Tooele County in the Ibadah region (including the Goshute Tribe's land), and the other at the eastern side of the two counties, known as the Sheeprock. These more eastern populations include birds in the Vernon area as well as in the Tintic Mountains. Population trends in the area have declined over the last few years. In 2015, lek counts which rebounded in other part of the state, including Ibadah, did not rebound in the Sheeprock.

Meetings and Field Tours, October 2014 – January 2016

Type	Date	Location	No.	Comments
Meeting	February 12, 2015	Tooele, UT	25	Prospector Trail, conifer removal projects
Meeting	March 24, 2015	Ibadah, UT	31	Population reports, NRCS and SGI updates
Field Tour	July 6, 2015	Vernon, UT; nearby areas	25	Conifer removal projects, recreation concerns, population decline issues
Meeting	August 3, 2015	Tooele, UT	16	Brainstorm session to address critical threats to sage-grouse in the Sheeprocks
Meeting	September 9, 2015	Tooele, UT	23	Conifer removal strategy, predation management, other updates
Meeting	November 3, 2015	Tooele, UT	36	Population baseline info, recreation planning systems, BLM plan amendment presentation
Meeting	January 28, 2015	Tooele, UT	25	WRI project reviews, Sheeprocks Task Force efforts updates, hydrology/conifer questions

Project and Research Highlights

With the 2014 lek counts, the WDARM group ramped up efforts to address a wide variety of threats to sage-grouse in the Sheeprock SGMA. This includes conifer removal planning, predation management, recreation enforcement improvements, and planned translocations and associated research, in addition to other topics.

A sub-team from WDARM formed to develop a long-range strategy for more extensive and strategic conifer removal in the Sheeprock area. Those plans were brought to the working group several times for comment and refinement. Other separate efforts are also taking place, through agencies with plans already in place and other goals for conifer management, but many of the projects are being linked together to provide short- and long-term habitat expansion opportunities for sage-grouse in the Sheeprock population.

Recreation management and planning has become a key topic in the WDARM group over the last year. Much of the conversation focuses around the Prospector Trail system, but other more diverse topics arise as well. Both the potential impacts of recreation on sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat, as well as ways to address those issues, are part of a long and complex conversation that the group is undertaking.

Among the primary concerns of the group is that red foxes and ravens may be having a large impact on the areas' sage-grouse populations. The WDARM group identified areas most in need of predator control, and key individuals worked a strategy for increasing funding and effort to tackle the issue. The additional first on-the-ground work was done in late 2015. Having predation management in place was an important precursor to additional grouse being moved to the area.

Translocations and research are also tools planned to address the sage-grouse population drop in the Sheeprock SGMA. Sage-grouse will be brought from two other locations in the state to augment existing populations. Translocated and resident birds will be radio-marked and monitored to learn more about seasonal habitat use, nest success, and other information that will help identify limiting factors or risk factors for the Sheeprock population more generally. USU, BLM, USFS, and DWR are working jointly on the translocation and research efforts.

In addition to the intense focus currently in the Sheeprock SGMA, the yearly meeting in Ibapah serves to connect the Goshute Tribe to the ongoing conversations about sage-grouse. The meeting is help in conjunction with other regular meetings conducted by NRCS, to endure the best attendance at all meetings. The Tribe has generously hosted this meeting.