

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: Ibapah, on the western border of Utah with Nevada, and the Sheeprock Mountains (in Tooele and Juab counties). Due to concern over population declines in the Sheeprocks, the WDARM group has also become the Technical Committee tasked for overseeing a series of enhanced efforts in the Sheeprocks 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 approximately every other month. The group will continue its increased activity until the urgent need for coordination and implementation goes down. Although the majority of the groups' focus is on the Sheeprocks population area, the group tries to meet once each year in Ibapah.

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 Ibapah region (including the Goshute Tribe's land), and the other at the eastern side of the two counties, known as the Sheeprocks. 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 Ibapah, did not rebound in the Sheeprocks.

Meetings and Field Tours

Type	Date	Location	# attending	Comments
Meeting	January 28, 2016	Tooele	25	WRI projects, hydrology research, sage-grouse research, recreation
Meeting	March 7, 2016	Tooele	24	Research and management updates, recreation communications,
Meeting	April 25, 2016	Tooele	18	Recreation management, research updates, predation, project and funding planning
Field tour	July 27, 2016	Vernon area	22	Conifer removal, sage-grouse habitat usage
Meeting	October 11, 2016	Tooele	21	Fire management, large-scale EAs, recreation signage
Meeting	December 12, 2016	Tooele	28	BLM policies, hydrology research
Meeting	January 26, 2017	Tooele	23	Research updates, BLM travel management planning, WRI project review

Project and Research Highlights

The WDARM group has been very active this year. There has been considerable interest, both within the working group and more broadly within the state, in the translocation efforts to bring sage-grouse from Parker Mountain and Box Elder County to help augment the declining sage-grouse populations in the Sheeprocks Sage-Grouse management area. Multiple partners and many volunteers assisted in the trapping activities and research follow-up. The group discusses additional knowledge gained through this research at each meeting. Now into the second year, the group is gearing up again for additional translocations in the spring of 2017.

A key conversation over the past year in the WDARM group revolves around water. One project designed to understand the long-term impact on groundwater from conifer removal treatments is underway in the sage-grouse area. Because the WDARM group has been very active in long-term planning efforts for multi-year conifer-removal strategies, it was an ideal area to test the impact of conifers on hydrology. The Utah Geological Survey is spearheading the research, with frequent input from sage-grouse group members on factor to consider, location, and other project design details. In addition to this research, the group is working to increase their understanding of how water sources such as springs, wet meadows, and snowfall may factor into sage-grouse survival. This is an ongoing process of learning and will continue into future years.

Fire management and post-fire habitat improvement work has also been an important topic. Several fires burned in the general Sheeprocks area this year, providing opportunity for habitat projects and additional information sharing about rehabilitation efforts, new coordination between agencies, and project responses.

Finally, the group continues to work on recreation-related issues, including signage for recreational users of the area, better understanding the process of travel planning generally, discussion of how to incorporate traffic counter data (or other recreation data) into the ongoing tracking and research on sage-grouse movements in the Sheeprocks, and discussing ways to improve education for recreationists in the area. This involves input from federal and state agencies regarding their travel and trails planning or policies, as well as county efforts on signage and State Parks on coordination and management work.

Last, but not least, WDARM continues its strong efforts on direct habitat improvement, proposing multiple projects with interagency and cross-boundary coordination. With several the newly approved RCPP funding source in addition to regular WRI funding opportunities for projects, the group anticipates being able to increase the pace of habitat project work in future years, on both public and private lands in the area, for the benefit of sage-grouse.