

West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Local Working Group

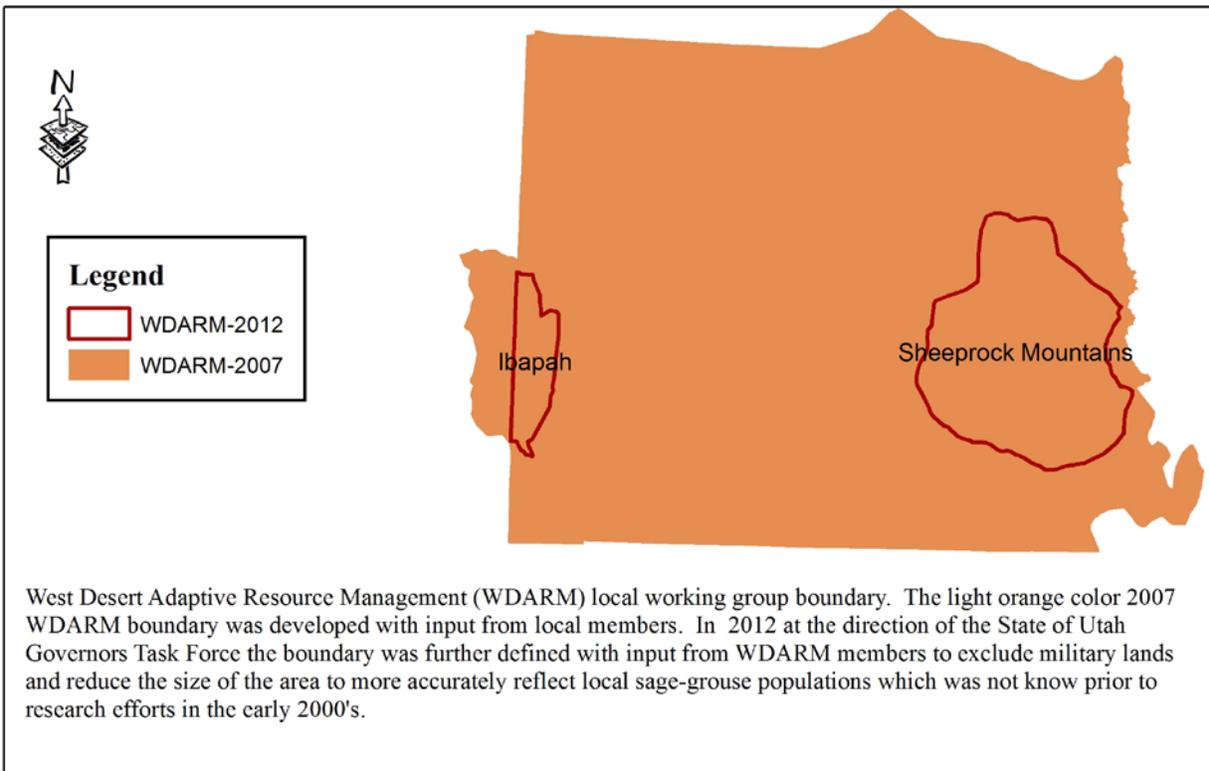


Figure 12. The West Desert Adaptive Resource Management (WDARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group and new Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA). The Ibapah and Sheeprock Mountains SGMA are located within the WDARM conservation area.



The West Desert Basin Adaptive Resource Management (WDARM) sage-grouse local working group is facilitated by Ms. Lorien Belton. WDARM 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. The following updates reflect the combined efforts of the group and individual agencies, landowners, and others on behalf of sage-grouse conservation in the West Desert.

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. From population highs in 2005-2006, small, isolated populations have declined in both the Ibapah and Sheeprock areas. Cheatgrass

and fire are of serious concern to the birds, and recent droughts and fires have exacerbated concerns about these populations.

Project and Research Highlights

During this reporting period, extensive staff turnover has been a challenge for the WDARM group. However, the LWG is an excellent mechanism to ensure that new employees with sage-grouse responsibilities within NRCS, UDWR, BLM, tribal government, and others have the chance to connect quickly and efficiently to partners in other agencies, get up to speed on projects, and feel part of the community.

The WDARM group participates in reviewing projects proposed by the Central Region team of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development. In the 2013-2014 project cycle, WDARM reviewed a long list of proposed projects in sage-grouse areas, to ensure that projects intended to improve sage-grouse habitat were appropriately designed, and to identify any projects which might create concerns for sage-grouse. The changes suggested (and generally incorporated into the projects, to the best of our knowledge) included such details as increased percentage of pinyon-juniper removal for sage-grouse habitat improvements projects proposed by several different entities.

The WDARM 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 WDARM group is increasingly looking to coordinate across political boundaries. In 2014, the group facilitator initiated contact with the White Pine LWG across the border in Nevada. Although no joint projects have been developed yet, the possibilities of a joint field tour, research project, or other coordination is gaining traction.

WDARM also met once in Ibapah in 2013, in conjunction with a lek counting trip. The Goshute Tribe was interested in exploring a variety of ways to assist with sage-grouse conservation efforts. Although tribal leadership has changed during this reporting period, individuals from NRCS have been critical to maintaining continuity in the relationship with tribal members interested in sage-grouse conservation efforts.

Project development and coordination is one of the strengths of this local working group. Issues are often raised informally during discussion, resulting in a coordinated plan for moving forward. A recent example related to coordination and decision making needed for grazing management on land owned by the Conservation District.

The presence of non-native red foxes in the area has been of concern to the group as well. During the planning period, the group discussed important next steps toward being able to more effectively address the threat of red fox depredation of sage-grouse.

Noxious weeds are of substantial concern for sage-grouse in the WDARM area. The Tooele County Weed Manager is actively involved in the LWG and works with members to address infestations as they are identified.

During the reporting period, a substantial percentage of the fences in areas known to have sage-grouse populations have been marked with fence markers. SGI/NRCS biologists have primarily coordinated these efforts.

The WDARM group will continue to focus on specific habitat issues (weeds, fires, conifer encroachment, etc.) as they arise. The red fox predation issue has the potential to create significant concerns for the low sage-grouse populations in the area, and the group will continue to monitor the situation and develop strategies for mitigating the concern as much as possible.

Table 10. Relative importance/contribution of individual threats to reducing or degrading aspects of sage-grouse populations in the WDARM Resource Area. Threats are described in the “Threat Analysis” section of this Plan. Ranks are defined according to TNC (2005).

Aspects of sage-grouse ecology							
Threat	Population size	Population distribution	Breeding habitat quality	Late summer/fall habitat quality	Winter habitat quality	Connectivity of seasonal habitat types	Connectivity of populations & sub-populations
Altered water distribution	-	Very High	Very High	Medium (all but Ibapah), High (Ibapah)	Low	Low	Medium
Drought	High	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Severe winter weather	High	High	-	-	Medium	-	-
Existing and new fences near leks	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	-	Medium	-
Home and cabin development	-	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Power lines and other tall structures	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	-	Medium	-
Renewable and non-renewable energy development	-	High	Very High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Roads	-	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Incompatible management of vegetation	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Poaching	High	Low	-	-	-	-	-
Fire in sagebrush communities	-	-	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	High
Incompatible livestock grazing	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Recreation	Very High	Very High	High	Medium	Very High	Medium	Medium
Invasive/noxious weeds	-	-	Very High	Very High	Very High	High	Medium
Parasites and disease	Low	Low	-	-	-	-	-
Predation	Very High	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Pinyon-juniper encroachment	-	-	High	High	High	High	-
Conversion to agriculture	-	-	Low	Low	-	-	-