

**Monticello/Dove Creek Gunnison Sage-grouse LWG
Meeting Minutes
January 19, 2011
Community Center, Dove Creek, Colorado**

Attendees

**Terry Messmer, Utah State University Extension
Jim Keyes, Utah State University Extension
John Lestina, NRCS Dove Creek, Colorado
Bob Barry, San Juan County Soil District
Ernest A. Williams, Commissioner, Delores County Commission
Chris Kloster, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Matt Hammond, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Guy Wallace, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Kyle Wheeler, NRCS Monticello, Utah
Doug Christensen, Utah Farm Service Agency
Don Andrews, Utah NRCS
Roger Barton, Utah Association of Soil Conservation Districts
Shelley Barton, Guest**

By Teleconference

Jason Robinson, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Agenda

1. Review of previous minutes – Terry Messmer

Terry Messmer reviewed the minutes of the October 18th meeting held in Monticello, Utah. He reported that the minutes of all previous meetings and local working group publication are available on the web site. The address of the web site is www.utahcbcp.org. As you enter the front page of the web site you will find a tab on the right that says local working groups. By clicking on this tab, it will take you to a page that lists the local working groups. Once on this page if you click on the Monticello/Dove Creek heading it will link you to the web page. Shortly, Phoebe Prather's dissertation will be added to the page. Terry will also add the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Request for Proposals.

After this meeting, Terry will send out a draft of the minutes to all LWG participants on the mailing list for approval. We usually allow two weeks for review prior to posting the minutes on the web site. The October 2010 meeting minutes were approved.

2. Status Review – Chris Kloster

Gunnison sage-grouse were designated a candidate species – level 2 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The annual status review will be completed by the USFWS in August 2011. The status means the USFWS has determined the species warrants listing, but that it chose not to list it at the time of the decision because other species were a higher priority. A USFWS was quoted in the Gunnison newspaper, that the USFWS may begin writing rules to list the species as early as 2012. He urged the Gunnison County Commission to enact new rules protecting Gunnison sage-grouse habitat in the Gunnison Basin. At this time no lawsuit has been filed regarding the decision. A copy of the newspaper article can be accessed on the web site.

Gunnison paper contained a statement from the USFWS that they will be listed. There would be a timeline for listing. It could be 1-1/2 years. The USFWS would have to write some rules. They will delay the process until funding from congress. The smaller populations have been declining even given the habitat work. Guy Wallace reported Utah's population had been relatively stable to increasing but last year the numbers were down.

Renee Chi, USFWS Utah Ecological Services Offices will attend the evening landowner support and will discuss the listing decision and options open to landowners to secure regulatory assurances. This meeting was held from 6-8 pm on 19 January 2011, in the Monticello High School Cafeteria.

3. NFWF Proposal – Chris Kloster

The CDOW has received a signed National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) contract and the money. The CDOW will use a RFP and call for proposals based on priorities established by the range wide prioritization committee. Guy Wallace represents Utah on a committee of 5 people who review proposals and select projects for funding. The call for proposals has been published and this can be found on the web site (www.utahcbcp.org).

CDOW was approached by NFWF to apply for Keystone Initiative Grant. NFWF chose Gunnison sage-grouse as a priority species. \$400,000 is available through NFWF and the CDOW has set aside \$400,000.

Jim asked what can the money be used for?

Chris stated – It can be used to cost-share on habitat projects to include CRP maintenance in core areas. Chris stated some of the money will be used to study operational program on predator control in the San Miguel population area. Some of the funding was being looked at to purchase an easement in Utah. But the property was sold and has been broken up.

The group was interested in knowing if the matching funds provided by CDOW could be used as match in Utah. Chris stated that this would be difficult to do, but the funding committee was considering this option.

Some money has been spent on trap and transplant also. Most of the money is still unspent. Chris repeated that there is no deadline – when some applications are submitted to consider the committee will convene. They do have one pending.

Chris – any organization can apply for funds. Easements, etc - Applicants need a letter of support from the LWG or biologist.

ACTION – ITEM Terry will post the Request of Proposal on-line and also e-mail the information to the LWG mailing list.

4. Predation Management

Mike Phillips, CDOW is starting a project looking at predator control. This project will begin in the San Miguel population area. Depending on the results this will determine what happens in the other areas. Predation management is identified as a conservation strategy in the Gunnison sage-grouse Regional Conservation Plan and in the NFWF Grant. Chris said he had not seen the research plan. Terry asked that if the plan could be shared with the LWG members. Chris stated he would try and get a copy and e-mail to Terry and he could send it to LWG members.

Roger expressed concerns of landowners regarding predation management. They feel it is important.

Terry discussed the Parker Mountain greater sage-grouse population response to a conservation strategy that includes habitat management and predator control. In addition to seeing an increase in the population, they have documented the highest chick survival rate reported in the published literature.

Ernest shared his concerns about predators in particular bobcats.

Chris said that it is assumed that predator control can have an effect but it must be a sustained effort and it can be an expense option. There is an issue of balance. Agencies are limited in resources and if dollars are spent on predator control they are unavailable for the habitat restoration, which is the long term solution. As an agency, the CDOW can get beat up a lot on this issue by some groups.

Jason Robinson – in Utah each year, the UDWR provides 30,000 to USDA Wildlife Services (WS) to implement an operational wildlife protection predator control program. This includes waterfowl – a large portion goes toward raven removal. WS treats several sites. Research shows it does have a positive effect on chick survival. Utah is looking at trying to be more efficient using UDWR personnel to place eggs. Utah WS has a permit

to take 1300. Trying to increase this to 2000. The USFWS has not ruled on the request. The UDWR obtains money from habitat council to do the work. For sage-grouse, WS can only do raven control to 1 June.

WS can't do raven control in Colorado. Mike Linnell, Utah Director is going to talk to Colorado WS state director about how the Utah program operates.

Don – expressed concerns that without predator control we may be only doing half the job. We have 25 years of protected habitat in CRP. If the species gets listed landowners could pay a price.

Guy - Utah DWR through WS has done predation management since the LWG has started. Utah has been putting out 400-500 eggs. WS removes 30-40 coyotes a year.

What is the status of the funding for WS predator control in Utah? Jason – funding continue to be under pressure, but it remains a UDWR priority.

Terry – asked about targeting source populations of ravens.

Jason – Mike Linnell has discussed focusing on source populations. But WS must stay within the label restrictions. WS reports a better response in feedlot situation. Around Parker Mt, WS has focused on feedlots. Terry reported that this year on Parker they did not count a raven during the annual raven surveys.

Bob – there are lot of small feedlots. You can create one just by moving the snow and feeding cattle in a bare spot

Ernest – what about involving sportsmen?

Guy – ravens are federally protected by the Migratory Bird Treat Act., UDWR can't take them.

Bob- can we get ravens excluded?

The discussion than turned to questions regarding establishing priorities for spending money and management.

Jim – asked if the Utah population of sage-grouse are significant enough to make a difference in the listing decision.

Chris – the range wide number and what is happening in each population weighs into any decision. The Gunnison Basin population is stable. The small populations are not.

Chris – CDOW biologists have done public relations in the San Miguel population area to prepare people for the possibility of operational predator control. Part of the reason for doing the predator control study in the San Miguel population is that researchers have data from previous studies and are set up to continue this with the predator control component..

Bob – the habitat issue may overblown. Habitat has not changed.

Terry – reported that the analysis done from 1970 to now shows we have lost sagebrush. Bob pointed out that populations were higher in the 1950-60s.

The group discussed the merits of habitat vs predation management and the benefits for sage-grouse.

Guy - There was a lot of discussion when the plan was written about the small population. If something happened in the basin, the small populations would provide a source to rebuild the population. But we can't ignore habitat or predation. From a habitat picture, they have been tied to certain areas in Utah. Need to keep and improve the habitat to provide spaces for them to move.

Don – we have been doing a lot of work to help sage-grouse. One of the things not brought up are some of the policies may be damaging the birds. A migratory species, in this case ravens, are damaging a local species.

John – we still need to do some more habitat work. We still have work to do.

Don – we have to achieve the balance

4. CRP Status – Doug Christensen/Don Andrews

Doug – stated CRP acreages are back up to 25,000 acres did lose a couple in the core. This acreage were replaced it with some other acres.

Guy – In Utah, we did not lose any where sage-brush has been planted

Doug – The Hines CRP, where sagebrush has been planted, will come up next year and he is interested

Don – we had to evaluate all the seedings. The grass is in good shape, globe mallow, flax is coming back in, but much of the alfalfa has been lost. Sites have rabbit brush and sagebrush coming in. This sign up were able to re-enroll as is. Everyone has selected wildlife watering facility. To provide green spots – catchment water –

Doug – doing about 60 catchment with a 60 foot mouth. We did push the catchment and gave 20 extra points for selecting it.

Don – these will go in this season.

Doug - landowner will do the work, we will do the cost share.

Guy – expressed an interest in working with the landowners and NRCS to select the locations. Terry also indicated he want to monitor the vegetation and sage-grouse response.

Doug – stated that the Utah CRP contracts required maintenance – each will have to do maintenance before year 6. This could include ripping up the soil and interseeding.

Guy – asked to avoid areas where we have sagebrush coming back in.

Doug – stated that as part of the maintenance, landowners can broadcast alfalfa.

This year in Utah about 7,000 acres of CRP contracts will be expiring. Doug was optimistic that these would be re-enrolled. The Hines CRP is the major one coming out – a section and 200 acres. Grayson-Redds property was sold. It was not bid into CRP. The total acreage was 960. It is in the process of being plowed. It was previous CRP. The current landowner is Fred Snyder.

John – For Colorado in SAFEW we ended up with 43 contracts in the 4500 acre range. Seeded 800 acres and 500 is in sagebrush the response was really good.

Don – what did you do differently to get the sagebrush response?

John – It was new ground and higher seeding rates. The 300 acres that failed was old CRP. We tried to no-till fashion and seeded it later. We can't draw conclusions from one year. We seeded a bunch of new ground so we will have another year to refine our conclusions. The seed source came out of Intermountain Seed – Wayne County Utah was the actual seed location.

For new CRP we are in the 60% range in getting them reenrolled 62 contracts for 6500 acres

Doug – In Utah, we had 95 offers and many of them overlapped the areas (water quality)

John – We developed a seed mixture to enhance the points. Surprised we are so different across the line. Everything we are not enhancing, we are going to move the first year. We have a maintenance period year 5-7. Did not offer water enhancement – with the 60 percent rate we are done but will have more sign ups.

Don – In Utah had a couple of applications for water developments but they were not funded because of concerns over West Nile virus.

The Group discussed the new NRCS sage-grouse Initiative. The consensus was that it did not offer much for Gunnison sage-grouse.

John – not much take on sage-grouse initiative for Gunnisons in Colorado, we can do the same under EQIP.

Chris – doesn't offer a lot in places like Dove Creek where we are CRP driven.

Ernest – need to work with local legislators to build support.

Chris – We made changes to program in Colorado by changing the mixture to include sagebrush.

John – seed mixture also included 30-40% forbs.

Guy – The UDWR bought a special drill to seed sagebrush.

7. Other Business

Chris provided an update of CDOW reorganization. The CDOW subsequently will hire a coordinator for GUSG/Greater sage-grouse.

Chris also updated the group on the translocations. Brought 15 birds to Dove Creek this fall and 15 next spring, with 15 more next fall. Of the 15 released this fall, 13 are alive, one in Utah. The birds are remaining close to the release sites.

The proposal was to move 45 birds. Now Dove Creek will get 30 birds this spring. Last locations were before Christmas because the plane was in for maintenance. We had one move to Utah 10 miles but came back. The birds were released west of Dove Creek on wildlife management area. Flushed radio-collared birds with local birds. As many as 8. Birds hung really close to the core area. Of the known birds most were males. Spring release on the leks. We chose the west side of Dove Creek because of the number of birds on the lek.

Tony Apa is finishing his handbook on raising Gunnison sage-grouse. Chris said he would provide a copy to the group when it's available.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA)

The CDOW has written a CCAA for Gunnison sage-grouse in the state. The CDOW holds the permit with Certificates of Inclusion (CI) issued to landowners. In Colorado, roughly 60,000 acres interested in the CCAA. Still working on completing all the CIs.

Colorado tried to enroll the best pieces of property for sage grouse. CDOW focused in the core area on larger tracts. CIs are applied to the property. Protected existing land use.

Don – what about CRP?

Chris – Have not completed the CIs for the Dove Creek area. Not sure how to approach areas with CRP under a CCAA. This will require more thought and coordination with the USFWS.

8. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date is 17 May 2011. The group will meet in Monticello, Utah at 10:00 am and then participate in a field tour that will end in Dove Creek at the CRP sagebrush seedings. Terry Messmer will work with NRCS, UDWR, and CDOW to outline a field trip agenda.

Submitted by

Terry Messmer