

**Monticello/Dove Creek Gunnison Sage-grouse LWG
Meeting Minutes
August 4, 2009
County Building, Monticello, Utah**

Present

Terry Messmer, USU Extension
Phoebe Prather, USU
Guy Wallace, UDWR
Tammy Wallace, BLM
Jim Keyes, USU Extension
Sue Bellagamba, TNC
Leigh Robertson, San Miguel LWG
Doug Christensen, FSA

Information – Presented/Discussed

Review of previous minutes

The last face-to-face meeting of the LWG was October 11, 2007 in Dove Creek. The LWG members participated in a regional Gunnison LWG meeting in May 2008 in Montrose. Phoebe Prather presented the results of research on perch deterrents and Terry Messmer summarized the research completed in San Juan County. These power points are available on the web site www.utahcbcp.org. On July, 22, 2009 Todd Black, USU, participated in a range wide meeting in Durango Colorado that was organized to discuss the development of a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to support Gunnison sage-grouse range wide conservation efforts.

Population Status

Terry Messmer summarized the research findings using a power point presentation developed by Sarah Lupis. This power point can be found on the <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups/sanjuan>. Guy Wallace presented the lek count data. The Utah population high lek count was 37. This is slightly down from 44 the previous year. The Dove Creek lek count was 2. It has been holding at this level. Previous lek counts in Utah and Colorado seemed to suggest the populations were connected. In years when Utah's counts were higher Dove Creek's were lower and vice versa. Radio telemetry data however suggests the populations are not connected.

Review of Monticello/Dove Creek RCP

The group reviewed the Monticello/Dove Creek section of the 2007 Summary of Gunnison Sage-grouse Local Working Group Threat Rankings and Conservation Strategies Towards Implementation of the Gunnison Sage-grouse Rangewide Plan (RCP) The group also reviewed the Monticello/Dove Creek Multivote Ranking Work Book.

The workbook rankings can be found at <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups/sanjuan>.

The group believed the ranking and conservation strategies as identified in the work book were still appropriate. The greatest threat to the Monticello/Dove Creek populations remains habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration. The group reaffirmed the needed for implementation of strategies to protect existing habitat through conservation easements. The second highest conservation priority was the implementation and evaluation of conservation/management actions to restore and enhance existing Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

Gunnison NFWF Proposals

Todd Black attended a meeting with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and the Colorado Division of Wildlife staff in on July 22-23, 2009 in Durango. In the meeting the participants helped develop a NFWF business model which was very similar to the TNC CAP process. The participants identified threats, actions strategies etc that the grouse are facing in all 7 areas including Dove Creek/Monticello. The key actions that surfaced were protection of key habitat and restoration of habitat.

NFWF is looking at 800k-1 million in funding possibilities for 2010. To this end, they requested proposal from each LWG that addressed the NFWF business model. The requested funds would require a 1 to 1 non-federal match. NFWF is looking for projects which would maximize immediate conservation benefits for the species and over a 10 year time frame. The smaller sub populations, such as Monticello/Dove Creek would be the highest priority.

Sue Bellagamba and Guy Wallace had put together a draft of a proposal describing an easement on private land in Utah. The easement would protect over 400 acres of critical winter and breeding habitat. Todd provided a copy of the proposal to NFWF. The participants however decided that the proposal would be submitted through the Colorado DOW. The proposals would be submitted to Gary Skiba (Gary.Skiba@state.co.us) and all questions directed to him.

Sue and Leigh discussed the submittal process. The LWG pre-proposal has to be submitted by 1 September with final proposals due 1 November 2009. The group identified a number of other tracts in the Utah Gunnison sage-grouse conservation area that would be high priority areas for additional easements. The group agreed to put all their emphasis on the current draft.

Action Item: Sue and Guy volunteered to finalize the proposal and Sue would submit it to Gary Skiba.

The groups also discussed the need to implement and evaluate management actions that could be implemented on agricultural land within the Utah conservation area that is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Doug Christensen discussed the status of the CRP in the conservation area. Many of the contracts will expire over the

next 2 years. The rules for enrolling and re-enrolling in CRP have not been finalized. Doug indicated many if not all of the landowners have expressed an interest in CRP as well as some other who have not previously enrolled land. The Utah Gunnison Sage-grouse conservation area has been designated as a critical wildlife area under CRP and as such several agricultural lands in the areas were able to qualify for the program even though they did not meet soil erodibility guidelines. Doug stressed the need for DWR and others that participate on the Utah State Technical Committee to seek for reinstatement of the conservation area as a crucial wildlife area. Over 70% of all documented Gunnison sage-grouse radio-locations were recorded in CRP fields. See the web site for a copy of the published paper. <http://utahcbcp.org/files/uploads/sanjuan/gunnisonwsb.pdf>

Regarding habitat improvement, Leigh mentioned some interesting work done to improve soil conditions and thereby improve conditions for native plants (and make it harder for weeds to thrive). People might want to check out the following:

<http://www.alphanaturalinc.com/>

<http://www.ieca.org/membersonly/cms/content/EnvironmentalConnection/Object327PDFEnglish.pdf>

Action Item: Terry Messmer will follow up with Lori Jones in the state NRCS office to track this issue.

The group also identified a need to develop a habitat management/evaluation proposal that could be submitted along with the conservation easement proposal to NFWF. This would include the use of disking, reseeding, and livestock grazing.

Action Item: Terry Messmer agreed to draft a proposal for the groups review and comment. He committed to having the draft ready by 7 August 2009.

Increased Coordination and Landowner Involvement

Leigh Robertson led a discussion regarding the need to increasing communication among LWGs. The 2008 Montrose Conference was well attended by agency and NGO staff. It was light on landowner participation. Terry Messmer summarized a range wide needs assessment of LWGs. (See <http://utahcbcp.org/files/uploads/Sage-Grouse%20LWG%20Technical%20Report.pdf>.) Respondents indicated they felt a need to foster increased communication by establishing regional networks to share information and experiences. The group supported the idea in particular increasing opportunities to communicate and engage landowners.

The group agreed to plan evening landowner meeting to be held the evening of October 8, 2009 at the Lamplighter Restaurant in Monticello, Utah. The meeting would be conducted from 6:00-8:00. The agenda would include updates from Monticello and Dove Creek as well as information on the status of CRP and other opportunities for landowners to participate in conservation actions.

Action items: Jim Keyes will arrange for a room and the menu. Jim, Terry, and Doug will develop the program. Jim and Doug will develop a letter that can be sent out to the Monticello/Dove Creek landowners from the USU Extension Office and LWG to invite landowners to the meeting.

Next Meeting Date

2-4 pm, October 8, 2009. San Juan County Building, 117 South Main Street, Monticello, Utah,

The meeting adjourned at 11:45AM for lunch.

Field Tour

The field tour was led by Phoebe Prather, USU graduate student. Phoebe discussed here research project and its implications. A summary of her work and results can be found on on-line at <http://utahcbcp.org/htm/groups/sanjuan>
Phoebe said solar pumps that distribute water onto the ground (so the soil is constantly moist) might be a better idea.

Submitted by

Terry A. Messmer