

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 12/5/17

Place: DNR office, Vernal, Utah

Present: Leah Lewis (BLM), Charlie Holtz (Pheasants Forever/SGL), Jim Spencer (NRCS), John Spencer (Simplot), Greg Todd (Duchesne County), Terrell Thayne (UDAF GIP), Dixie Sadler (BLM), Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), Tory Mathis (UDWR), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension), Mark Ewell (NRCS), Scott Chamberlain (STILA), David Allison (consultant, co-chair), Bob Christensen (USFS), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Population and research updates

Brian Maxfield presented to the group on the different collared birds that DWR, BLM, and USFS are jointly tracking in the Uintah Basin. There are many GPS collars out, and Brian the group maps with the birds' movements on them. The data is allowing for identification of travel corridors, among other interesting information. There are still more transmitters to be put out. The following are details emerging from the research.

- GPS collars gather multiple points per day per bird. There are currently around 67,000 data points for where the collared birds are spending time.
- One male from Little Mountain went to Red Desert for two weeks – flew down, then walked back up through the habitat projects. He also went to La Pointe, and spent time on Little Water Flat on tribal ground, which is a critical area.
- There have been fairly high nest initiation rates. Jason Wood, from BYU, did the vegetation data.
- Randy Wood, from BYU, is analyzing the before and after usage of treatment areas.
- A bird from Blue Mountain took a long walk to Diamond. Some Blue Mountain birds go to Diamond for the winter. They are currently hanging out in the treatments on Blue Mountain, and also seem to like the “mima mounds,” deep fertile soil mounds that keep sagebrush, and where sagebrush comes back faster after chain harrowing.
- Shiner Basin (rough Draw/McKee Bench) is an important wintering area, in addition to having a few leks.
- In Brown's Park, they finally got one bird collared, after a lot of effort. Therefore, we are just beginning to get data from that area.
- On Goslin Mountain, the area is covered with grouse. Some stay in the winter and others go to Antelope Flat. Antelope has lots of winter and brooding habitat. One hen from Goslin moved to Wyoming two winters in a row.
- Brian is using the birds' movement data to identify new areas for projects, such as those that open up currently used areas to be larger, or ones that clear PJ from movement

corridors.

- There are currently no Anthro birds on air; we need to catch more as there is still a lot to learn about the winter habitat use of those populations. So far, we have learned that they don't use the canyons, and may be avoiding smooth brome.
- There is a reclaimed well pad that is used by grouse as a lek.

Dave mentioned that Little Mountain should be a high priority for habitat work, both because it is important for seasonal migration, but also because there are new landowner opportunities there. Dave, Terrell, and Charlie will get together to discuss ideas through GIP and SGI. It was noted that we need to be extra careful about cheat grass issues in the area.

Someone asked about the cost for the GPS data. The collars are considerable more than VHF tracking, but provide lots more data and don't require technician and truck time. There are download charges for the birds, which cost about \$20/bird/day, but the costs are worth it for the quality and quantity of data we get, especially in the winter. The GPS collars allow us to find where birds move. With VHF, if we don't guess right and look in the right spot, we can lose contact with birds for months and not know where they moved during certain seasons.

Round-robin updates

- Mitigation rule for Utah is going out for a second public comment period during December. Comments are due January 1; anyone can submit comments via Lorien if you prefer. Lorien will send out info on how to comment.
- The Forest Service has just opened a scoping period on the plan amendments from 2015. The questions are similar to the BLM scoping: "what, if anything, should be changed in those 2015 amendments?" Lorien will send info on how to comment to the group.
- The GIP signup date was moved to the end of December.
- Dave wants the group to be aware of the Green River Basin Landscape Planning effort. Lorien will reach out to them.
- During the meeting, it was announced that the white-tailed prairie dogs were not listed.
- At the spring UBARM meeting, the group would like to revisit the local plan. That will require a plan for how to split it up and make the process not painful.
- Lorien will remain the UBARM representative on the ranking committee for WRI, but Boyd can look at specific projects as needed.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will follow up with Randy to get contact information for Jason Wood, so we can learn about research on use of treatment areas.
- Lorien will send info on the mitigation comment period to the listservs
- Lorien will send the comment link for the USFS plan amendments to the listservs
- Lorien will reach out to the Green River folks about their planning process

- Lorien will send out links for the sage-grouse related UPBCD projects to the groups after the submission deadline has passed.
- Lorien will plan for how to revise the local plan at the spring meeting, after WRI is done. She will send out copies of the current plan so people can think about it in advance.
- Lorien will bring any WRI proposals that Boyd can help look at to his attention

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will coincide with the WRI project meeting of UBPCD on February 13th. Rather than discuss the sage-grouse-relevant projects separately, UBARM participants will be invited to attend the WRI meeting instead, where all projects will be discussed.