

**UINTAH BASIN  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date:** 11/16/12

**Place:** County Building in Vernal, Utah

**Present:** Gary Aho (Enefit American Oil), Misty Roberts (XTO Energy), Natasha Gruber (NRCS/Mule Deer Fdn), Jon Stearmer (Uintah County), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Joan Degiorgio (The Nature Conservancy), Mark Ewell (NRCS), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Darrell Gillman (UACD), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Jim Brown (UGIP), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*Planning Updates*

Lorien gave the group an update on the progress toward the state sage-grouse plan. A final draft has not yet been completed. The group raised several issues:

- Dave Allison feels that the fine-scale mapping should start as soon as possible.
- Gary Aho noted that it is unclear how the recent oil sands restrictions (OSTS PEIS) relate to sage-grouse mapping efforts. He noted that the delay in having final public maps of sage-grouse management areas available makes it difficult for companies to predict what regulatory landscape they will need to respond to. Lorien will try to learn more about the process and report back to the group.
- Misty explained that she has heard contradictory answers on what maps will be used by BLM. Brian Maxfield explained that because the maps are not finalized, current decisions and comments would be based on the current DWR maps of occupied habitat. How it will change moving forward is difficult to predict. Both Joan and Dave, who have been involved in (Joan) and actively following (Dave) the state planning efforts, noted that this is one of many things still up in the air.
- Jon Stearmer asked where the mitigation ratio of 4:1 came from. Lorien will look into the ratio and bring more information to the group in the future. It was noted that Gateway South is doing a Habitat Equivalency Analysis, and it would be good if the state sage-grouse plan used something like this, or at least drew from existing processes rather than reinventing the wheel. Dave noted that the Energy by Design Model is also a good opportunity. (Joan explained that Energy by Design is a computer model that helps select places to mitigate based on opportunities. The assumptions of the model could be adjusted to reflect whatever the needed parameters might be.)

*Research Updates*

Randy Larsen, via Lorien, provided the following update: BYU has finished sampling on Diamond Mountain (to learn about chick survival, habitat use, etc.). They are currently wrestling with the data. Brian is still monitoring the birds to help identify winter habitat and to take advantage of the collars until the batteries die.

Brian Maxfield reported some research highlights from recent work:

- Diamond Mountain birds moved similarly this winter as they did last year.
- Colorado researchers have a GPS-collared male that attended two of the leks in our area.
- Brian also has collars out on Taylor Mountain. They are relatively easy to track. Seven birds were collared, and the 6 birds still alive all spend time in the same place together.
- This year, survival appears to have been very good. There were fewer losses this year on Anthro Mountain than in previous years.
- More birds were seen on Nuttars Ridge this year than usual as well.

## *NRCS/SGI updates*

Natasha Gruber showed a short video that is promoting NRCS's Sage-Grouse Initiative to private landowners. The group discussed SGI opportunities and challenges in the area. There was interest in the assurances that will come with participation in the program. According to an MOU signed by USFWS and NRCS, participating landowners who continue to follow their conservation plans will be given assurances in the event that greater sage-grouse are listed. Natasha has tried many forms of outreach but some landowners are not responding. The group decided that a January workshop for landowners would be a good way to interest and inform people. Topics to cover could include SGI and assurances, practices for sage-grouse habitat improvement, impact of BLM.USFS possible decisions/planning, assessing what landowner needs are with regard to sage-grouse habitat, and possibly some other ideas that would be interested to sage-grouse but not related to sage-grouse. It will need to take place before the sign-up deadline of January 18 for this year's SGI funding. The group suggested Thursday January 3. Natasha will take the lead on this event.

## *Carbon-Emery group changes*

The Carbon-Emery sage-grouse group is considering splitting between the Uintah Basin and the Parker mountain group. We might hold meetings in Duchesne if they joined us, so they would not have as far to drive. Lorien will follow up with that group and invite them to join us.

## **Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will learn more about the OSTs PEIS and report back to the group.
- Lorien will look into the 4:1 ratio and bring more information to the group in the future.
- Lorien will pass along suggestions relating to other mitigation processes to those working on developing the state sage-grouse plan (Energy by Design, Gateway South's process).
- Natasha will lead development of a January SGI workshop for landowners.
- Lorien will follow up with the Carbon-Emery group and invite them to join us.

## **Next Meeting:**

The next meeting will follow an upcoming UBPCD meeting, either in January or February.