

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 12/16/14

Place: County Building in Vernal, Utah

Present: Terrell Thayne (GIP), Emily Spencer (Dinosaur NM), Miles Hanberg (UDWR), Bob Christensen (USFS), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Natasha Gruber –Hadden (NRCS/Mule Deer Fdn), Garrick Hall (Farm Bureau), Roland McCook (Ute Tribe F&W), Dean Richens (American Gilsonite), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Update: Congressional action

The “cromnibus” bill before congress has now been signed. It contains a provision that reduces USFWS funding for working on the sage-grouse listing decision. This will likely postpone the listing decision at least one year. Once more is known, Lorien will send it out to the LWGs.

Blue Mountain population research update

Dinosaur NM is helping fund additional collars in the Blue Mountain area. There will be additional collars put out on birds in the spring. These are GPS collars. One thing we have learned so far is that one of the hens that was collared in Colorado has been wintering with the Diamond Mountain birds.

Tribal update

Roland provided an update on the tribes’ sage-grouse efforts. They are between biologists, so Roland is the person in charge of projects currently. He is working with Natasha on improving habitat conditions on Towanna Flat. This would be a mowing project. They are also talking about a project near Little Water.

NRCS updates

Natasha is looking at potential private lands projects adjacent to BLM and DWR projects that are being proposed in WRI this year. Little Water is one of those under consideration. Diamond Mountain landowners are also looking at other little projects, but Natasha is trying to focus on landscape scale work. The SGI deadline will be at the end of March [3/20/15]. In addition, fence markers continue to go out. Many Eagle Scouts and Dedicated Hunters have been involved. Across the region that Natasha works in (which is larger than just the Uintah SGMA) a total of 56 miles of fences have been marked. There are still more to mark, but they are low on fence markers. Dedicated Hunters are incredibly helpful, but obviously less available for volunteer work during hunting season. They have been making and donating the materials for the fence markers.

USU Extension involvement locally

Boyd reported that he does a January newsletter to landowners in Uintah and Daggett counties. Any news of information related to sage-grouse could be included if he receives it by January 10. He can also facilitate getting similar updates out to landowners in Duchesne County through Troy.

SITLA Update

Scott Chamberlain reported that SITLA has several PJ projects that are lined up for entry in the WRI database. Also, although it is harder to account for, several proposed sagebrush treatment projects in winter range were stopped before they happened. This represents progress that has been made getting decision-makers educated about the needs of sage-grouse, and how to both help them actively, but also not damage their habitat.

Transmission line update

Pat Rainbolt has been tracking the transmission line siting process for several proposed projects. He is working with Brian Maxfield on the Transwest line, which will be going through the Fruitland area, but they are working to site the exact pole locations so as to avoid sage-grouse as much as possible. They are working on a minor variation on Tabby Mountain. It will cross the Wildcat WMA as well. Gateway South is a bit farther behind in the process of siting, but they are watching what Transwest does.

BLM update

BLM just finished a data call from FWS, for the whole state and the last five years. Also, they completed 4 PJ treatment projects on Diamond mountain this year, including two bullhogs and 2 slashings.

UDWR projects update

Miles Hanberg reported in the progress of several projects:

- On Taylor Mountain, a chaining has been done and the PJ burned. Sagebrush will be seeded onto the site.
- The Browns Park PJ project was done, and a sagebrush seeding is also coming soon
- Also in Browns Park, 40 acres of furrowing treatment was done in sage-grouse winter range. 20 acres are planned for next year. Some of the same treatment was also done on Tabby Mountain. This has all been done on DWR land. Seed mixtures include sagebrush, bitterbrush, and four-wing salt-brush. The goal in those areas is to bring back winter browse.
- Miles is proposing a project near Crouse. That will also entail tearing out smooth brome, then seed forbs and bitterbrush, and trying out a technique with alternating rows of brush and forbs. At another project, on Donkey Flats, near Red Fleet – which might be a good

location to visit during a summer field tour – a similar technique may be used in crested wheatgrass.

Forest Service updates

A 1600-acre lop-and-scatter on Anthro was done recently. Anthro Mountain isn't in the SGMA, but it is still very much on the Forest Service's radar for keeping sage-grouse populations on FS ground healthy. Also lots of work is being done near Taylor Mountain.

Statewide Pinyon-Juniper Strategy

Lorien showed the low-resolution maps that have been developed through the statewide conifer encroachment strategy. Eric Ellis was unable to make the meeting, but there will be additional discussion in the UBPCD meeting following the LWG meeting about the maps. Essentially, the NRCS conifer encroachment layer was overlaid with sage-grouse habitat areas to develop priority areas for PJ removal. Only the NRCS data above 10% conifer cover was used, due to the lower-percentages data being less reliable.

The maps show Phase 1 and Phase 2 conifer encroachment areas that should be address in the next 2, 5, and 15 years to help sage-grouse. To match BLM terminology, these were labeled Tier 1, 2, and 3. They may help guide project proposals for WRI this year and into the future. The ranking score-sheet has not been changed to reflect these polygons. The polygons will be available as shape files soon. Lorien will send them out to the groups once Eric Ellis emails her.

Dean mentioned that for these maps and in many other cases, it would be very helpful if the maps had a township and range overlay available, so that industry could understand how their interests fit in to the conversations about priority conifer removal and many other things.

International Sage-grouse Forum report

Lorien provided a brief update on the November sage-grouse forum. All the sessions are available online for free at the Forum website. Lorien sent that to the LWG list very recently. Sessions included mitigation, private landowner opportunities, hunting and predation, disturbance, fire, NRCS programs, and many other topics and plenary speakers. Several people indicated that the longer recordings make it hard to find what you want, and know where to start the recording. Lorien will make a list of presentations and send it out to the group, while also highlighting some that might be of particular interest.

Miscellaneous updates:

- The GIP deadline has been extended this year. Contact Terrell if you know of landowners interested in getting help with grazing improvement projects.
- Bill Stringer (formerly the new public lands person for Uintah County) will be a commissioner beginning January 1. The Uintah commissioners are now McKee,

Stringer, and Raymond. There will be new Duchesne and Daggett County Commissioners also. Once those commissioners have determined their roles, we can invite them as appropriate to attend the LWG.

- Scott Chew, the UBARM co-chair, is now in the state legislature. He will probably have to scale back his role on the LWG.
- Future meeting topics of interest include mitigation and information on the availability of basic trainings in sage-grouse habitat improvement, especially for those who are new to their jobs. This is currently pertinent for the Tribes on their projects.

Follow-up Needed

- Anyone interested in getting info out to the Daggett, Uintah, or Duchesne county agricultural landowners needs to get it to Boyd Kitchen before January 10.
- Lorien will send out the conifer strategy shape files to the groups once Eric Ellis and Eric Edgely have them available.
- Lorien will send a list of speakers/sessions from the Forum to the listserv.
- Natasha will identify key sessions from the Forum that may be useful for the Tribe in understanding key sage-grouse habitat improvement opportunities.
- Lorien will notify the group of all sage-grouse related habitat projects that could be reviewed before the project ranking team meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next UBARM meeting will be the same day as the February UPCD meeting, on February 17 at 10 am. There will not be a separate sage-grouse meeting before the WRI ranking team meets to discuss projects in the WRI database. Both meetings will be held at the new DNR offices on Vernal Ave.