

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 2/17/15

Place: Interagency Fire Center (west of the USFS). Vernal, Utah
Present: David Allison (consultant and co-chair), Karl Fleming (FWS), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Dave Olsen (USFS), Brian Maxfield (UWDR), Greg Todd (Duchesne Co Commission), Garrick Hall (Farm Bureau), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

NRCS updates

There are two upcoming deadlines for NRCS programs related to sage-grouse. The Sage-Grouse Initiative deadline is March 20th. Other sage-grouse project funding is also available (new this year) through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) which has specific sage-grouse project funds available as well. The deadline for the funding is coming up quickly on Feb 27th. [Post-meeting update: this has been postponed until March 13th]

CCAAs from Wyoming

Dave Allison explained that several partner organizations in Wyoming have developed a CCAA template that may be of interest to local ranchers. The Sublette County, Wyoming, Conservation District is a lead agency. Dave said that they would likely be willing to come present in the Basin if anyone is interested.

There has been some interest in CCAAs in the past from ranchers on Diamond Mountain, but interest died down after the process seems very burdensome.

Karl noted that Jay Martini was hired by FWS to help with CCAAs in Utah, among other sage-grouse related work, so the landscape for getting them done has changed since UBARM discussed this several years ago. If we do invite the Sublette CD folks to present here, having Jay at the meeting also would make sense as he would be involved in any efforts to develop local CCAAs. Dave Allison will inquire locally with the Uintah County Commission and others to gauge interest levels, and work with Lorien to set up an information meeting if it makes sense.

Governor's Executive Order

Lorien reviewed the Executive Order released on Tuesday last week, with a primary focus on the last two pages. The EO provides a minimal amount of detail but solid directives on how state agencies should implement the Governor's Sage-Grouse plan that was released in early 2013. Among the named agencies are the Division of Oil Gas and Mining, Division of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Agriculture and Food, and the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands. All agencies "shall coordinate" with the Division of Wildlife Resources when their activities might affect sage-grouse in the Sage-Grouse Management Areas. Lorien will forward

the Executive Order to the listserv; everyone is encouraged to read it.

Several individuals in the group wondered how the Executive Order applies to SITLA actions or SITLA land trades; Lorien will pass the question along to individuals better able to answer it.

BLM update

The best information currently available about the current process of the BLM/USFS EIS is that the BLM is aiming to sign a Record of Decision by the end of July. This will indicate how Resource Management Plans across Utah will be amended to reflect sage-grouse management stipulations.

Proposed State Land Exchanges

Dave Allison expressed concern that state land exchanges proposed through Rep. Jason Chaffetz and Rep. Rob Bishop's offices, unless currently proposed language is changed, might create a situation that would limit our ability to manage sage-grouse habitat. Dave explained that current sage-grouse opportunity areas or habitat areas, if they were affected by this land-ownership change mechanism, could be placed into a designation desired by environmental groups that could prevent future vegetation management projects, such as pinyon-juniper removal, other than those done by hand. This could potentially hamper vegetation restoration efforts in sage-grouse areas, particularly those in Daggett County. The group looked at maps of the sage-grouse habitat in the Uintah SGMA, but without detailed information on proposed land swap areas, could not comment further. Dave Allison will find more information and send it to Lorien to forward to the full group as appropriate.

State Sage-Grouse website and maps

Lorien demonstrated for the group that the state has a new website up for sage-grouse. The site includes pertinent information, such as the Governor's Executive Order, as well as links to maps with layers that can be turned on and off, representing landownership, sage-grouse habitat and lek areas, cheatgrass, oil and gas wells, and other useful layers.

Mitigation information from the International Sage-grouse Forum

The group watched the first few minutes of a mitigation basics presentation given by Shauna Ginger, UFWFS, at the sage-grouse forum in November. The intent was to get everyone familiar with how to access the information on the Forum website, as well as inform our conversation on mitigation.

Summer field tour

The group considered going to Little Mountain for the summer field tour. We could look at recently finished and newly proposed projects. Dave offered to host lunch. Lorien will follow up with Brian, Dave, and others to plan the tour.

Follow-up Needed

- Dave Allison will inquire locally with the Uintah County Commission and others to gauge interest level in a CCAA workshop, then work with Lorien to set up an information meeting if needed.
- Lorien will forward the Executive Order to the listserv; everyone is encouraged to read it.
- Lorien will pass the question about the EO and SITLA along to someone better able to answer it.
- Dave Allison will find more information on the land exchanges and send it to Lorien.
- Lorien will work on planning the field tour with the individuals familiar with the area.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting was not scheduled. It will likely be the field tour in May/June, unless an urgent agenda item emerges that requires the group's attention before summer. This year will probably not be a joint tour with UBPCD as that group may visit non-sage-grouse areas this year.