

**LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 12/6/11

Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Place: County Building in Vernal, Utah

Present: Diane Coltharp (Uintah County Public Lands), Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Kirk Wood (Duchesne County), Mark Raymond (Uintah County), Mike McKee (Uintah County), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Mark Ewell (NRCS), Steve Weaver (Mule Deer Foundation/NRCS), Scott Ackerman (USFWS), Pat Rainbolt (DWR), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Brian Maxfield (DWR), Marissa Oaks (Grazing for Wildlife), Jared Zierenberg (USDA-WS), Bob Christensen (USFS), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension, Uintah county), Robert Hamilton (Rocky Mountain Power), Jimi Gragg (DWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Available Resources

Lorien noted that there are several resources available that may be of interest to the group.

- 1) There is a new habitat and basic sage-grouse ecology guide for landowners and managers recently published by USU. Lorien handed out copies. It is also available electronically on the working group website, www.utahcbcp.org. Boyd Kitchen agreed to take a bunch of them to Daggett County.
- 2) Lorien has been working on a compilation of private lands conservation opportunities in Utah that will be available within the next month or so. She handed out a draft version for the group members to review.
- 3) There is a webinar on Dec 14 by Steve Knick that might be of interest. The link was sent to the group email list prior to the meeting.

Sage-Grouse Initiative: New Biologist, Projects

Steve Weaver is a new Mule Deer Foundation/NRCS employee who has a three-year position to help implement NRCS's sage-grouse initiative on private lands. There are two other biologists in the state with similar positions.

The group collectively reviewed progress and updates on SGI projects. The Siddoway project, which was going to be paired with an adjacent BLM project, still needs engineering done, so BLM is going ahead with their half of the project.

The Wilkins/Mail Draw project has likely moved forward. BYU research is ongoing in the area and will be able to provide information on the effectiveness of that work.

On Mitch Hacking's property, fencing has been added to improve grazing management, and fences have been marked with reflectors to help increase the visibility to grouse.

The group briefly discussed the reasons that some agencies prefer certain sagebrush management techniques, such as chemical treatment, while others prefer mechanical. For example, chemical application leaves skeletons, which can be good for cover, but it is difficult (and possibly even dangerous for pilots) to apply in small polygons that would provide a mosaic. Mechanical methods, such as chain and harrow, make it easier to seed at the same time, as well as providing opportunity for more detailed mosaic patterns in the sagebrush, but can be difficult to get to some sites and have limitations on rough terrain.

UPCD Projects

Several UPCD projects were also briefly discussed:

- Raven's Ridge, Phase 3 on BLM ground, is phase three of the Deadman Bench project
- On Anthro Mountain (Forest Service), the Jeep Trail lop and scatter (and then also another 500 acres lower). More lop and scatters on Anthro will be analyzed through NEPA on approximately 8000 acres, in an area where sage-grouse have nested in the past

Group members should remember to review the UPCD projects in the database in January. Comments (both supportive one and those which identify possible problems) are very helpful to project managers and those who review the projects during final funding decisions.

Research Updates

Orrin Duvuvuei, a graduate student from USU working on Anthro Mountain, was unable to attend the meeting due to school schedules, but provided Lorien with the following update paragraph to read: "This past field season I trapped and tracked the grouse on Anthro to monitor their vital rates and habitat use. My project is continuing the research that Natasha Gruber recently completed. We want to continue to monitor the grouse (translocated and resident) and determine how the translocation affected the population. I am currently trying to identify where Anthro Mountain's sage-grouse winter so we can examine seasonal movements. Trapping will resume in the spring and I will continue to track the grouse this upcoming field season. I will be monitoring the survival and other vital rates of this population."

Brian Maxfield provided other Anthro Mountain updates. Birds collared there have been found in Range Creek, Tavaputs Plateau, Rye Patch, Wrinkles, the head of Sand Wash, and Moon's property. One female has been going between Tavaputs and Anthro. In past years, Anthro counts have been down when the rest of the state was up, and this year has been the reverse – Anthro had good production, when many other areas saw declines.

BYU research continues on Diamond Mountain. Josh Kaze collared approximately 60 sage-grouse, and Steve Peterson will continue working on that project.

Lek finding helicopter flights did not happen as planned, to look for new leks on the north end. The flights will likely be rescheduled.

Predator Management

Jared noted that Wildlife Services is working to increase its coordination on raven management, lead by Mike Tamllos. They are trying to focus early-season control efforts on groups of ravens where they gather in the winter. Anyone in the working group who sees large groups of ravens in areas that could be problematic for sage-grouse locally should contact Danny at 435-828-8099 to let him know the location. Wildlife Services also has been taking coyotes during flights in key sage-grouse areas in the winter (for example, 21 coyotes on Raven Ridge). Several red foxes have been seen on Anthro Mountain, but they do not appear to be a concern currently.

Proposed Projects and Transmission Lines

No notable updates on either the TransWest or Gateway South proposed transmission lines were presented. Both still have Diamond Mountain proposed as an alternative route.

Robert Hamilton noted that RMP has moved away from using perch discouragers since they have been shown to be not effective in many instances.

Bob Christensen reported that there have been no recent updates with the Berry Petroleum wells. Vantage was given very restrictive mitigation requirements, using the Wyoming process.

Scott Ackerman noted that there are two important final EIS's that have not yet been released but will hopefully be available soon, for Greater Natural Buttes and for Gasco's work on the west side of the Green River.

Scott Chamberlain noted that there are several SITLA leases that are pending that may be relevant to sage-grouse, including some discussion of tar sands. He will keep the group updated as issues arise.

Possible Habitat and Population Improvement Projects

Brian noted that it would be very good to maintain or enhance the current populations on Diamond and Little Mountains. He has submitted a few multi-year habitat improvement projects for consideration. As relevant, some of those will be added in the UPCD database.

There is some private/tribal ground on the west side of Little Mountain that would be great for a PJ reduction project. This might be an item for SGI. There are also some leks on Little Mountain. Considering ways to improve the leks or the surrounding habitat would be a good focus for SGI. Steve Weaver will follow up with Brian about these projects.

Updating the UBARM Sage-Grouse Plan and Map

This year the group will continue to focus on getting the plan updated. This will be a major focus on the January 25th meeting, in addition to UPCD project discussions. Prior to upcoming meetings where this will be a discussion item, Lorien will send out documents reflecting the work done earlier in 2011.

We need an updated map for UBARM with improved labeling, new sage-grouse habitat polygons, and updated well locations. Lorien will work with Diane to create a map that the group can use for reference on tours and in meetings.

Upcoming BLM RMP revisions for Sage-Grouse

Dixie Sadlier explained an upcoming BLM topic with regard to sage-grouse: BLM will soon be issuing a memorandum that gives guidance on new ways the agency will be handling sage-grouse-related decisions. [Post meeting note: this guidance was actually issued as two IMs, one Dec 22 and one a week later.]

These documents will guide BLM actions on two fronts:

- 1) Resource Management Plans across the western U.S. will be revised to better address sage-grouse issues, and the guidance will be partly related to that process.
- 2) Until the plans are revised and in place, interim guidelines on how sage-grouse are to be considered by the BLM will be issued. These guidelines will be based on recommendations from a national technical committee, and will cover many aspects of BLM operations, from recreation management to grazing and energy development.

UBARM will discuss the guidance at upcoming meetings. UBARM members will likely be involved in the RMP revision process, once it is more clear what that will entail. There will be a scoping meeting in Vernal on January 18th to discuss the upcoming RMP revisions.

Follow-up Needed

- Scott Ackerman will inform Lorien when the EISs are finalized for Greater Natural Buttes and Gasco are available.
- Steve and Brian will discuss possible Little Mountain projects for SGI
- Lorien will send plan LWG update summary information prior to upcoming meetings.
- Lorien will work with Diane to create a new UBARM area map.
- Lorien will update the group about new info on the BLM process, and scoping meetings.

Next Meeting:

The upcoming meeting were schedule for January 25th at 3:30 after the UBPCD meeting, and Tuesday, March 20th, at 10 am.