

Color Country Local Working Group
December 12, 2007 10:00 AM Forest Service Office, Panguitch

Agenda

10:00 Welcome and Introductions

10:10 Chris McCoy, Alton Coal Development, LLC. Presentation on the plans for Alton Coal Project.

Alton Coal Development – Coal Hollow Project Overview

Chris McCourt, P.E.

463 N. 100 W. Suite 1

Cedar City, UT 84720

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- ~4,000 acres – disturbed over a 30 year period (620 acres private, 3600 federal)
- All surface mining
- 10 mi (as a crow flies) from Bryce Canyon
- New headquarter office in Cedar City
- Plan on trucking coal out
- Expected to produce 2 million tons coal/year
- Only about 60 acres surface impact at any one time. Boxcut area (active mining area) reclaimed within 120 to 150 days after being mined. Revegetation, etc. done immediately.
- Federal and private land involved
 - Currently in Mining and Reclamation Plan (MRP) process for private and in the NEPA process (EIS) for BLM lands. Hoping to be on-line to mine by Fall 2008.

Sage grouse impacts – may be short-term detrimental impacts – goal is to avoid critical leking and nesting periods. Studies have shown that mining has positive impact over time.

Sage Grouse Habitat Improvements that could be/have been done:

- Juniper removal (shredding, track hoe)
- Minimize mining
- Create more sagebrush areas
- Plant desirable forb species for pasture lands
- Simulate lek vegetation community structure at reclamation
- Preserve sagebrush communities
- Predator removal
- Luring birds with decoys to alternative leks.
- Import birds from north lek
- Continuing studies of local populations

Questions/discussion on presentation:

Is it feasible to lure birds? Nicki indicated that they had tried last year and it had not worked; however, Kevin H. said that he has flushed birds from a lek and seen them go immediately to another lek site. Most likely they have alternative leking sites and will move temporarily.

Alton area would be a good area to monitor and see what happens with birds in relation to mining activities b/c this is happening all over the west. Nicki will be working with mine officials to get a master's student to do a research project.

Opportunities to reconnect Sink Valley and Alton Country corridors to expand habitat and sage grouse mobility.

10:45 Nicki Frey: Elections for Chairperson

Nominees: Kevin Heaton

Hal Stout

Jake Schoppe

Nomination for Chair

Hal Stout will be the new chair

11:15 Nicki Frey (and Steve Petersen) Plans for Grouse research in 2008. Nicki and Steve intend to submit a proposal for further research to Chris McCourt to continue to look at how the birds move from Alton to Hoyt's Ranch area. Mr. Heaton has already conducted some vegetation improvement on his property that will improve this corridor between the two lek sites.

Other comments

Greater Sage Grouse Listing

In past - Petitioned for listing, but USFWS put on back burner and they were not listed.

USFWS said listing was not warranted

Last week's ruling - USFWS service will be required to re-evaluate ruling and reconsider research to see if listing is warranted.

Problem – There are places like Dog Valley – Large lek, primarily on private – There is interest in the area to trade the lands to preserve habitat – if grouse listed, really impede recovery of habitat.

What can we do?

Need to look at opportunities to entice birds back into areas where veg. treatments have been done, but some water developments need to follow. A lot of areas where this is occurring (fire areas, pinyon/juniper treatment areas).

Is this a good time to approach the developers that have the land by the airport (5-10 acre parcels) – John and Peggy Ellenberg? It may be too late to do something here. The lek site is in the middle of subdivision. Is there potential to lure the birds to a site near here? There may be an opportunity to work with individuals to engage in community-based conservation programs.

Next Meeting

February 13, 10:00 a.m., Forest Service Office