

CCARM Meeting

December 6, 2017

Panguitch, Utah – 10:00 a.m.

Attending

Rhett Boswell, UDWR

Kevin Heaton, County Extension

John Keeler, Farm bureau

Vicki Tyler, BLM

Lisa Church, via phonebridge, BLM

Kurt Nichols, Alton Coal

Ben Nodalski, PLCPCO, DNR

Brian Bremner, Garfield County

Conference line

Great to have this capability. Group suggested we utilize this more often to call in, for folks that may have to travel.

Update of State of Utah Sage Grouse Plan

Ben Nodalski – Ben is working with the governor’s office and UDWR to update the State Sage Grouse Conservation Plan. He will oversee revision of the plan and then implementation of the plan.

Lots of attention has been focused on revision of federal plans (BLM and now USFS). Ben is dealing with the state plan only.

Ben will discuss feedback he has received and is also here at this meeting is solicit feedback from our working group. He has met with over 20 groups.

Primary elements of plan/and or where comments have been received to-date:

1. **State’s plan lacks clarity** – format and structure are not conducive to understanding; appendices bloating plan. Solution: reformat plan to change the way it flows to make it more clear. Write the plan to reflect Clear and quantifiable objectives. The plan does contain conservation goals, but not laid out clearly. Ben plans to eliminate redundancy, and to make it “leaner and meaner” so that it is more clear to local communities and local groups.

Q/Comment: Brian Bremner – Feels plan is clear – It is overarching to cover the whole state – State plan should be written to cover a broad base and let the local county and working group

plans to cover site-specific. Ben clarified that this does not necessarily mean local specificity, just to clarify those things that are not clear.

Ben also noted that there has been a lot of confusion as to how the governor's executive order crosswalks with the current plan. The current plan is to build the EO into the plan revision.

The goal is to 'look' different but not function differently. The plan will look more authoritative and professional.

Working group comments: The group agreed this was a good way to move forward.

2. **SGMA** – Lots of confusion of how SGMA's work and how they relate to the the federal nexus of PHMA's. Additional concern on how they work with private lands. There needs to be discussion on how plan relates to these issues and how the plan works with habitat maps. Plan should discuss how local working groups and counties can change boundaries.

Working group comments: The group agreed this was a good way to move forward.

3. **Population objective** – The plan calls for a population objective of 4100 males w/rolling 10-year average. Ben has heard support for an objective for each SGMA's population, as well as a population objective for the state as a whole. However, he has also heard feedback that the way we are getting the population objective may not be backed in science or useful. The Idea is to combine our viability objective with the population objective to come up with something that is less objective. Plan will assess pop. trend over long-term, and to ask the question of whether populations are increasing, stable or declining. Population objective in the plan is to answer the question above. Goal is to get all 11 SGMA's with stable or increasing populations.

Q. Brian Bremner - How close is Utah to 4100 birds – current population objective?

A. Ben Nodalski - Several dozen under objective.

Q. Kevin Heaton – Is there anything in the plan that gives consideration to drought, extreme weather, etc.

A. Ben - The idea is to swap annual variations with long-term trend line (20 years).

Kevin: But if we are in a 20 year drought, there may be situations beyond our control.

Ben: Each working group should have an idea of where there SGMA stands and to help inform conservation solutions locally – this takes into consideration local pressures, including drought, fire, etc.

Brian: re: trend : local areas would respond and take action if outside events are causing issues (fire, drought, etc).

Ben: Does not see the plan as a "one size fits all." The plan should pave the way for local conservations to happen and for groups to ensure solutions are relevant locally. Just b/c there is an objective does not mean we can't have common sense solutions at the local level.

4. **Habitat Objectives** – There is a lot of confusion/questions on implementing habitat objectives in the state plan. For example the plan says we will improve 25k acres/year and increase 50k acres/year. It is hard to parcel out what is improve and what is increase and most time this objective is reported in a combined manner. In the new plan there would be a combined habitat objective to improve/increase, enhance/rehabilitate/restore type of objective. Every project in an SGMA that improves habitat can be combined into one habitat goal annually.

Brian – likes the idea of doing this - makes it easier to determine what is good for the bird.

Q. John Keeler – Is this a 10 year plan?

Ben: Ben hopes to revisit the plan every 5 years to ensure we are using the best science available. Plan should be dynamic but also be a conservation tool.

Q. Brian: Who has questioned the viability/habitat objective?

A. Ben - Everyone that has ever read the plan. The current plan is very subjective, with no detailed way for us to see viability in the future.

Brian: I am involved in a viability analysis. There are 3 or 4 measures that are highly influential; given the vast difference between SGMA, should there not be different viability objectives for each SGMA? There may need to be 5 or 6 that are different throughout the state.

Ben: He is nervous about being overly prescriptive in the state plan. The Federal plan has triggers, which may be hard to change/adapt to once they are hit. Those are a tool for the federal framework; in this setting (state plan) we hope to have a tool that will give local governments the ability to work through the local working group process to determine causal factors and to determine proactive and collaborative conservation measures moving forward. The state's plan can be the nexus to provide the framework, but not overstep the ability of the local working groups to make decisions.

5. **Habitat protection goal.** Feedback Ben is hearing is that the goal of protecting 10k annually within SGMA's is too big and too many acres –too much potential for negative impacts to local communities. Goal is not an effective instrument moving forward. Goal will be less focused on quantity of acres (local concern of locking up land) and will be more focused on identifying quality habitats – more strategic. Identifying quality habitats and higher priority habitats will help work toward more voluntary and incentive-based measures. The Migration Initiative is a statewide focus – this will help make sure we accurately understand what impacts are to wildlife and local communities.
6. **Key threats** - Threats identified in the plan are based on the COT report. We have identified primary threats statewide. Some SGMA's have local threats. Need to clarify all of this and threats may change based on individual SGMA's and on feedback from local experts.
7. **Mitigation Framework** – Avoid, minimize, mitigate: State has been working on compensatory mitigation program for sagegrouse. Want to make sure the state's plan and mitigation rule support each other.

Brian: explain compensatory mitigation.

Ben: There are lots of ways to avoid impacts to sage grouse. We ensure we are minimizing if they cannot be avoided. If there are impacts remaining, mitigate for impacts. Compensatory mitigation can help be used to support mitigation – not intended to thwart development. Compensatory Mitigation can make sure sage grouse populations are accounted for properly – Brian – so whatever you lose, you gain nearby and overall there is a gain or a net-even. Regaining somewhere else that which we have lost.

Ben: Goal of Utah Compensatory mitigation is to make sure we have “credits” that are available and are affordable and effective. The goal is also to make sure that there is a mechanism in place that is easy to work with and will allow developers and the conservation community to get measures that are effective. All states are doing this - we want something that works for Utah.

John: Top Threats – Predator control should be in the top 5.

Brian: USFS and BLM rely on USFWS to have a say in their plans. Is this the same with the state?

Ben: The State would like this removed. State has control over the wildlife. Believe partnerships have proven to be effective and that we have a pretty good track record. We do not wish to have USFWS weigh in on local decisions or local projects.

The state should have the mitigation plan out any day for public review and feedback.

8. **Season habitats** – most folks agree with the habitats we have identified in the plan - Nesting, brood rearing, year-round habitat. The question is more often, ‘How do we deal with year-round habitat, that is all of the above.

Rhett: Example of year-round habitat on SITLA piece. What I have done locally is look at SGMA as a whole. Look at limiting factor – seasonal restrictions – rely on local decision to be made to prioritize based on the limiting factor and what work needs to be done. There should be clarity in the plan to allow local decisions to prevail.

Q. John – Does habitat increase include areas where birds move into each year, even if nothing is done.

A. Ben – yes. If you have phase 1 and phase II p/j removal– we would consider that immediate functional habitat. If connectivity is provided and they start using an area adjacent to the project area that they did not use before, that is still gain in habitat.

The plan does not call out a need for mesic habitats. We will build mesic habitats into the language of the plan. Account for nesting and brood in these mesic areas.

Lisa Church – great idea! – gives us an opportunity for support for water projects.

Brian - Legislative support – May propose that a 12,500 gallon tank w/o a water right could be developed, with a limitation that it is in area that is designated for species of conservation/special concern.

Vicki reiterated points brought up at yesterday’s meeting with the SWARM group.

1. Consideration in plan for lands that are in SGMA, but will never be habitat.
2. Careful review of statewide seasonal habitat maps. These maps need to be reviewed by local groups before being incorporated into the plan.
3. Greater attention to those items that cannot be addressed in federal plans (i.e. predator control).

Ben: In summary, the ultimate goal is that we have a plan for local communities that can be adaptive, and updated without a lot of concern.

Q. Rhett Boswell– what is the revision timetable? Can we make changes at any time?

A. Ben: We want to make sure the plan is updated and maps reviewed yearly. Make sure state/federal/local plans are not conflicting each other. The goal is not to let rigid ideology get in the way of doing what needs to be done.

Focus on day-to-day coordination! Focus on coordination at state level, that trickles down to the local level (ex. Quincy and Ben should be BFF's).

Ben – Need to have draft to Governor's Advisory Committee/Plan Implementation Council before legislative session begins.

Rhett – additional comment – terminology - concern over designation of “other” habitat. Is there a need for something more descriptive (semantics). Transitional habitat = could be a better term more ecologically speaking. Rhett will get recommendation to Ben on this. BenNadolski@utah.gov.

WRI Projects in Panguitch SGMA

Four projects were presented to the local working group for consideration in the upcoming WRI funding cycle:

1. South Canyon/Sunset Cliffs 2– along Highway 12 (brood habitat); bullhog
2. UKC – Spaniard Spring phase II (year round); chain
3. UKC - Cottonwood – Phase III (opportunity); bullhog & future cultural
4. UKC – Burnt Cedar Point Phase II (opportunity); chaining

The projects were prioritized by the group as follows:

Priority 1a: UKC Spaniard Spring Phase II – Good linkage between summer and winter habitat; project also ties into other completed projects that have been shown to be beneficial to grouse.

Priority 1b: South Canyon Sunset Cliffs – Good brood rearing habitat. Grouse in this area. A lot of work has also been done along this corridor for grouse. This is also Utah Prairie Dog Habitat.

Priority 2 – UKC Burnt Cedar Point Phase II; connects to other previously treated areas; these treated opportunity areas on UKC are showing immediate use by grouse.

Priority 3 – Cottonwood Phase III – bullhog and future arch clearance. Does provide some connectivity;

Focus Areas

Get any removals or additions to focus areas to Rhett by December 15. Brian asked to look at the Dog Valley area and to ensure that it was in a focus area. Rhett confirmed that it was.

Completion reports

There are a lot of completion reports that need to be completed. This may impact how we receive funding in the future. Everyone needs to ensure these get completed.

Next Meeting – March 7, 2018

This was John Keeler's last meeting. His replacement will be (please remove John and add Brett to the mailing list for CCARM and SWARM:

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Welcome Brett and Good luck John – we will miss you!