

**CASTLE
COUNTRY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 1/21/14

Place: City Planning and Zoning office in Price, Utah

Present: Rex Sacco (Carbon County), Bill Butcher (landowner), Brayden Huntsman (Price River CD), Bart Treviño (EnerVest), John Jones (Carbon County Commission), Brad Crompton (UDWR), Derris Jones, Dana Truman (BLM), Roger Barton ((UACD), Shelley Barton (Price River CD), Nicole Nielson (UDWR), Makeda Hanson (DWR), Wayne Frandsen (rancher), Dorrell Barker (co-chair), Clint Wirick (USFWS), Robert Edgel (UDWR), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Introductions and Announcements

After introductions, Lorien mentioned that the Utah sage-grouse summit will be held on February 18-19 in Salt Lake City. More information and registration links will be emailed out soon. It is free of charge but registration is requested for an accurate head count.

Lorien provided some background information for the group members about the current federal planning efforts, which are designed to make amendments to all BLM Resource Management Plans and Forest Service Forest Plans to improve sage-grouse protections in those plans. A draft Environmental Impact Statement is out for comment that explores different options for what could go in those plans. This was as background for the comments proposed by Rex Sacco, which he proposed that the group send to the BLM as comments on the draft EIS.

Research Updates

Robby Edgel, a new oil and gas biologist for the DWR in Price, gave a short presentation to the group on the kinds of impacts that energy development can have on sage-grouse. Among the discussion items were the latest research on tall structures, which is a controversial topic.

Comments on the draft EIS

Rex presented a draft letter for the group's consideration, that reflects concerns and comments with the draft EIS. Some members of the group were strongly supportive, and others were uncomfortable with some of the letter's content and/or tone.

Among the points addressed in the letter that generated animated discussion and/or controversy:

- A concern that the Price RMP did not need to be amended as it already contains sage-grouse protections; in addition to other existing regulation which require the protection of sensitive species.
- Comments regarding the reliability of the data on which maps presented in different

proposed Alternatives (within the EIS) are based

- Questions about how conservation easements relate to private property rights
- Objections to the idea of mitigation for disturbance, using a threshold; the unproven nature of the threshold and the uncertainty around how it would be managed were both of substantial concern to many individuals in attendance

Considerable – although not necessarily uniform – agreement was found on the following topics:

- The need to ensure that the LWG can still have an important role in local decision-making, and that that not be eliminated by any of the options. Many individuals felt that the LWG role was well defined in some Alternatives, and inappropriately ignored or downplayed in others.
- A general agreement that the maps from the State of Utah (those found in Alternative E) are preferable to maps from the other alternatives.

Although it was not possible to discuss each point in detail, many of the people at the meeting had received the letter in advance of the meeting, and expressed general comments, either supportive or not, that suggested a lack of consensus on many of the topics.

In addition to substantive comments, the group recommended that the letter be restructured to include a summary page which focused on the key points, and have supporting reasoning later in the letter. Rex agreed to rewrite the letter in order to address some of the concerns raised at the meeting, and resend it to the group.

State Sage-Grouse Plan Update

The lek location data has just recently been made public, so that anyone working in sage-grouse habitats can know where the sensitive areas are. The data is available as GIS files on the state of Utah's website. There are links from the UDWR sage-grouse web page as well. Anyone needing help to find them can contact Lorien.

One of the key features of the state sage-grouse plan is the 4:1 disturbance /mitigation acres ratio. Alan Clark is currently working to design a mitigation program. It will very likely include a conservation bank, which will allow people to trade credits for sage-grouse habitat. In the past, someone from the CaCoARM group expressed interest in knowing more about the system. It is in development, and will be discussed at the February Sage-grouse Summit in Salt Lake.

NRCS Update

The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program has \$1.5 million dollars available this year as matching money for sage-grouse specific easements. Anyone interested in that can contact Lorien or their local NRCS office for more information. The sign-up deadline is March 21st.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will email the LWG list with information on the sage-grouse summit, Feb 18-19.
- Rex will update the letter based on the group's suggestions, and send it out to see if more people are comfortable signing on to it.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will likely be in late March. There was some discussion of including a lek count opportunity for those who have not seen the birds. Also, the group wants to see and comment on early drafts of the baseline disturbance layer maps. The meeting date may wait until those are available. Rex and Lorien will coordinate.