

**CASTLE
COUNTRY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 11/28/18

Place: DNR office in Price, Utah

Present: Jim Spencer (NRCS), Bill Butcher (landowner), Makeda Hansen (UDWR), Dana Truman (BLM), Klint Eastman (Preston Nutter Ranch), Scott Gibson (UDWR), Todd Thorne (Carbon County), Nicole Neilson (UDWR), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

USFS Planning update

The Forest Service is currently in a 90-day comment period, which ends Jan 3, for revision to sage-grouse amendments originally finalized in 2015. Many of their proposed changes include parallel suggestion to BLM, such as eliminating sagebrush focal areas. One key substantive change is that locally relevant guidelines for sage-grouse habitat quality will replace a 7-inch stubble height requirement that was included in the 2015 plans. If anyone in the working group wants to comment, or has additional questions Lorien can look into for you, let her know.

It was noted that no one from Forest Service attended this meeting, and they are often difficult to get in touch with locally.

Project updates and plans

Several projects were discussed:

- North Springs/Miller Creek is in progress right now. Stream BDAs were just installed and the bullhog is happening this week. Phase II will be proposed in the upcoming WRI project round.
- The seed islands on Tavaputs, planted for pollinators, have been done.
- Range Creek fire breaks were done and sprayed with Plateau to hopefully reduce fire ignitions in the area that could spread elsewhere. There is likely not a need for a Phase II.
- A proposed Emma Park SITAL land spike treatment, proposed by a private landowner, for sagebrush thinning or removal was discussed at length. NRCS reached out to DWR to see if there were suggestions on project implementation, application rates, etc. Bill noted that there is a significant likelihood that rabbit brush will come back in aggressively and a long-term management plan will be needed to keep the area useful and meet original goals. Jim Spencer will reach out to Lowell at NRCS to follow up. Dana mentioned that NRCS had also reached out to BLM as well about the project.

Sage-grouse tracking updates

Michel Kohl sent several images of sage-grouse collar locations and a short summary of the

current year's results. The group examined the images and compared them to last year's slide. The same bird that travelled from Emma Park to the Tavaputs Plateau last year followed almost the exact same path this year, earlier this month. Points from Michel were:

- We still have 7 birds with GPS units. 4 that were captured in Emma Park and 3 in Scofield.
- Of these birds, we had 5 nests last spring. That produced 3 broods, and 2 other possible broods (couldn't confirm all the way to 50 days).
- Since we started in 2017, we have captured: 12 birds in Emma Park, and 7 birds in Scofield. This has resulted in 20,087 locations.
- 1 Emma Park bird has once again migrated to west Tavaputs. She started on 11/03 and moved 30 miles and stopped on 11/12, she has since moved another 4 miles to the northeast over the last few days.

The group was interested to know the age of the Tavaputs bird, and also see more detail, if available, about whether she stopped in the same areas on her flyover last year, and if so what those areas look like on the ground. They also asked about the relationship of her flight path to the slope of the landscape features in the area.

Wild horse updates

Dana noted that a recent local horse gather took 93 horses off private land. There is an EA in the works to do another one soon on BLM. Klint explained that any data from past evaluations of horse use of habitat treatments would be something Derris might have.

State Plan updates

Ben Nadolski was unable to attend, so Lorien gave a brief overview of the state plan updates. Key points about the new plan:

- In the last year, the state of Utah, USFS, and BLM have worked together on their simultaneous plan revisions to coordinate efforts and streamline processes. The state plan will likely be the first to be finalized, with a January 1 goal for the revised plan to be done. BLM is working with comments received as of the August 3 comment deadline, and USFS is in a comment period now.
- There are statewide threats (fire, weeds, and conifer encroachment) and local threats that vary by area.
- Mitigation is now part of the plan.
- The plan will be organized so as to be easier to use when the next assessment by USFWS is done.
- Maps and appendices will be available on line, and updated as needed.
- There will be a process for adjusting SGMA boundaries written in to the plan.
- The disturbance caps will be included but exactly how they will be used is still to be determined; a strategy in the plan is to work on those items.
- The local working groups are called out as an important continued piece of how the plan

will be implemented.

- There are wild horse strategies in the plan, associated with sage-grouse habitat health.
- MOUs are continuing to be developed for agencies (federal and additional Utah agencies) to coordinate implementation of the plan and reporting on progress working together.

Lorien will ask Ben to attend a future meeting about the plan once it is finalized, so the group can ask additional questions and understand their role in implementation.

Utah sage-grouse conference in February

There will be a conference in Salt Lake City on February 5-7 highlighting policy and research updates for Utah sage-grouse conservation. Landowners interested in attending may be able to have the registration waived and should contact Lorien if interested.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will follow up with Forest Service to see if we can get attendance at meetings from someone in their local office.
- Lorien will ask Ben to attend a future meeting about the plan once it is finalized.
- Lorien will send additional information to the group about the February conference.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting was not set but will be scheduled for late winter, probably February.