

**CASTLE
COUNTRY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 5/21/13

Place: DWR office in Price, Utah

Present: Jim Spencer (NRCS), Natasha Gruber (NRCS/Mule Deer Fdn), M. Dean Stacey (NRCS), Garrick Hall (Farm Bureau), Jeff Fenton (NRCS), Ron Patterson (USU Extension), Makeda Hanson (DWR), Doug Dennison (Bill Barrett Corp), Susan White (DOGM), Nicole Nielson (DWR), Brad Crompton (DWR), Slate Stewart (UDAF GIP), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Introductions

Lorien Belton introduced herself as the group's new facilitator. Because Todd Black moved to a different job and the Carbon-Emery group chose to divide between the Uintah Basin (UBARM) and Parker Mountain (PARM) groups, this group is in transition. Based on an email poll of the Carbon-related group members, the Carbon county portion of the group will continue to hold meetings in Price, but will meet jointly with the UBARM once a year. Anyone with comments or concerns about the new structure can contact Lorien to see if there are better alternatives.

If anyone is interested in attending the group but is not receiving notices, they should contact Lorien. Also, at a future meeting, we will discuss local leadership options given the new structure for this group.

Sage-Grouse Management Planning (State, Federal, and Local)

The state sage-grouse plan has now been released. The group reviewed several of the major elements of the plan:

- Maps and the full text of the plan is available on the DWR website.
- There are five objectives for sage-grouse populations and habitat in Utah, including ambitious pinyon-juniper and other habitat improvement or increase goals.
- Efforts on private and SITLA land will be voluntary.
- Predator management is addressed in the plan

It was noted that the map has been highly contentious in this area.

The group was interested to know what would happen if LWG plans conflicted with the state plan. The state plan has authority, so it would take precedence. The local plans will be rewritten in the future to ensure that any conflicts are worked out.

The link between the state plan and the ongoing federal efforts is not completely defined at this

point. An original goal of the state planning process was to create maps and stipulations in the state plan which could be approved by USFWS and subsequently adopted into the federal (BLM and USFS) plans. However, because the USFWS cannot provide “concurrence” at this time (in part due to the lack of mechanisms in the plan to carry out the objectives), it remains to be seen how the state and federal processes will work together. For now, both the Forest Service and BLM will be working from their interim guidance documents. Lorien provided hard copies of those documents at the meeting.

Work continues on the federal sage-grouse planning effort. A draft EIS is being written which will explore alternatives for how BLM Resource Management Plans and Forest Service Forest Plans will be amended to include regulatory mechanisms for sage-grouse protection. The State sage-grouse plan will be one of the five alternatives in this EIS. The draft will be out for public comment probably around September 2013.

Carbon County has its own sage-grouse plan. This may provide the county additional leverage to work with BLM during the federal planning process.

NRCS Update: Grazing Reserve Program and Fence Marking Efforts

Natasha Gruber updated the group on opportunities with NRCS for sage-grouse. The Grazing Reserve Program (GRP) is an easement program with a lot of money statewide to support rangeland easements specifically for sage-grouse. The deadline for signing up is May 31. Signing up is just an expression of possible interest, and is not binding. Lorien will send out a reminder via email.

The group had several questions, including how subsurface rights are affected by an easement, or how an easement would affect subsurface rights. Natasha will look into these questions in more detail if anyone has specific examples and potential interest. The group felt that there would not be a lot of interest locally. There would also not be many large private parcels that could rank highly.

NRCS is working to mark fences on private land that have a high collision risk for sage-grouse. Natasha is working with Dedicated Hunters to coordinate this effort in the area. This fence marking is going to be done by NRCS at no cost to landowners.

Grazing Improvement Opportunities

A recommendation was put forth that this group focus on assisting private landowners and ranchers improve grazing management to benefit grouse. Although grazing impacts to grouse are not a high concern rangewide for grouse, grazing management is a topic of interest locally, and there are several areas where group attendees felt that a coordinated effort could be helpful. Some other grazing collaborative grazing discussions elsewhere in the state might have helpful lessons or ideas. A good effort would ideally also include an economic analysis. The Grazing

Improvement Program could be involved. Dean Stacey was also interested in exploring this idea. Slate will talk to Troy Forrest, and Lorien will follow up with Slate and Dean this summer.

Population Research

Two birds were collared on the Scofield lek in early May. Bill Barrett is also doing a project. It includes a winter range study and monitoring sage-grouse response to Bill Barrett road movements. As of May 21, there are 6 collared hens, 5 of which are on eggs.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will continue to update the group on planning processes
- Lorien will send reminders to all groups about the May 31 sign-up deadline for NRCS for sage-grouse easement programs for sage-grouse.
- Lorien will pass along the groups' questions on the plan to individuals who will be able to address the steering committee (state working group) in charge of deciding plan implementation details.
- Lorien will follow up with Dean and Slate about appropriate next steps to continue the grazing discussions.
- The next meeting will include a discussion of local co-chairs in the new structure with UBARM.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting was not set. A joint field tour with the UBARM group may be possible this summer. Details will be developed soon.