

**CASTLE
COUNTRY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 5/29/14

Place: City Planning and Zoning office in Price, Utah

Present: Rex Sacco (Carbon County), Brayden Huntsman (Price River CD), Brandon Steinberg (NRCS), Roslyn Jensen (landowner), Jeanie Jensen (rancher), Butch Jensen (rancher), Klenell Jensen, Daniel Eddington (UDWR), Ted Donaldson (NRCS/UDWR), Brad Crompton (UDWR), Derris Jones, Nicole Nielson (UDWR), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Population information

Brad Crompton provided updates and handouts on sage-grouse population trends based on recent lek counts. The handouts compared total males per lek and average males per lek over time for the state of Utah, the Carbon SGMA, and the Tavaputs area, which although it is not in the SGMA, still has birds. Several leks had high counts, particularly in the Tavaputs area. The Bishop lek had 43 this year – a very encouraging number. Currently, there are three radio-collared birds in the area. All are hens sitting on eggs. DWR is interested in getting more collars out on birds (ideally some for more Tavaputs birds, and also elsewhere). The main focus would be to understand their movements so we can identify critical winter range areas that help with decisions on where to do and not do projects. There may be movement between Anthro Mountain and the Parks, but we need additional bird location information to be sure.

Upcoming Range-wide Sage-grouse Meeting

Lorien announced that there will be a Range-wide Sage-Grouse Forum held in Salt Lake City on November 12-13, 2014. She will send out an email soon with additional information and a save-the-date notice.

State and Federal Planning updates

Utah is close to having baseline (as of April 1, 2013) maps available, but only a few SGMAs are done so far, and the Carbon SGMA is not yet finished. Eric Ellis showed us a preview based on the Box Elder area. The maps have areas inside the SGMAs that the GIS team could not label definitively, so the local working groups will be an important contributor to make sure that the maps represent what is really on the ground. We will schedule the next CaCoARM meeting once those are available. The maps will be available online but password protected.

There is a process to submit edits to the SGMA boundaries based on on-the-ground or other Local Working Group observations. That process can be done online, and is located on the Division of Wildlife Resources site, in the same area as the other sage-grouse related maps. Map adjustments will require a submitted “application,” and will need to have local biologists’ support. This process is explained on the site. Inside the border of the SGMA, corrections that

refine the designations of habitat, non-habitat, and opportunity area will also be accepted. Eric noted that the new NRCS maps of pinyon-juniper will be used to adjust those boundaries as well, with Phase I generally being labeled as habitat, and Phase II or III as opportunity or non-habitat, as appropriate to their location. Derris noted that we will need to be particularly careful to make sure that we don't designate opportunity areas as non-habitat and lose opportunities to get credit for potential conservation measures.

Carbon County has done some separate GIS work as well, looking at leks/habitat, and searching for similar habitat areas to currently occupied habitats.

Rex updated the group on the current status of the federal planning effort. The comments on the draft EIS for the Utah sub-region have been pulled together, but cooperating agencies (including Carbon County) have not seen the early version of the proposed final EIS. There was a conference call planned for May 9, with a 14-day turnaround for cooperating agency comments, but this was cancelled and as of this meeting has not been rescheduled.

Rex explained that several Congressmen from western states have submitted a bill in Congress to prohibit the listing of greater or Gunnison sage-grouse if the states where they reside have a current management plan. The goal is to keep sage-grouse management in state's hands.

Other Updates

EverVest has a new representative who has taken Bart Trevino's place. Derris will send her contact information to Lorien so we can keep her in the loop with the LWG. EnerVest, as well as XTO, which purchased Bill Barrett's interests in the area, will be held to the same EIS as the original company. The group noted that there is currently a rig on Peter's Point. The group discussed questions about the opportunity for offsite mitigation since the eastern part of Carbon County is not within the SGMA boundaries.

Lorien passed around the full list of funded projects through the Watershed Restoration Initiative. No known projects for sage-grouse in the Carbon area were discussed. Lorien and others explained that WRI can be a valuable funding mechanism for projects on private or public land like pinyon juniper removal, and others that can benefit sage-grouse. Lorien or any of the DWR employees at the meeting, among others, can provide more information on how to propose a project, if anyone is interested. The database of all past and current projects is available on line by searching for "WRI Utah."

Lorien explained that she would be gathering information soon to report on the work done by the Local Working Groups in the last year or so. Anyone with information on projects or initiatives completed for sage-grouse, or projects that otherwise benefited sage-grouse in the area should contact Lorien so we can track the groups' successes.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will email the LWG list with information on the sage-grouse forum, Nov 12-13.
- Derris will give Lorien contact info for the new EnerVest representative.
- Anyone with information on projects or initiatives completed for sage-grouse, or projects that otherwise benefited sage-grouse in the area should contact Lorien so we can track the groups' successes.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be scheduled once the Carbon SGMA mapping has been done by USU's GIS folks, and there is an opportunity for the group to review it. Topics of discussion will likely include any recommended map boundary or internal designation changes, as well as the opportunity for strategic project planning for habitat work based on the new NRCS maps.