

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: May 17, 2011

Time: 3:00 – 6:00 pm

Place: Ogden, UT, UDWR offices

Members Present: Rick Danvir (Desert Land and Livestock), Mike Welch (QRM), Desiree Van Dyke (UACD), Lindsey Brooker (UACD), Steve Wilcox (UDWR/NRCS), Scott McFarlane (UDWR), Scott Walker (UDWR), Dave Rich (UDWR), Pam Kramer (UDWR), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension; facilitator)

Highlights

The meeting focused on updating the threats and strategies in the plan, following on the conversations initiated at the March meeting.

Key points include:

- Winter vegetation management: without knowing the important areas for winter sage-grouse use, it is difficult to identify any specific actions. Once critical areas (winter or otherwise) are identified, then they can be targeted for protection or improvement projects. Winter habitat might be a limiting factor in the area, although we do not know because little is known about migration patterns.
- A new strategy needs to include information needs, or research/information needs should be worked into each strategy.
- Fences are only an issue right around leks, so the strategies should reflect that not all fences are problems for sage-grouse, particularly since fences can also be part of improved grazing systems that may benefit grouse
- Power lines: power lines are not currently an issue, but could be a large problem if they were routed through lek areas or areas where small non-migratory populations could be heavily impacted.
- It would be great to know enough about the population so that we could focus our efforts on, for example, the 20% of the habitat that is critical to 80% of the population, but we don't know enough yet to be able to do projects
- Energy development: Chalk Creek is the only area of possible concern here, where there is some drilling, but it is not known what level of impact that might be having on sage-grouse populations
- There may be leks just south of East Canyon reservoir on private land. One private land issue in the area is a landowner interested in converting sagebrush to pasture for grazing his animals.
- Roads are primarily an issue at the Henefer-Divide lek, as discussed at length in prior meetings.
- Fire is a potentially major issue, and fire breaks on private land could be valuable. The potential impact of fire on sage-grouse depends on the size, and whether it is winter range. Also, the vegetation burned can determine whether there is much hope of having sagebrush return (annual grasses like bulbous bluegrass are a problem)
- Livestock grazing: the main issue that causes livestock grazing to be a problem is when

associated vegetation treatments to improve forage for livestock are done in ways that reduce sage-grouse habitat quality. In most cases, livestock grazing is a positive thing for sage-grouse because it means an area is being managed but not being developed.

Negative impacts from grazing would likely occur in nesting and brood-rearing habitat, but the general understanding is that those habitats are probably not the limiting factor for sage-grouse in the MSARM area, so reducing concerns from livestock grazing is not as high a priority for the group as other projects.

- Recreational vehicle impact: the impact of OHVs on sage-grouse is unknown but seems unlikely to be a high priority concern. More likely, the recreation that might possibly be detrimental to sage-grouse would be related to domesticated animals recreating with people, but the potential effect of that on sage-grouse is not known.
- Weed concerns: sagebrush establishment is severely limited by the presence of bulbous bluegrass. This makes improvements to or rehabilitation of sage-grouse winter range very difficult.
- Strategy 3 can be removed
- We have considerable research needs in the MSARM area to better understand the population. The telemetry study has been designed and is waiting for a funding opportunity.
- Predation: the impact of, or even types of relevant predators for sage-grouse in the area is not known. Further research should be done to learn what would need to be done before predator control efforts are attempted in the area.
- P-J: Pinyon-juniper is not thought to be a major concern in the area for sage-grouse. Although there are plenty of good reasons to do P-J control, sage-grouse should probably not be used as a justification for that work. P-J is not an issue in Morgan county.
- References to BLM and USFS should generally be removed because those are not key landowners in the area. From strategy 9, the action item about commenting on fire plans should be removed as it is not relevant for the sage-grouse in this area.

Comments on changes to the threats chart, which was substantially revised, included:

- Fences are really only a problem near leks (perhaps up to half a mile?)
- Home and cabin development has a “High” ranking under population distribution because a development might eliminate an entire core area.
- Very little is known about winter habitat locations and use, so it is difficult to know what threats would be of greatest concern in those areas.
- Powerlines are seen as primarily a predation enhancer, so near leks they would be of much greater concern than in other areas.
- The potential impact of noxious weeds on winter habitat is very site specific in the medium term. In the long term, this could be a high threat.
- Weed concerns relate primarily to bulbous bluegrass and conversion to annual grasslands, when even without a fire, sagebrush isn't regenerating.
- The group also added a column specifically for leks and ranked threats accordingly

The discussion from the previous meeting was recapped briefly, including the need to increase the level of threat from weeds, due to bulbous bluegrass, and a change from “Hunting” to “Illegal Harvest” or “Poaching” to more accurately reflect the nature of any local concern. In addition,

the roads threat needs to include both the impact of fragmentation and direct mortalities. Home and cabin development” should probably be listed as a “high” threat instead of just medium, as it can have serious impacts to habitat

The group briefly discussed possibilities for funding sage-grouse research in the area, then adjourned the meeting. Lorien will compile the results of the discussion and make edits to the threats table and the strategies & actions, and send them out for full group review.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will compile and send revisions out for full group review.

Next Meeting

- The field tour was not scheduled during this meeting, because without active projects, it is not clear what stops might be appropriate that were not covered last year. Lorien will continue to discuss field tour possibilities with interested group members.