

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: November 19, 2018

Place: Summit County Courthouse, Coalville

Members Present: Pam Kramer (UDWR), Scott Walker (UDWR), Andy Pappas (UDAF), Loralie Cox (UDAF), Sean Lewis (Summit County), Anthony Gray (USFS), Jordan Hulsey (NRCS), Arlin Judd (landowner), Dusty Morgan (USU Extension), Kate Sattelmeier (Summit Land Conservancy), Lorien Belton (USU Extension; MSARM facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

USFS proposed sage-grouse plan revisions

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 and general habitat. 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.

There will be three open house meetings in the second week of December to review the plan changes: Dec 11 in Cedar City, Dec 12th in Vernal, and Dec 13th in Tooele. All are from 5-7 pm. Lorien sent information with additional details to the full group listserv.

State sage-grouse plan revision

Ben Nadolski called in to the meeting to present about new revisions to the State of Utah's sage-grouse plan. He noted that the state, BLM, and Forest Service have all been working on revising their plans for sage-grouse, and have been working closely together to make sure there is good coordination between the three entities. Because there was the opportunity to work on revising all three plans at the same time, the governor gave an extension for the 5-year timeframe for revising the state plan. It is now almost finalized.

Key elements of the plan are not changing. For example, we will still use the SGMA concept, and seasonal habitats. It is still voluntary on private lands, and there is still a focus on habitat management.

There are three types of changes to the plan: structural changes, specific revisions, and adaptive revisions.

Structural revision include that the plans will have better formatting, clarity, and an executive summary. There will be ways to link specific threats to strategies, so it easier for USFWS to assess progress during future listing decision assessments. There are also two ways that threats are looked at: statewide, such as fire, weeds, and conifer encroachment; and local/secondary threats.

Of particular interest to the MSARM group is the habitat protection goals. The acreage goal has been reduced from 10,000 acres/year to 5,000 acres/year, but it is now focused on smaller footprints and higher priority to sage-grouse. There is not currently any state money allocated for this; it still relies on private donations and partners like NRCS, local land conservancies, etc.

Specific revisions to the plan include:

- Science updates
- Opportunity areas are still used conceptually, but not mapped
- Clearer timelines and reviews
- Clearer reporting requirements to gauge progress on the plan
- Mesic areas are a new focus that was not in the previous plan. This allows for linking mesic and terrestrial habitats.
- The previous plan used the word “other” for some habitat that wasn’t seasonally specific; now that is called ‘transitional’ habitat, and mostly refers to migration corridors. This may be of particular importance to MSARM.
- There is a newly defined process for making changes to the SGMA boundaries
- Compensatory mitigation is included in this plan now that the program has been developed

Adaptive revisions to the plan include:

- Appendices and maps will be on the website, and may be updated if new science or mapping is done. The body of the plan will stay the same, but will also be available on line. The group mentioned to Ben that a location to find out any changes, and when they were made, should be available on the site so we can confirm whether we are working with an updated version of something or not. The group was also curious to know how any changes to the plans would be announced.
- There will be a new approach to monitoring the disturbance cap. That has not been defined yet, so as not to hold up the plan revision, but one of the strategies in the plan is to develop specifically how to use the disturbance cap, which is a complex issue. It will likely be either 3% without fire or 5% with fire, the two ways that other entities generally look at it. There are still many questions, such as “if we hit a cap, what do we do about it?” That could guide prioritization decisions about where mitigation/offsetting work is done, but right now those things are not decided. Federal partners use caps to say “no further disturbance in areas that are over their disturbance caps” but there are many questions of scale and it wouldn’t be possible in areas like MSARM which are largely private land.
- Ben is working on an MOU with federal partners that will hopefully reduce conflict and commit to helping the other partners implement their plans, as well as making plans and processes as efficient and consistent as possible. The need for this comes from many directions. For example, Utah can’t meet state plan goals for habitat acreage improvements without federal partner involvement. The feds need state data to make informed decisions. And many issues, like mitigation and weeds, require working together to deal with problems effectively.
- The adaptive management process will be an improvement over the goal of maintaining

“viable populations” of sage-grouse in each SGMA. This will be a process where the state can stay ahead of any possible federal triggers (hard or soft). It will use the past 20 years of data, and look at the shape of the trend line. This will allow for common-sense decisions to be made adaptively.

- There will be a new way of delineating seasonal habitats.
- The state does recommend that counties recommend mitigation. Counties can use county RMPs to help determine mitigation that might be required. The state will offset permanent habitat disturbance on state and private land out a 1:1 acreage ratio, in addition to the 50,000 acres a year of habitat improvement in the plan. In cases like the Golden Hills development proposal, the state might recommend, but cannot enforce via the state sage-grouse plan, that impacts to sage-grouse on site be mitigated. Acquisition of other nearby lands in easement, for example, might be one way they could mitigate.

The timeline for approval of the state sage-grouse plan is January 1, 2019.

Local development conversation

Golden Hills has submitted primary plats for approval on the property across the highway from east canyon reservoir. The group briefly discussed the road access challenges the landowners are working with. The proposed plats suggest that housing would be grouped along roads and would be somewhat out of the way of the exact lek areas, but anyone who purchased a parcel would not have to stick with that proposed house location, so it would not be a guarantee that no house would be built on the lek, for example. The development proposal has many additional hurdles to overcome, but the developers would be welcome to attend MSARM meetings to get input on design opportunities that would minimize the impacts to sage-grouse. During the meeting, several individuals looked up Morgan County plans, like the RMP and General Plan from 2010, which seem to indicate that resource values are of concern to the county, but do not expressly prohibit development impacts to sage-grouse. It was noted that the LWG could possibly write a general letter to the county expressing concern that there are grouse in the area, and offering support.

Local working group opportunities to meet landowner needs better

With a small amount of time left in the meeting, the group brainstormed ways that the MSARM group could be more effective and helpful locally to landowners interested in resource conservation. Some ideas and pertinent facts included:

- NRCS does not currently have a presence in Coalville, and is understaffed in nearby offices. Many younger farmers and rancher may not even know about NRCS funding and project opportunities, and MSARM might be able to help get that information out. Dusty with USU county extension can also play a role in that. The conversation would need to be shifted away from “it’s not worth the strings attached to take the money” to conversations about what the value is, and why it is worth the strings that come attached to various kinds of support for conservation projects on private land.
- MSARM could support the Conservation District’s efforts to inform landowners about easements.

- The Rich County CRM is a clearinghouse for projects in the area, but that might be more applicable in areas with more public land.
- There is a CRMP specific to Chalk Creek and South Fork.
- More tours can help connect people and provide opportunities to learn project ideas.
- The MSARM group could be more proactive about proposing WRI projects in the area and bringing people together to propose them.
- Weeds might be a good place to start, as people need education and resources and it helps to work together on that.
- We should make efforts to always go to existing meetings, not trying to get people to come to our meetings, particularly daytime meetings.
- The MSARM's group plan should be revised and invigorated.

Partner update

Kate reported that Summit Land Conservancy just received funding for a half time position to advance sage-grouse conservation easement work in the area. Lorien can circulate the position description to the listserv when it is ready.

Follow-up Needed

- Ben will look into a way to have a list of any changes made to the plans available on the same site as the pieces of the plan.
- Lorien will look into writing a letter to the county officially expressing concern about sage-grouse on the property and offering the LWG's support for helping avoid or mitigate impacts from development, in whatever way the group might be able to assist.
- Lorien will forward a position description to the group from SLC if Kate would like.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was not set but will likely be in February.