

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: November 5, 2012

Place: Coalville, Utah (Courthouse)

Members Present: Mike Welch (QRM), Dave Rich (UDWR), Pam Kramer (UDWR), Amy Vande Voort (UDWR), Ashley Hansen (UDAF-GIP), Adam Brewerton (UDWR), Patti Barney (NRCS), Buzz Nelson (UACD), Jake Powell (UACD), Tammy Koldyke (NCRS/SGI), Thomas Hoskins (NRCS), Craig McKnight (NRCS), Arlin Judd (rancher), Lorien Belton (USU Extension; MSARM facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

New Faces

The MSARM group has had considerable turnover in the last year. Amy VandeVoort has replaced Scott McFarlane at DWR, Ashley Hansen is the new GIP attendee, Adam Brewerton has replaced Riley Peck as the sensitive species biologist, and Jake Powell replaced Lars Christensen in the Coalville UACD. Ashley Koehler and Adryan Slaughter have both left Summit county planning positions this year. Stephanie Dolmat-Connell, the energy programs coordinator for the county, is the current contact for the county. Don Sargent is the Summit County Community Development director, and he can also be contacted. The group has not had much involvement from Morgan County; Lorien will contact their council members and work to involve that county more, particularly as sage-grouse planning related to the state planning efforts may become more relevant.

Planning Updates

Lorien provided a review of the current BLM/USFS and State of Utah planning processes. A new draft of the Utah plan is expected to be available within a month. Lorien will let the group know when it is available for public comment, or any other updates. The BLM/USFS planning process will include the Utah plan as one alternative, assuming it is ready on a timeline to include it.

Mike suggested that a meeting for landowners to inform them about BLM and USFS changes would be greatly appreciated, as planning processes usually leave out areas like Morgan and Summit counties. Although there is not a lot of public land in the counties, grazers in the area are very interested because they winter sheep and cattle on the desert in the winter, and cattle on the forest in the summer. Lorien will schedule a meeting for late January, in the evening probably including dinner. Hopefully at that time the Utah state plan will be available. Regardless, a discussion of either BLM/USFS interim guidelines, or the Utah state plan that may supplant them, or both, will be of interest. Lorien will contact BLM and USFS employees who can speak to the issue, who can give a presentation at the meeting.

Mike Welch requested that Lorien submit a question to the state planning team about how federal lands in northern Utah currently managed by field offices in other states would be handled under the plan. Specifically, the Crawford Mountains are managed by the Kemmerer BLM in Wyoming, and the Raft River District of the Sawtooth National Forest by the USFS in Idaho. However, wildlife management authority is complex, and how this will be managed should be addressed. Would the BLM and USFS lands in Utah be subject to Utah, Idaho or Wyoming's stipulations? The maps should also reflect accurately who is managing these areas.

Mike Welch requested an updated copy of the MSARM plan that includes the revised threat table. This has been on hold during the state planning efforts. Lorien will work on doing this soon and getting a copy to Mike to add to the binder he carries to show to ranchers.

Research Project Funding Update

The proposed sage-grouse research (collaring and tracking, plus other potential research questions) for the MSARM area appears to be on the verge of complete funding. Adam Brewerton is likely to be the primary point of contact at the DWR for this project. Mike Welch would like confirmation of the funding details and logistics so he can continue to assist with those. Lorien will ask Terry Messmer for additional details and make sure Adam and Mike (and Pam) are kept in the loop. The project is likely to be able to start trapping this winter.

The next step will be to get landowner permission to trap on the leks in addition to getting access to land for tracking. Lorien will contact the Summit landowner representative to set up a meeting, and will ask Scott McFarlane, then contact the Morgan side landowners as well.

Lek Vegetation Treatment Options

Craig spoke to the grazer on the Henefer-Divide lek about placing sheep on the lek for short, intense periods to help clear out the lek vegetation. The rancher was open to the idea but noted that when he is moving cattle, he does not have time to put up additional temporary fences, so someone else would need to help with that.

The group discussed possibilities such as NRCS SGI money to help (unlikely unless the rancher has a five year contract on the land), Eagle Scout or other volunteer assistance, or GIP involvement to do intensive grazing management on the area. Ashley noted that GIP would probably not be possible until the next funding cycle, but we could start planning now. Lorien will connect Ashley, Dave, and others to discuss a project plan that could be proposed to the rancher and the landowner's representative if necessary.

Working with Developers on the Henefer-Divide lek

Based on the need to contact the developers/landowners on both properties in the Henefer Divide

lek area, the group brainstormed other topics that might be of relevance to them, and worth bringing to the meeting. Gauging their interest in conservation easements, and keeping them informed about the state planning process, were both added to the list of items to speak with them about if possible. They may also be interested in the bigger picture about potential ESA listing in 2015.

Possible role of conservation easements in the MSARM area

The group discussed the idea that the best way to protect some of the sage-grouse populations would be to have conservation easements on the Henefer-Divide area. This has been explored in the past and the potential property values made easements difficult. However, MSARM would like to invite members of local land trusts and open space councils to join the conversation at a future meeting, perhaps with a short presentation on mechanisms to inform the members of MSARM about easement options. Dave Rich noted that protecting small pieces of the area around the lek would not be as effective as a larger-scale project.

Project updates: private land, SGI, and Henefer-Echo projects

Very few projects in the area have been done specifically for sage-grouse on private land. Thomas noted that several are in the planning stages (water developments and associated grazing improvement projects) for next year, but are not planning to use SGI funds. One SGI project in the area was proposed last year but did not rank high enough for funding. Mike Welch noted that private landowners in the area have had negative experiences with UPCD/WRI funding, because projects good for wildlife did not rank highly enough to be funded, so many landowners were discouraged from future proposals.

Several projects are taking place on the Henefer-Echo Wildlife Management area north of I-84. Although they are primarily designed to increase shrub cover for mule deer, there are likely to be improvements to sage-grouse habitat as well.

Brush management (for sagebrush, not PJ) is currently a somewhat controversial topic. The group had a discussion about how best to protect winter habitat and promote tall sagebrush growth in wintering areas. The research project should help us identify critical areas where birds winter.

Tammy noted that SGI has a website with information on grouse, projects, and more. If anyone has suggestions of what to add, let Tammy know. The address is sagegrouseinitiative.com.

Rich-Morgan-Summit sage-grouse management area in state plan

The group considered how best to address the fact that the state of Utah's planning process has combined the Rich County and MSARM sage-grouse areas. MSARM members were clear that

they did not want to merge the two local working groups. Several important reasons for this are the different threats found in the MSARM area compared to Rich County, the very different proportions of public/private lands, and the potential for getting overly caught up in the controversial issues in Rich County. They agreed, however, that perhaps annual joint meetings to communicate about populations, research, and management questions would be very useful. Lorien will pass this information to Terry Messmer and work to ensure that the transition with Todd Black leaving USU takes these ideas into account.

Follow-up Needed

- Pam Kramer will follow up with Summit County to learn whether Ashley or Adryan will be replaced.
- Lorien will contact Morgan County council members to keep them involved.
- Lorien will ask Terry Messmer for additional details about research funding and make sure Adam and Mike (and Pam) are kept in the loop.
- Lorien will contact the Summit landowner representative to set up a meeting to discuss trapping access, interest in possible easements, and the status of the state planning process. Pam Kramer and Tammy Koldyke offered to attend if appropriate.
- Lorien will ask Scott McFarlane for additional information, then contact the Morgan side landowners to set up a similar meeting.
- Lorien will connect Ashley, Dave, and others to discuss a project plan for a lek vegetation reduction project that could be proposed to the rancher and the landowner's representative if necessary.
- Lorien will continue to keep the group updated about opportunities to provide comments on BLM, USFS, and state planning processes.
- Lorien will update the MSARM plan with recent threats table changes and get a copy to Mike soon.
- Lorien will communicate the question of how the BLM and USFS sage brush lands in northern Utah will be managed, to the appropriate individuals involved with the state planning process.
- Lorien and Terry Messmer will work to coordinate Rich County efforts with MSARM efforts in a way that makes sense during and after Todd Black's transition from USU to Deseret Land and Livestock.
- Lorien will invite representatives of local land trusts to present at a future meeting (possibly at the January open house).

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in late January, and focus on providing updates on BLM and USFS processes to permittees who live in the MSARM area but use federal lands for grazing in other areas. Lorien will work to identify an appropriate date