

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: December 11, 2014

Place: Coalville, Utah (County Courthouse)

Members Present: Brandon Flack (USU), Adam Brewerton (UDWR), Thomas Hoskins (NRCS), Logan Wilde (Morgan County), Marv Jensen (DLL), Lisa Yoder (Summit County), Chad Wilson (UDWR), Dave Rich (UDWR), Loralie Cox (UACD), Scott Walker (UDWR), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Taylor Payne (GIP/NRCS-SGI), Terry Messmer (USU Extension), Lorien Belton (USU Extension; MSARM facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

Forum Update

Terry Messmer announced that the recorded proceedings from the International Sage-Grouse Forum were soon to be released for free. Just go to the Forum website and sign up. Topics included mitigation, hunting and predation, disturbance, fire, private lands experiences and opportunities, and many other issues. There are also comments by a variety of plenary speakers representing many agencies.

Congressional Omnibus Bill relating to Sage-Grouse

Congress is going to vote on a bill “cromnibus” that includes proposed changes in funding for sage-grouse listing decisions. The effect that might have on sage-grouse work will be reported to the groups if the bill passes. The focus is on defunding USFWS work on the listing decision specifically.

State Pinyon-Juniper Strategy

Eric Ellis explained that the state of Utah has taken the NRCS mas of PJ encroachment, and used them (with local biologists' input) to create a prioritized strategy for how to tackle pinyon-juniper encroachment in the SGMAAs. Areas above 10% conifer cover were compared to sage-grouse habitat areas. Three tiers of importance were created: Tier 1, which is intended to be treated soonest (0-2 years) due to its location near leks and brood rearing areas; Tier 2 (0-5 years), and Tier 3 (0-15 years). The focus is to prioritize areas near leks, near water, and in nesting and brood-rearing areas. All of the juniper in question is in Phase 1 or Phase 2 juniper encroachment stages – probably mostly phase 2, since a lot of the phase 1 was not identified reliably in the initial data set. The shape files for these areas will be released very soon. Eric will send them to Lorien who will forward them to the LWGs. Thomas and Scott noted that there is a lot of PJ work that would be very helpful in the Chalk Creek area. Generally, the Morgan-Summit end of the Rich-Morgan Summit SGMA does not have a substantial PJ encroachment problem in sage-grouse habitat. Some projects in Rich County will be going into the WRI database this year.

Minutes

Projects

NRCS is starting discussions for a project near the Wyoming border. The SGI application deadline this year will be March 20 [this information was updated after the meeting, where there was some confusion about the date]. January 5 is the deadline for having WRI project proposals into the online database. DWR has one project proposed on the Henefer-Echo Wildlife Management Area, for a grass conversion project. Sometime soon there may be a lop-and-scatter proposed on the Hickson property. Taylor explained that, on the ground, the lop-and-scatter projects have been really difficult for landowners to get done themselves. A hand crew might spend \$75 a day on replacement chainsaw chains alone. It is also very exhausting and time consuming. Having an experienced crew come in, instead of getting the landowners to do it themselves, is probably preferable. The LWG discussed options for encouraging landowners to pool together and assign their payments to the state so the state can do the contracting for crews. Nate Long, the Farm Bio biologist in the area, is a good point of contact.

The range/water improvement projects proposed for the Pioneer lek area are being done with SGI. Firebreaks in that same area are GIP funded, and will need to be completed before July. Taylor and Thomas will follow up with Ashley about suggestions for implementation.

USU Research Project

Brandon Flack, a new USU graduate student, will be implementing the sage-grouse research project in the area. It will involve 8 leks, including 5 in the East Canyon area, 2 in Browns Canyon, and 1 further north in the Guildersleeve complex. The Echo Canyon population is not included. He will be putting out 30 VHF (regular radio tracking) collars and 12 GPS collars (2 near Browns, 10 near East Canyon). The GPS collars track more movements and will likely help with locating the radio collars. The radio frequencies will be detected from the ground (technicians in trucks) as well as from aircraft. In addition to the location information, vital rates and vegetation sampling at nest sites will be done. There is a possibility that this project may help locate additional leks in the area. All bird locations will be protected, and will not be publicly available. Seed money for the project came from many sources, including the Kern River Pipeline. Anyone who knows of possible short-term housing options in the area for the seasonal technicians can contact Brandon.

Development Potential near East Canyon Reservoir

Immediately prior to this meeting, several individuals from DWR, USU, and the Counties discussed how to find more guidance from the state, or from other counties around the west, on models for managing sage-grouse and development conflicts. Lorien will contact other counties around the region that may have example code that would be useful.

No additional news is available about the general plan amendment request from the owners of the East Canyon property for sale. The Morgan Council may take up the issue again at a meeting in the spring (likely March). The landowners are considering holding community workshops to discuss the possibilities and issues.

Minutes

Disturbance maps

Eric Ellis explained the draft baseline disturbance map, which will be used in the future to calculate the amount of disturbance that might need to be mitigated in sage-grouse habitat. Several individuals stayed after the end of the meeting to work on identifying the “unknown” polygons on the map. Many were similar, so the process went quickly and the group finished the map in time for Eric to take it back to DWR to get the updates digitized.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will send out updates related to the “cromnibus” bill as appropriate.
- The PJ strategy shape files will be released by Eric, though Lorien.
- Taylor and Thomas will follow up with Ashley about suggestions for implementation of the fire break project.
- Lorien will research other counties’ sage-grouse and development ordinances.
- Anyone who knows of possible short-term housing options in the area for the seasonal technicians can contact Brandon.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be February 10th at 5 pm in the Summit County Courthouse in Coalville. [The meeting has been rescheduled February 10 at 6 pm, in the Morgan County Courthouse, to accommodate and coordinate with another meeting about medusahead]