

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: January 13, 2014

Place: Wanship, Utah (Fire station)

Members Present: Mike Welch (QRM), Dave Rich (UDWR), Pam Kramer (UDWR), Adam Brewerton (UDWR), Chad Wilson (UDWR). Alan Clark (DNR), Ron Greer (UDWR), Loralie Cox (UACD), Thomas Hoskins (NRCS), Craig McKnight (NRCS), Marv Jensen (private citizen), Logan Wilde (Morgan County), Lisa Yoder (Summit County), Chris Perkins (USDA-WS), Lorien Belton (USU Extension; MSARM facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

Predation Discussion

Chris Perkins provided the group with an overview of the current situation with predator control for sage-grouse by USDA Wildlife Services. He explained how poisoned eggs are used for raven control, and answered various questions about how Wildlife Services helps sage-grouse and what his role is. He noted that Wildlife Services currently does raven and red fox control for sage-grouse, and can respond to a documented need, or a concentration of predators in the vicinity of sage-grouse. There are limited dollars, but the areas where WS employees work are flexible, based on what we know. If there is a clear issue in an area, let Chris or one of the local Wildlife Services guys know. The group did not identify any specific, immediate needs for sage-grouse predator control in the area. In part, this is because we do not know a lot about sage-grouse in the area and where they spend their time.

Research Project Funding Update

The proposed research project for sage-grouse in the MSARM area is slowly making progress through potential funding channels at UDWR. It looks very likely to happen, but probably not until next year. After a discussion about alternate places to look for funding, Alan supported the idea of looking at both ESMF and Habitat Council funding, which Adam (the project lead at DWR) will do.

The project is based on a proposal from Terry Messmer, and would entail putting a grad student on a three-year project. It would include East Canyon, Browns Canyon, and the Guildersleeve lek complex areas. Mike Welch asked to see the proposal so he can start gathering landowner support for the research.

Upcoming Sage-Grouse Summit

Lorien reminded the group about the upcoming Sage-grouse summit in Salt Lake City on Feb 18-19. Topics will include implementation of the Utah plan, federal reporting requirements, and workshops on mitigation, CCAAs, and other topics. There is no cost to attend but registration is

requested to get appropriate counts for food that will be provided.

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

Thomas Hoskins presented information about Ashley Hansen's proposed WRI project in the East Canyon Area (East Canyon Reservoir Fire Breaks, #3077). The project proposes mowing 24-foot-wide strips in the sagebrush in the area of the Pioneer lek to provide firebreaks. The mowed areas will then be seeded to improve the forb and grass component. The project proposal also notes that separately, a new pipeline and troughs are also planned for the area to improve livestock distribution. The group suggested that 30-foot wide breaks might be better. The proposed breaks follow existing 2-track roads in the area. Taylor Payne is helping with the grazing program. The livestock operator, who runs sheep in the area, is also on board. Thomas noted that he feels this project is a win-win for the livestock operator and the sage-grouse, who will benefit from a greater diversity of vegetation cover in the area.

Craig mentioned that in December, the operator did locate his sheep on the lek to reduce the vegetation cover as the group has been discussing for several years. This likely means that the visibility on the lek will be improved for the grouse, without having to do anything mechanical. In December, there were 2000 sheep held (with supplemental feed) in the area for one day, and 800 sheep on the next day.

Mitigation program developments

Alan Clark explained his in-progress work on mitigation to the group. Over the next six months, Alan is working on setting up systems for mitigation. He noted that industry is particularly interested in "advanced credit acquisition" opportunities. There are several types of mitigation, including 1) onsite, which has been used in the past but makes less sense for sage-grouse as a landscape-scale species. BLM and USFS are starting to think more landscape scale, so they are moving slowly toward other offsite options, 2) the ability for a developer (or other proponent of a disturbance in sage-grouse habitat) to just pay someone to handle mitigation, 3) doing a project themselves (although it would need to be in the right location, and approved, etc.), and 4) conservation banking. Conservation banking would provide a system ("bank" where it would be possible to trade credits for sage-grouse habitat. Alan noted that there is a lot of interest in conservation banking, but it is a complex system to set up. Right now, in order to get the USFWS to sign off on a conservation bank for greater sage-grouse, it will take a lot of work. The USFWS has never done a conservation bank for a non-listed species before, so it is unprecedented. In addition, there are many steps, such as setting up a governance structure, defining a baseline, creating a fair system, defining desired outcomes and actions, defining the service areas, etc., which all take time. Alan will have another update at the February summit.

BL/EIS comment opportunity

The group was offered the chance to discuss the BLM draft EIS for sage-grouse in Utah. Alan explained that two items of importance are how the plan deals with fire, and the need for a strong mitigation component. No one in the group presented strong opinions about the content of the

plan, in large part because of the low percentage of federal land in the Morgan-Summit area. Those most influenced by any changes would likely be livestock producers who run cattle or sheep on federal land in certain seasons. Anyone interested in sending separate comments for submission via Lorien can contact her separately.

Follow-up Needed

- Pam will send the proposal to Lorien and Mike Welch so the group members can help gather support for the sage-grouse research in the area, and hopefully gain access for researchers as needed.
- Lorien will send out info on how to sign up for the sage-grouse summit in SLC Feb 18-19
- Thomas Hoskins will work with Ashley to make recommended adjustments to the firebreaks project
- Anyone interested in sending separate comments on the draft BLM/USFS EIS, for submission via Lorien should contact her separately.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be this spring, depending on when drafts of disturbance maps are available for comment.