

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: March 28, 2013

Place: Coalville, Utah (County Courthouse)

Attendees: Mike Welch (QRM), Tammy Koldyke (NCRS/SGI), Thomas Hoskins (NRCS), Arlin Judd (rancher), Mark Peterson (UFBF), Taylor Payne (UGIP/SGI), Ron Greer (UDWR), Lisa Yoder (Summit County), Logan Wilde (Morgan County), James Barnhill (USU Extension), Marion Klaus (volunteer biologist), Lorien Belton (USU Extension; MSARM facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

Research project

Lorien updated the group on the proposed research project for the area. Most funding is in place, and the project will likely begin in the spring of 2014. Additional funding is being sought to add GPS collars to the project. These collars cost considerably more than regular radio collars but allow for much more information to be gathered at lower cost.

Sage-grouse signs near Henefer-Divide lek

Someone noted that the new road signs by the lek have not yet been opened. The group was unsure as to whose job that is, now that Scott McFarlane has moved to the Salt Lake office. Lorien will ask Pam Kramer if she knows who is responsible for opening them, as she was involved in getting them put up.

NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative

NRCS (via the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI) biologists and others) has been working to engage landowners. One project is planned for this year that will improve habitat for the population of grouse that use the Henefer Divide lek. Taylor Payne is temporarily helping with that project but Tammy Koldyke will continue to be the SGI biologist that oversees Morgan and Summit NRCS Sage Grouse projects. Most projects in the state (both applications and funded projects) came from Box Elder County.

The SGI biologists are spearheading an effort to mark all high-risk fences on private land for sage-grouse in the state this year. This will involve finding funding for materials (vinyl undersiding), volunteer or other labor to produce the markers, and volunteer efforts to get them onto fences. Some efforts already ongoing, and other suggested, include:

- Thomas Hoskins and Marion Klaus are coordinating to do a pilot project with volunteers from Sierra Club in Summit County. Marion noted that she needs about three weeks' notice to get volunteers into the field. We should probably wait until we have the materials in hand before scheduling a date to either make the markers or put them out. We do not know how much interest there will be for volunteers. Thomas is planning to

accompany volunteers to ensure that the private landowners have given permission and are comfortable with the project. He has several landowners in mind for the pilot stages in Summit County.

- NRCS is planning to buy the fence markers, but it has been difficult to estimate the number of miles of fence on private ground within the high-collision-risk areas. They are almost there. The local working group suggested several possible entities, such as the conservation districts, which might be interested in helping sponsor some fence markers. When we have more information such as cost per mile and goals for the county, Lorien will send it to the group.
- “Enable Utah” is a business that hires and oversees developmentally challenged individuals to work on projects like this. NRCS Ogden Area employees toured their facility last year. This may be an option for getting the fence markers made.
- It was suggested that someone could cut, going full speed, about 1000 markers per hour with a power saw. Because making them seems likely to be more economical than buying them, this is likely the route we will take.
- Mark Peterson suggested that he would be willing to discuss the fence-marking need with any landowners that were not comfortable with it, to help them understand the benefits to grouse. For now in the MSARM area (which is in the combined Morgan-Rich-Summit state SGMA), we will focus on larger ranchers that are comfortable with the markers going on their fences.
- The group briefly discussed the idea of having extra volunteers walk the fence to record any grouse strikes. Several people suggested that the extra effort was probably not worth it because of the low likelihood of actually finding dead grouse.
- Several other opportunities for volunteer groups that could make markers or mark fences were suggested, such as FFA groups, Boy Scouts (Eagle scout projects), and Dedicated hunters. Lisa Yoder offered to post volunteer opportunities on the county website, if needed.
- Because the NRCS efforts are all on private land, all coordination needs to go through NRCS. The NRCS is not providing markers for fences on public lands, but would be supportive of helping track and coordinate with public land fence marking projects.
- Lorien will explore options for getting otherwise unusable siding materials from local construction suppliers.
- Although no one was certain and only anecdotal information currently exists that we know of, there was discussion of the possibility that fence markers for grouse might also reduce the more destructive collisions that big game have with fences. This merits additional research, because fence markers would be very appealing to landowners if they could reduce the amount of fence repair that landowners need to do because of big game colliding with fences.

Planning Updates

Lorien provided a short explanation of the BLM/USFS and State of Utah planning processes. The BLM/USFS EIS may be out for public comment sometime this summer. The state of Utah plan will be one of the alternatives in the plan, but a final draft of that state plan is not currently

publicly available. Hopefully it will become available soon. When that happens, the local working groups will be a big part of implementing it. The details of how that will occur are still being worked out. Lorien will be working with appropriate parties to help suggest a process for how this will be implemented, and what exactly will be done at the LWG level.

Among the key elements of the draft state plan are:

- Specific goals for acres of habitat improvement, increase, and easements
- Specific sage-grouse population goals
- 5% limits on disturbance inside Sage-Grouse Management Areas (SGMAs). This will be looked at as either short-term or long-term disturbance, and will need to be mitigated accordingly.
- A mitigation bank that will be available to offset habitat losses due to development

The Forest Service has recently come out with interim guidelines for sage-grouse on USFS lands before Forest Plans are amended. Several individuals at the meeting expressed interest in having the guidelines emailed to them. Lorien will send them to the group via the listserv.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will contact Pam Kramer to see who is responsible for opening the signs near the Henefer Divide lek.
- Once materials are made available through NRCS, Lorien will let the group know. Tammy, Taylor, Thomas, and Marion will work together to coordinate making and placing the fence markers in the MSARM area. Anyone else with volunteer ideas can contact potential volunteers at that time.
- Lorien will explore options for getting otherwise unusable siding materials from local construction suppliers.
- Lorien will email the USFS guidelines to the group.
- Lorien will continue to keep the group updated about opportunities to provide comments on BLM, USFS, and state planning processes.
- Lorien will explore summer field tour ideas and schedule the next meeting as a tour or as an information meeting on the state plan, as appropriate.
- Lorien will bring up the idea of markers and big game collisions with fences with USU researchers to see if anyone has information.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be scheduled as a field tour or as an information meeting if the state plan is available within a reasonable time frame. The group did not have strong opinions about possible field tour locations or goals. We will probably wait to set the next meeting date until more information is available about the state plan.