

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: March 30, 2011

Time: 8:00 – 10:00 am

Place: Morgan, Utah, Courthouse

Members Present: Adryan Slaght (Summit County), Ashley Koehler (Summit County), Craig McKnight (NRCS), Danny McBride (NRCS), Thomas Hoskins (NRCS), Michele Devaney (NRCS/Uinta Headwaters RC&D), James Barnhill (USU Extension, Morgan County), Mike Welch (QRM), Desiree Van Dyke (UACD), Lindsey Brooker (UACD), Ned Mechem (Morgan County Council), Scott McFarlane (UDWR), Scott Walker (UDWR), Pam Kramer (UDWR), Renée Chi (USFWS), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension; facilitator)

Highlights

The group began the morning with a lek-viewing field trip to the Henefer-Divide lek on the county line. Twelve people attended the trip; others joined for the meeting afterward. About 25 male sage-grouse were on the lek and the road, with very few, if any, females.

Several members of the group were curious about why several of the male sage-grouse at the lek site were eating something off the side of the road. The group discussed the possibility that they were interested in road salt, but no conclusions were reached. No one has seen sage-grouse doing this at other leks, so it may be unique to the Henefer-Divide situation. More research may be needed to understand what they are doing. It would be helpful to know because most of the grouse that were directly on the road were eating, not strutting. Understanding what/why they are eating could help in getting the birds to move away from the road and out of danger.

Pam updated the group on discussions with UDOT about signage to slow drivers on Highway 65 when the birds are strutting on the road. Lorien and Pam met with UDOT this again this spring and now have specifications for a fold-down, permanent sign. Pam is working with two different regions because the two approaches to the crest of the hill are administered in different regions. Pam is working to get one sign on each side of the lek. The signs will say “Wildlife on Road” and will indicate how many feet ahead to pay attention. Placement of the signs is the next step. DWR will pay for the signs and UDOT will install them to their specifications.

Audubon has proposed putting fence markers up on the fences near the lek. The group was supportive of the idea, and agreed that we should move ahead to get landowner permission to do the project. Craig McKnight indicated that perhaps the fence marking project could be part of an Eagle Scout project. The group brainstormed ways that the project could be expanded to be an appropriate size, including maybe even some lek-mowing work. Scott Walker said that a DWR mower would be available for this. Lorien will coordinate with Scott Walker, Scott McFarlane, Craig McKnight, Danny McBride, and Bill Fenimore or Nathan Darnall to discuss the possibilities further and propose a project to the landowner’s representative, who is a real estate agent in Ogden. The mowing would have to be after the first of June to avoid negative impacts to nesting birds. The area to be mowed is unlikely to be more than about 100 yards square.

Scott McFarlane also agreed to ask the rancher who runs sheep on the land where the lek is if it would be convenient to bed sheep in the lek area to help keep down the vegetation. If the rancher is willing to do this on a regular basis each year, this could help keep the lek area open. The lek may exist there because it was previously a sheep bedding area.

Lorien passed around a flyer that had also already been circulated by email, asking local residents to slow down as they approach the lek area to avoid hitting birds on the road. The flyer has been distributed at several key locations in Henefer. Others at the meeting took copies and agreed to post them in other relevant locations in other towns and at East Canyon resort.

Ashley mentioned that she has GIS information about easements in the area, and can share that with group members via email. Lorien will connect with Ashley to discuss other mapping efforts that may be helpful to the working group.

The scope of work for a proposed telemetry study in the area has been completed, but cannot be moved forward until matching funds are found to add to \$50,000 from Kern River pipeline. Hopefully, funds can be found to put a technician in the field by next spring, although congressional budget cuts may make finding funding very challenging. It is important to have full funding because years 2 and 3 of the project would need to be funded in order to get useful telemetry data from the radio collars.

Since the last meeting, Lorien and Jason presented to the Summit county planning commission and the summit county council, providing information about sage-grouse biology/ecology, the listing status with FWS, and LWG work in the area. Morgan County is interested in information but has a full meeting schedule for the next two meetings. Lorien is in communication with the county and will send written information prior to any in-person presentation. The County would be most interested in knowing what their role can be in addressing wildlife issues.

Morgan County would be interested in GIS data that would support wildlife decision-making. Lorien will put Dave Manning (in Morgan County's planning and zoning department) in touch with Ben Sutter or Sarah Lindsay at DWR.

The group had an interesting discussion about whether it was possible to include a note, such as a plat note, in property deeds that let people know that their property was an important wildlife property – if it had a lek, for example. There is an agricultural designation that might be used as an example, but no one present was aware of such a mechanism that currently exists.

Lorien explained that she is working on a separate project to better understand the differences between different private land conservation mechanisms. Ashley noted that Utah Open Lands may have something like that available that discusses easement options. Lorien will get in touch with Wendy Fisher to see what resources they have. Summit Land Conservancy and ESAP would be good to include.

The group began to review the threats chart from the MSARM sage-grouse conservation plan. It was noted that the threat rankings were originally developed using a process that did not

incorporate a lot of existing data, so as we update it, it will be good to improve the data-backing and record in the chart somehow whether threat ranks are based on scientific evidence or simply best guesses by MSARM participants. Specific areas that the group did discuss included:

- The need to increase the threat level recorded for invasive species, particularly given that bulbous bluegrass is becoming a serious problem. Morgan County is working on a weed management plan but currently the county only handles weed issues on county right-of-ways and is not a comprehensive coordination center for other weed management efforts in the area. A bluegrass management project might be an excellent future WRI project to propose.
- “Hunting” needs to be changed to “Illegal Harvest” or “Poaching” since there is no sage-grouse hunting allowed in the MSARM resource area.
- We need to make sure that the “Roads” threat includes the impact of both fragmentation and direct mortalities, and as with each updated threat, that any edits to the chart also are recorded in the text sections which provide further explanation for the chart.
- “Home and cabin development” should probably be listed as a “high” threat instead of just medium, as it can have serious impacts to habitat.

Renee noted that it would be useful to have more information in the chart about what assumptions are being made or when we really need more information to be certain of the threat level. For example, knowing whether cabin development is a high threat to sage-grouse winter habitat involves knowing more about the seasonal movements of the birds than we know currently. Lorien will incorporate the changes discussed by the group using tracked changes, and send it out to the group to review, as well as to add additional suggestions or revisions.

Follow-up Needed

- Pam will continue to coordinate with UDOT to get road signs ordered and in place
- Lorien will contact everyone involved with the Eagle Scout/fence marker project so they can begin coordinating. Once a project design has been agreed upon, Lorien and Danny will approach the landowner’s representative.
- Lorien will send Ned Mecham or Teresa Lake an electronic version of the handout provided at the meeting and work with Morgan County to ensure that they receive useful information and eventually have an in-person presentation that addresses sage-grouse issues in the county
- Ashley will send Lorien and several DWR staff information on agricultural easements.
- Ashley and Lorien will discuss maps that can help the local working group’s efforts.
- Lorien will send out potential edits/updates to the sage-grouse plan with tracked changes.
- Various members of the group will post flyers in key locations around Morgan, Mountain Green, and the East Canyon resort.
- Scott McFarlane will discuss sheep-bedding opportunities (as a way to clear lek vegetation) with the local operator.
- Lorien will put Dave Manning (in Morgan County’s planning and zoning department) in touch with Ben Sutter or Sarah Lindsay at DWR.

Next Meeting

- The next meeting was not scheduled during the meeting. Lorien will send out a Doodle

request.