

**MSARM
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: March 30, 2020

Place: Virtual meeting via WebEx

Present: Elizabeth Cohen (Summit County USU Extension), Heather Talley (UDWR), Adam Wickline (Summit Land conservancy), Joe Moore (USFWS), Jared Reese (BLM), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Discussion and Updates

Raven information

Joe Moore, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, explained that they are gathering data on raven populations throughout the region, and anyone with information is encouraged to submit what they know on an online form. Comments have been extended through April 30. (Lorien sent the link to the working groups via the Utah CBCP listserv recently, and will again as the deadline approaches.) Anecdotal information is valuable as well as more formal research data. They are interested in information on raven populations, including changes observed, and any amounts of damage observed (to wildlife, crops, livestock, etc.). The information will be used by a regional team that is trying to develop a strategy to handle raven problems at a larger scale.

Federal plan updates

Jared updated the group on the status of the supplemental EIS. It addresses concerns raised in the court injunction from October that required the BLM to return to its 2015 sage-grouse amendments instead of using the new 2019 amendments, which were challenged in court. The supplemental EIS included more information on compensatory mitigation, cumulative impacts, and removal of GHMA, among other items. Comments are due soon; Lorien will resend the information to the full sage-grouse group listserv.

Asked about detail on the compensatory mitigation changes, Jared explained that the 2015 plans had an *enforceable* net conservation gain requirement. The 2019 amendments say that they are only requiring what the state wants, and the state is saying it will be voluntary. The BLM can recommend mitigation, but it will be up to the project proponent to decide if they want to do it. The state feels that the cost per acre that they require (in one possible mitigation scenario) isn't necessarily going to deter companies. The change in mitigation happened because after the 2015 plans had been finalized, a national directive to BLM changed how it dealt with mitigation universally, not just with sage-grouse, so that change was incorporated into the 2019 plans, but there was not a chance to comment on it previously due to when the change was made nationally.

Jared noted that the timeline for resolution of the 2015/2019 plan stipulations is very uncertain; the final EIS will be submitted to Judge Winmill, and the issue will ultimately play out in the courts. Until it is resolved, BLM is still working under its 2015 plans.

State habitat maps status

There have been some questions about the status of the habitat mapping efforts being done by USU and BLM that will result in statewide sage-grouse maps that can be used by all agencies. We will eventually have a heat map of seasonal habitat probability for sage-grouse based on GPS collar data. It will also include precipitation, elevation, and other factors. Those efforts are still under way. Preliminary results may be available this spring for some portions (or seasons) of the map, and will be sent to agency biologists for review.

Other updates and discussion:

- Lek counts will still be done, despite COVID-19, for now (with precautions).
- Adam wondered if we have any evidence, even anecdotally, of a particular area being used by sage-grouse. Jared recommended that Adam contact Dave Dahlgren and request a kernel density map specific to the area to help understand the likelihood.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will keep the group apprised of the habitat mapping progress.
- Lorien will send another reminder about raven info and the SEIS comment period out to the listserv.
- Lorien will send Adam contact info for Dave Dahlgren.

Next Meeting

Next meeting was not set but will probably be scheduled when there are seasonal habitat maps to review. No field tour plans were made yet, pending a better understanding of how covid-19 concerns will play out.