

SWARM Meeting Minutes

December 5th, 2017. 10 am, Iron County Extension Office

Attendance:

Nicki Frey, Utah State University Extension

Melanie Mendenhall, BLM

Mitch Bayles, BLM

Erica Shotwell, BLM

Mark Nelson, Utah State University Extension, Beaver County

Chad Reid, Utah State University Extension, Iron County

Jason Bradshaw, USDA

Connor England, BLM

Mike Worthen, Iron County

Dustin Schaible, BLM

Stan Gurley, UDWR

Vicki Tyler, BLM

Ben Nadolski, Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office, State of Utah

I. Nicki provided an update on the survey she conducted in the Panguitch SGMA regarding the public's knowledge and understanding of greater sage-grouse and pinyon-juniper treatments. She'll provide more information in March. The final results will be available to the group,

II. Watershed Restoration Initiative project proposals.

At the December meeting, groups that have projects located in sage-grouse habitat present their projects to the SWARM. If there are any questions or concerns regarding the project, SWARM will discuss them at this meeting.

A. Indian Peaks Bull Hog (Mitch Bayles). 798 acres will be proposed. They are still mapping out the footprint and where to leave the islands. Will begin Fall 2018. There were no comments or concerns from the group on this project.

B. Atchison Creek (Mitch Bayles). 6542 acres suggested in this proposal. Considering chaining and bull hog of trees. Proposal is for collecting the vegetation and wildlife monitoring data in 2018. The implementation would take place in Fall 2019.

Nicki has data on current grouse locations in that area. She will send this to Mitch for his consideration when planning the treatment footprint. No other comments or concerns from the group on this project.

C. Mortensen Holyoak (Mitch Bayles). 5985 acres proposed on this project. This is south of the Bald Hills and west of Long Valley. The proposal is for vegetation and wildlife monitoring. Suggesting lop and scatter, and bull hog to be implemented Fall 2019. This would be a connector for treatments in Bald Hills and Long Valley and would benefit multiple species. No other comments or concerns from the group on this project.

D. Paragonah/Willow Spring (Mitch Bayles). 3200 acres of chaining/bull hog proposed but details are still being mapped out. There are no current grouse locations in this area. No concerns from the group.

E. Pine Valley (Erica Shotwell). Proposing to rehabilitate an old chaining where trees have encroached again. Planning lop and scatter, although there may need to be some chaining. This will remove stage 1 trees and benefit multiple species. Improving Sage-grouse habitat in the Pine Valley area is a concern for this region. No concerns from the group about this project.

F. Adam's Well (Connor England) – planning to rehabilitate old treatments in Adams Well area. This will benefit grouse and prairie dogs. No comments or concerns from the group about this project.

E. Buckskin Valley (Stan Gurley). 906 acres of private land scheduled for treatment on the south end of Buckskin Valley.

Nicki reported grouse nesting and brood rearing in that area this summer. She will send Stan the data to assist with mapping out the treatment design. [I didn't think of this at the meeting, but we have several birds moving from Buckskin to Bear Valley in the summer and back in the fall. I hope that this treatment can help open that corridor for them. That would be great if it could.] No other comments or concerns from the group.

F. Bone Hollow (Melanie Mendenhal) 1438 acres. ON the corner of I-15 and Highway 20. Plan to take out small trees and open the area up.

This area has seen a few instances of grouse crossing I-15. Efforts to open up the area and make it safer for grouse to move through the area are appreciated. No other comments or concerns from the group.

G. Greenville Bench (Melanie Mendenhal) 2000 acres. Maintenance on old project to take out small trees. No comments or concerns from the group.

H. S. Buckskin (638) acres and Freemont (500 acres) for cultural clearances. No comments from the group.

III. Update of State of Utah Sage Grouse Plan

Ben Nodalski – Ben is working with the governor's office and UDWR to update the State Sage Grouse Conservation Plan. He will oversee revision of the plan and then implementation of the plan.

Lots of attention has been focused on revision of federal plans (BLM and now USFS). Ben is dealing with the state plan only.

Ben will discuss feedback he has received and is also here at this meeting is solicit feedback from our working group. He has met with over 20 groups.

Primary elements of plan/and or where comments have been received to-date:

1. Most feedback suggests that the basics of the plan are acceptable, but there are small things that can change.

2. Would like to have most public outreach completed by January to be ready by February.

3. One objective is to clarify some language in the plan, re-order the structure of the plan.

Make it look more official and less like draft

Objectives of the plan explained in the front of the document

Executive order in the front of the document

4. Appendix will stand alone and will be paired with the best available science

5. Will clarify the role of the SGMA boundaries and the habitat boundaries within the SGMA

Comment: If it is private land within the SGMA and within designated habitat, would the landowner have to 'ask permission'?

Response: No, they would not have to. Private landowner participation is voluntary.

The update will make it very clear that private lands are voluntary, will do better at explaining the process of using the habitat polygons.

Comment: But the private lands are part of the disturbance cap so their actions would have to be considered at some point.

6. There will be a process to change the SGMA, and that process will be outlined. All updated SGMAs will be posted on the separate site where the appendices are hosted.

7. Current state maps will use the maps created by USU using the VHF data. This will be replaced with the probability of use maps created by USU using the GPS locations when it is completed.

Comment: Can we make sure that the county plans are considered during the update process, because all of the counties have written their plans by now.

Population Objectives

1. the purpose of the objectives is to have a benchmark for reporting so that we can compare our progress from year to year.

Comment: Would like to see some language about population management that recognizes that there are many partners in this process and not all of them collaborate equally.

Habitat Objectives

1. As written, the state will improve 25,000 and increase habitat by 50,000. This is considered by many to be an unrealistic goal. The edited plan will combine these numbers to that the goal will be to "enhance and improve 75,000 acres within mapped SGMAs".

2. Preserving 10,000 acres in each SGMA may also be unrealistic. Considering decreasing the acres and focusing on quality not quantity.

Threats

1. List of threats originally based on the COT report.

2. Primary threats are: fire, invasive plant species, habitat management, and predation

Comment: We want to ensure that the threats are addressed by each LWG in a way that is a priority for the LWG. For example, development may be the primary threat in one SGMA and habitat management the primary threat in another SGMA.

Comment: What do we do with habitat when it is considered winter and brood-rearing habitat [which often have conflicting management actions]?

Response: Local knowledge should lead the decision. We would like the plan to reflect the importance of local decision making.

Comment: In Hamlin and Bald Hills SGMA, free-roaming horses are a problem. We do a \$1 million project, then then horses move in and destroy the reseeding efforts. This is a growing problem that we need help addressing.

Other Notes

Please comment on the Forest Service plan amendments. The link was sent via email through the SWARM agenda that Stan sent out. Comment period closes on January 5.

December 15, 2017 Focal Area Nomination/Subtractions for WRI are due to Rhett Boswell.

Rhettboswell@utah.gov

January 8, 2018 WRI Project Submission Deadline

This was John Keeler's last meeting. His replacement will be

Brett Behling

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Brett.behling@fbfs.com

Welcome Brett and Good luck John – we will miss you!

Next Meeting March 6, 2018. 10 am at the Iron County Extension Office meeting room.