

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 1/25/12

Time: 3:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Place: County Building in Vernal, Utah

Present: Diane Coltharp (Uintah County Public Lands), Kirk Wood (Duchesne County), Mark Raymond (Uintah County), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Mark Ewell (NRCS), Scott Ackerman (USFWS), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Jared Zierenberg (USDA-WS), Gary Aho (Enfit American Oil), Don Abeyta (USFS), Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), David Allison, (UBAG), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension, Uintah County), Orrin Duvuvuei (USU), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Upcoming BLM RMP revisions for Sage-Grouse

As discussed in the December UBARM meeting, the BLM will be amending land-use plans across sage-grouse range to ensure that clear conservation measures and regulations are encoded in Resource Management Plans.

Two Instructional Memoranda (IMs) were issued in December. One (BLM IM 2012-044) relates to the process of amending the Land Use Plans, and the other (BLM IM 2012-043) provides guidance on how to incorporate sage-grouse into decision making in the interim, before the plan amendments are in place.

The group reviewed and discussed the text of BLM IM 2012-043 during the meeting. The IM explains, for many different possible threats to sage-grouse, what steps the BLM will take to ensure that adverse effects to sage-grouse and its habitat are identified, avoided, mitigated, etc. Specifically including sage-grouse in NEPA analyses is one aspect of the instructions, although in many instances, the new rules represent work that the BLM has already been doing in many cases, but has not been codified or formally required, such as doing NEPA on grazing renewals.

Several members of the working group attended the January 18th scoping meeting, which was primarily a passive information session. Comments are due by February 15th.

Stephanie Tomkinson noted that to her knowledge, energy companies are currently focused primarily on the current Utah state sage-grouse plan, since when it is updated, it will provide guidance to BLM, as noted in the IM.

UPCD Projects

The UBPCD meeting was held prior to the UBARM meeting. Numerous proposed projects (more than 10) have potential sage-grouse habitat benefits, either as a primary or secondary goal.

The group did not discuss the individual projects. The projects have been ranked and will be forwarded to the state for funding decisions.

Updating the UBARM Sage-Grouse Plan and Map

Lorien handed out the current strategies and actions and threats table as revised in previous discussions. It was also sent out to the full group electronically. Although there was not much time to discuss the changes, Lorien requested comments from the group, and a few of the threats table comments were noted. Not conclusive recommendations for change were made. Progress will need to be made between meetings.

Lorien is working with the Uintah County GIS department to develop a new map for the LWG to reference. Stephanie noted that we should wait to print it until the new preliminary and general habitat designations have been released. Everyone agreed that that was a good plan.

Research Updates

Orrin Duvuvuei, a graduate student from USU working on Anthro Mountain, explained his research briefly. He is following Natasha's birds that were collared on Anthro in previous years. Subsequent trapping experiences have netted only a few additional birds. Tracking the birds has proved difficult due to the difficulty in scheduling flights. Jared offered to help listen for signals from collared birds when Wildlife Services' planes were in the area on other business. All but one of Natasha's translocated birds has died, with an unusual pattern of adult birds dying in the fall. The group wondered if the higher raptor migrations in the area might play a role.

Lorien then asked the group what additional research questions they are interested in, on Anthro or elsewhere. Ideas included:

- Examination of raptor migration routes, raptor numbers, and sage-grouse populations
- Examination of hybrid vigor and stagnant gene pools: for example, for offspring of translocated birds have more success?
- Looking at genetics of isolated populations around the Basin

Follow-up Needed

- Dave will let Lorien know if he hears of BLM policy updates to grazing policies
- Lorien will continue to move revisions of the local plan forward via email.
- Lorien will continue to update the group about new info on the BLM process.
- Production of a new map is on hold until new priority/general habitat maps are available.
- Lorien will look into any opportunities for commenting on general/priority habitat maps

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 20th, at 10 am, before the UBPCD meeting.