

Minutes

LOCAL WORKING GROUP

Date: 11/16/10
Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Place:

Present: Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), Terrell Thayne (UACD), Diane Coltharp (Uinta County Public Lands), Kirk Wood (Duchesne County), Renee Chi (USFWS), Drew Crane (USFWS), Mark Peterson (Farm Bureau), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension, Uintah county), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Natasha Gruber (USU), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Carlyle Rollins (APHIS), Gary McRae (RC&D), Gary Weiser (UACD), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Renee Chi gave a short presentation on CCAAs. She presented an imaginary example and explained the basics of this policy mechanism. If a private landowner is interested in a CCAA, it requires extensive discussions between the landowner, the USFWS, and any third-party group that would be holding the permit. This would help decide what actions the landowner will do to help conserve the species, and what assurances they would receive, i.e. “take” permits or exemption from future regulatory requirements under the Endangered Species Act if the species were ever listed. Every CCAA has to go through the federal register. It also has to be approved at several levels within the USFWS. Ideally, the agreement document would be written jointly by the parties involved so that when it is submitted, the USFWS has already helped determine what will be most likely to succeed, and it would require less time to approve.

Because no land owners attended the meeting, but landowners in the area are primarily interested in discussing a CCAA for sage-grouse, possibly on Diamond Mountain, the group agreed that a similar presentation about CCAAs should be held in an evening session sometime around February. Gary McRae of the RC&D will host and advertise the workshop. Gary also mentioned that the RC&D has a newspaper space for short pieces of local conservation news. He invited the group to send him articles of interest. He will coordinate with the newspaper.

Updates

The compressor station on Diamond is up and running. It went online November 1st. Only one mitigation remains to be done, which is raptor exclusions on the power lines. Similar discussions with Moon Lake involve considering putting raptor exclusions on their power lines. It currently appears to be cost prohibitive.

Brian Maxfield reported on research progress on Diamond Mountain. UDWR is helping with BYU’s tracking efforts. Most grouse are currently alive (so far only two have died, which is a good record). He noted that the researchers try not to trap in the snow because recreationists follow the snowmobile paths and might disturb the grouse as a result. It has been difficult to schedule flights to track the birds.

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Natasha Gruber reported that her research is wrapping up. As of the last tracking counts: of 30 birds translocated this spring, 18 are left; of 30 translocated last year, 5 are left, and of 12 resident birds, 7 are left. The disappearances are likely a combination of grouse that have left the research area and moved to wintering grounds, and raptor mortalities. Brian is continuing to track the birds so it will be possible to see if some return in the spring. One other goal is to understand where birds that winter in the area exactly spend their time, so that key patches of sagebrush can be protected, particularly as energy development increases. There are also other discussions about continuing the research on Anthro to capitalize on the research that Natasha has been doing. Natasha's research will provide a baseline for data on sage-grouse prior to the newly proposed 400-well development on Anthro Mountain.

USFS provided an update on the Anthro drilling plans. 12 wells in that area are by Vantage. The company may receive a split decision which approves wells that are away from sage-grouse. The other wells, which are more of a concern, will be the subject of future conversations with the company. Barry Petroleum will be working to reroute the road away from Nuttars Ridge, a key sage-grouse area. The EIS for that project is in the final stages.

Stephanie Tomkinson of QEP reported that she has been working with The Nature Conservancy on an Energy By Design project. They have gathered maps of many wildlife issues. It will help with future QEP planning and also with mitigation decisions. She noted that Bill Barrett corporation provided a good example of proactively working with the wildlife community to avoid impacts and design mitigation, and Energy by Design will allow QEP to be similarly proactive and do good work for wildlife.

The TransWest transmission line is planned to come from Wyoming to Nevada. When alternative routes are proposed and public meetings have been scheduled, Diane Coltharp will send information to Lorien, who will keep the group informed.

Actions Taken:

No formal actions were taken.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will work with Gary to get sage-grouse info in the new Conservation Corner.
- Lorien will work with Gary and Renee on a CCAA workshop for landowners.

Next Meeting:

Tentatively scheduled for January 18th but will depend in part on the CCAA info workshop date.