

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 12/3/19

Place: DNR office, Vernal, Utah

Present: David Allison (Consultant), April Abate (DOGM), Rhett Burkman (USFS), Tyson Todd (SITLA), Tory Mathis (UDWR), Bob Christensen (USFS), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Charlie Holtz (Pheasants Forever/SGI), Greg Todd (Duchesne County Commission), Terrell Thayne (UDAF GIP), Ethan Hallows (SITLA), Jared Bigler (Frontier Resources), Jared Reese (BLM), Tyler Nelson (BLM), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Federal planning updates

Jared Reese provide updates on the BLM planning status. Key points:

- BLM is operating on the 2015 plan amendments until the injunction is lifted or other changes are finalized.
- Projects approved since the 2019 amendments were finalized this spring are being examined on a case-by-case basis to see if any changes are needed.
- The supplemental EIS, which is being coordinated by a national lead, will address the substantive issues related to the October injunction. The document will be made available for a 45 day comment period, which will be probably be available early next year. Items in that document will include:
 - Cumulative impacts across the sage-grouse range
 - Net conservation gain/mitigation issues
 - Dropping the GHMA
 - Reasonable alternatives
- Plan maintenance documentation will include items such as:
 - Clarifications
 - Alignment with the state plan
 - Best available science, including habitat tables updates
 - USU habitat mapping efforts
- The policy situation is complicated for several reasons, including the fact that the state was litigating the 2015 plans.

Forest Service also had plan amendments due to come out, but things have been very quiet since the BLM injunction. Upcoming changes had included the reduction of GHMA, using “no net loss” instead of “net conversation gain,” change of Anthro Mountain to PHMA rather than its own distinct category, and adjustments to the 7-inch stubble height requirement. Once BLM processes are further along, we will check in again with USFS.

BLM HAF updates

Tyler Nelson presented what BLM is doing on the Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF), based on a presentation given recently to other partners at the state level. Key points included:

- BLM is assessing sage-grouse habitat using HAF. It includes three components: suitability ratings, indicators, and multiple scales. Sage-grouse habitat assessment is one part of BLM's larger rangeland assessment process.
- Table 2.2 has been updated to include recently available improved science on Utah sage-grouse habitat.
- There is a HAF technical reference, available on line, for anyone interested in the details.
- BLM is gathering all the data required in the technical reference, but only using relevant data for Utah to determine suitability.
- Currently, HAF data is being relied upon heavily when permit renewals are due
- HAF assessment summary reports are done once the HAF data has been collected and analyzed. There will not be a HAF assessment for every permit renewal. If something big changes, the BLM might update the assessment for one or more scales, as appropriate. The idea is to have this information on the shelf for when it is needed. They are time consuming but BLM is continuing to work on them so they are ready for when they need to be used in future decision-making.
- Right now, the HAF reports for much of Utah have not been done because Colorado and Wyoming are still working to delineate their boundaries for mid-and fine-scale analysis, and BLM boundaries overlap those states as well as others that have been completed.
- The national BLM office maintains the database for disturbance categories and data.

Population and research updates

Brian Maxfield was unable to make the meeting, so population updates were postponed to the next UBARM meeting (not the joint WRI meeting).

Round robin

- USFS will know more about planning after a meeting tomorrow.
- NRCS: no deadlines still for project proposals. There is some interest in trough and grazing projects; a demo project is under consideration, possibly on BLM and including z-dikes.
- GIP deadline is the end of the year. Several water development projects from last year has been progressing well in implementation.
- SITLA has been working a lot with NRCS
- 319 Money will be coming back to the Basin in a few years; it will be worth coordinating to take the best advantage of that money strategically. Pott Creek tributaries were discussed as a possible area to focus on.

- The Christmas bird count dates were announced: Dec 14 for Ouray and Jan 1 for Dinosaur
- Dave Allison mentioned the need to revisit the local plan again
- Lorien is on the WRI ranking committee representing the sage-grouse groups again this year.

Future meeting topics:

- Dave Dahlgren or Eric Thacker on sagebrush treatments
- Revisiting the local plan

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will keep the group updated about comment periods for the supplemental EIS.
- Lorien will send out a list of sage-grouse related WRI projects to the listserv.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be a joint meeting with the WRI project presentation meeting on February 5th, to avoid duplicate agenda items. Lorien will schedule the following UBARM-specific meeting with a doodle for March or so since there will not be a WRI meeting to coordinate with at that time.