

**LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 2/15/11

Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Place: Uintah County Building in Vernal, Utah

Present: Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), Terrell Thayne (UACD), Diane Coltharp (Uinta County Public Lands), Kirk Wood (Duchesne County), Mark Chamberlain (NRCS), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension, Uintah county), Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Daniel Emmett (BLM), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Scott Ackerman (USFWS), Mike Tamllos (USDA-WS), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Research Update

Brian provided several research updates for the group. On Diamond Mountain, BYU will be trapping again this spring, aiming to get at least another 30 birds collared. This winter, it appeared that most collared birds were staying on Diamond Rim, though some dropped off the Rim toward Island Park. The population is very mobile and the harsh winter was helpful for understanding the sagebrush areas most critical to the population when the snow is particularly high. Natasha's work on Anthro mountain has finished up but a new student, Orrin, is taking over. No more birds will be translocated but they will be tracked, and hopefully more birds will be able to be trapped. All projects in the area are sharing radio frequency data to see if birds that stray far away can be located in other areas. This winter, birds have scattered extensively, which is to be expected given the harsh conditions and the relatively scarcity of sagebrush available above the snow. Flights for tracking have been delayed due to technical issues with the planes.

Project Updates

Predation

Wildlife Services has removed 34 coyotes from Anthro Mountain to benefit mule deer but it may also benefit grouse. Two red foxes were seen on Nuttars Ridge. Mike Tamllos will be putting out eggs this spring for ravens, although not in Currant Creek, where no control was done last year either. Last year, Mike tried putting out baits and eggs using flags. It isn't totally clear whether the flags make the ravens take more eggs or find them more readily, but it definitely makes it easier for the person putting them out to see how many eggs were taken. Mike noted that we need more research on how the raven control works.

UPCD projects

Birds are reported to be using the lop and scatter areas on Anthro mountain. In the Book Cliffs,

projects for PJ removal are being targeted at places where grouse are seen during the summer. Lek searching in that area is an ongoing project. About six PJ projects were proposed through UPCD's Watershed Restoration Initiative funding process this year.

Proposed Power Lines

Pat Rainbolt has been following the monthly phone calls for several large proposed power lines slated to come through the area. Pat passed out a map of leks and proposed routes. Even if one of the lines goes through an existing corridor, it would have to be, for security reasons, at least 1500 feet away from the other one. Brian mentioned that there is anecdotal evidence that the Blue Mountain power line was detrimental to the sage-grouse populations there.

The group agreed that the alternative route for the TransWest Power Line that would go over Diamond Mountain could be a serious problem for sage-grouse. At the group's request, Lorien will draft a comment letter to the BLM expressing that it would be better to avoid Diamond Mountain, and that we prefer the existing corridor route. Also the letter should mention timing and spatial stipulations and who to work with on them. The group will look at the draft letter before it gets sent to BLM.

The group noted that in the Fruitland area, grouse would be impacted less if powerlines went over homes instead of open areas.

Project Updates

QEP is doing sheep grazing work on Deadman Bench to help reclaim well pads, which are plugged and abandoned, then seeded and drilled. Hay is spread on the location and then sheep (~1500 head) are brought in to "poop and stomp." QEP did a lot of plowing to get the sheep in when snow was an impediment to the project. Also, old sage has been harrowed and Plateau has been put out for cheatgrass control. Stephanie noted that there are 6 or 7 more similar projects coming up soon. Steve Strong did vegetation work to follow-up. The first year, there was not much response, but he will continue the monitoring. Jan Anderson noted that he has experience with compost addition making a big difference 7 years later in other sites. The project has been jointly funded and collaboratively done by QEP, GIP funding, and the BLM. GIP helped with the cost of the hay and transport.

Also on Deadman Bench, a camera will soon go out on the lek.

Birds appear to be using lop and scatter projects, including the big Wash lop and scatter, Chokecherry, and possibly others. One of these is part of Terry Messmer's project on Anthro.

Some sage-grouse initiative work on Diamond has been done and more is being planned. Jim Slauch and the Uintah Basin Grazing Association (through Todd Moon) have put up fence markers. Others are working on brush management (through chemical treatment) and water improvements to improve grazing. Brian worked with them to make sure the improvements

were actually positive for sage-grouse. 5-6 landowners were involved. Fence markers have also been put on a BLM boundary fence in Fruitland.

CCAA Discussions

Lorien is working to set up a time to discuss/present CCAA information to local landowners who have expressed interest. The group suggested that the landowners who came to the meeting last March should be invited. Lorien will keep the group up to date with what gets scheduled. Scott Chew may be interested in having a CCAA presentation given to the Conservation District also. Mark Chamberlain asked if he could see who the landowners were who attended last year's March meeting/dinner with the FWS presentation, so he could contact them.

Proposed Energy Developments

The Berry Petroleum EIS has been in progress. Berry has been good to work with and was particularly responsive and flexible about core sage-grouse areas. They are mostly avoiding sage-grouse areas, and have agreed to a 1 well per square mile stipulation in sagebrush. The final EIS will be coming out in May of this year.

There was a split decision on Vantage's wells. Approximately 10 of them are fine, but they are holding off on the ones that were going to be right around the or on the leks. FS appears to be deferring the sensitive wells.

Both companies were told to avoid the Nuttar's Ridge access road option to decrease impacts to grouse.

Plan Revision

The LWG began to look at the threats chart from the local sage-grouse plan, which needs to be updated this year. After a few discussion items about changing the threat level of weeds and all structures, it was decided to work on this at a separate meeting in the future.

Actions Taken:

No formal actions were taken.

Follow-up Needed

- Pat will send info to Lorien on TransWest so she can draft a letter from the group.
- Lorien will keep the group updated with any progress on landowner CCAA discussions.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be decided over email after the meeting.