

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 2/16/16

Place: DNR office, Vernal, Utah

Present: Dixie Sadlier (BLM), Natasha Hadden (BLM), Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), David Allison (consultant), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension), John Spencer (Simplot), Cheryl Meier (Uintah County), Terrell Thayne (UDAF-GIP), Mark Ewell (NRCS), Greg Todd (Duchesne Co Commission), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Leah Lewis (NRCS/SGI), Eric Olsen (Deseret Power), Brad Dickson (Deseret Power), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Van C. Elsbernd (consultant), Jean Dickinson (VRLP), Bob Christensen (USFS), Miles Hanberg (UDWR), Scott Hacking (DEQ), Hugh Hurlow (Utah Geologic Survey – via phone), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator-via phone)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Lorien Belton and Hugh Hurlow attended by conference call.

UGS hydrology study

Utah Geologic Survey has been talking with Alan Clark about assessing the hydrologic impact of PJ removal on water in the landscape. Hugh Hurlow presented the proposed project analysis to the group, and asked for feedback on any project ideas or people to talk to. Hugh noted that there were several possible hydrologic features that could be measured, depending on what makes most sense:

- Spring flow, using weirs or a v-notch weir to measure spring flow and turbidity
- Groundwater, using small (2-inch) bored holes, drilled to assess shallow groundwater
- Soil moisture

The project is just in the design phase. He hopes to do similar assessments in three different basins in Utah. The next step is to identifying the right areas: ones where ideally there is a project planned for at least three years out, so that several years of pre-data can assess normal baseline conditions and normal variability before the tree removal project is done. Many people in the room expressed support for the project, and suggested that Dixie Sadlier, Dan Abeyta, and Tory Mathis would be appropriate next contacts with whom Hugh can discuss specifics.

There is interest growing in understanding how wet meadows influence sage-grouse distributions. This project could be a stepping stone to greater understanding about how to improve or protect wet meadow habitat. UBARM would like to know more, and build on the work Scott Chew did identifying lost and remaining wet meadows on Blue Mountain.

Policy implementation updates

BLM field staff are working to understand all the details in the new land use plan amendments.

We are still waiting for the additional detail that will be coming out nationally on implementation specifics for grazing management and other topics. Those were intended to be finished in December but are still being developed.

USFS is waiting to implement many features of the Forest Service plan, such as grazing management, until they have had time to develop additional guidelines and meet with ranchers.

The State of Utah may sue the BLM over some of the implementation features in the new land use plan amendments. No details of that are available at the moment.

NRCS update

Leah explained that the SGI deadline is February 19th. She is working on various project applications that have come in over the past months. There are approximately \$350,000 in SGI funds available for projects in the Northeastern Region (Uintah, Ouray, and Strawberry). She has 11 proposals this year, most which are PJ removal. Some of those involve removing trees from areas with wet meadows, which might be of interest to Hugh.

This spring and summer, Leah will focus on planning for next year's projects. Someone asked if Leah has been able to coordinate with private landowners adjacent to any of the WRI projects. Where possible, she does; however, there is not much private land around many of the WRI projects, especially those in the book cliffs.

Leah is also working on developing guidance for the NRCS wet meadow project assessments, as currently projects that might benefit wet meadows rank lower in other projects' assessments. Anyone with input should contact Leah. Dave asked if West Nile Virus was a consideration; Leah explained that it was a question in the assessment, yes. Leah explained that the focus is on late brood-rearing habitat, so those projects can have equal standing in rankings as PJ projects.

Three Corners Area

Dave Allison explained that there is confusion from the people on the ground about management authority in the areas near the Wyoming/Utah border. The recreation area that Forest Service manages but is surrounded by BLM now has a complex management structure due to the new sage-grouse plan amendments. Dave suggested that a subgroup of the working group might be able to assist in bringing clarity. Dave will contact Lorien with ideas for how to assist.

Sage-grouse data

Brian Maxfield presented information about recent sage-grouse movements. In the Three Corners area, collars were put out last spring. 11 are still active, and 7 have died. One was killed by an eagle, based on how the collar moved at the end, but it is difficult to know exactly how the others died. The collars from those that died will be redeployed. Brian downloads the data once a week, but movements are recorded much more often than that. It is possible to tell where they nest since the signals for 28 days are all from essentially the same location.

The various collared birds have shown many interesting movements already. From Three Corners, one hen went all the way into Wyoming, but was caught, nested, and raised her brood on Bear Top – moving more in the winter than in the summer. Birds from the high elevation population moved to Antelope Flat where it's really dry in the summer. Some birds on Goslin are not leaving during the winter – there is a lot of tall sagebrush there but that was not expected. Some birds winter in Brown's park. There are lots of movements, but still many questions. These birds are a great example of how valuable the GPS collars are for tracking the birds.

This spring, Brian hopes to add collars in Brown's Park and Gray's Canyon. Eighteen new collars and any collars retrieved from dead birds will be put out in the spring. Five transmitters will also be put out on Blue Mountain this spring and on Brush Creek Mountain. More information about birds near the recreation area would be very helpful as well.

Brian showed some slides of the Blue Mountain birds' movements (data from Utah and Colorado). One of the birds went to Diamond to nest. Although they have "lost" birds from there before, no one ever looked for them on Diamond.

On Anthro Mountain, the collared birds have not moved off the mountain, and are staying on windy ridges. The birds there appear to be using every inch of available sagebrush habitat available on the mountain, suggesting that may be a limiting factor for them. We were hoping to see where they went for winter, but they did not leave the mountain.

Brian thanked BLM and USFS for funding the collars and the downloads. BYU students will be analyzing some of this data since Brian does not have time to do extensive analysis.

Someone asked the status of the BYU research from Diamond Mountain. Brian said that he had not seen a final report, but they learned generally that the birds tended to nest on BLM where there was sagebrush left, but raised broods more on private land. Lorien will follow up to see if the BYU folks can present their results at a future meeting.

Follow-up Needed

- Hugh will follow up with Dixie, Dan, Tory, and Leah about hydrology projects.
- Dave will contact Lorien with ideas for how to assist in the management clarity for the recreation area on the Utah/Wyoming border.
- Lorien will follow up to see if the BYU folks can present their results at a future meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be in the spring, date to be determined via doodle poll. [update: April 6]