

**UINTAH BASIN
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 4/6/16

Place: DNR office, Vernal, Utah

Present: John Spencer (Simplot), Natasha Hadden (BLM), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Ben Williams (UDWR), Pat Rainbolt (UDWR), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Roland McCook (Ute Tribe Fish & Game), Leah Lewis (NRCS/SGI), Brad Dickson (Deseret Power), David Allison (consultant), Stephanie Tomkinson (QEP), Ryan Clerico (Enefit American Oil), Karl Fleming (USFWS), Sonja Jahrsdoerfer (USFWS), Garrick Hall (Farm Bureau), Nate Barrons (FFSL), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

FFSL presentation on Cat-Fire

Nate Barrons, from the Salt Lake office of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL), presented the draft version of an improved statewide strategy and an online database system designed to help coordinate fire-related information around the state. Nate discussed what is called the catastrophic wildlife reduction strategy (“cat-fire” for short). The system involves an improved statewide strategy that uses local resources to get ahead of possible wildfire problems. It includes pre-suppression and mitigation work. For the first three years, this effort is funded through a restricted state lands account. There are six regional workgroups (the regions mirror the DWR region boundaries). The Northeast region (NER) team is based out of Heber. Mike Erickson is the contact for the NER. These regional groups, similar to WRI, plan and implement projects, but have a fire expertise and focus. Nate recommended that fire-mitigation specific projects can be brought to these teams for feedback and possible funding.

Nate demonstrated the online mapping system, Utah Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (UWRAP for short). It has layers that can be turned on that include information on wildfire threat (the likelihood of any given place burning) and risk assessment (this includes other data about the results that a fire would have; i.e. what would be lost). It will be publicly available, and users will need to have accounts. Once you have an account, you can add your own data as needed, and get extensive reports based on polygons you can select. The site will also have other links to relevant tools and information. The website will be www.UtahFireRisk.com.

Nate also answered several questions about how fire response systems work. He noted that BLM has been adjusting their “run cards” which determined that kind of resources are sent immediately into a fire area, before a more complete assessment has been done. Especially in the West Desert, where fire risk is higher, there has been more work done to reflect sage-grouse concerns in addition to human and structure concerns.

Lorien will send out information from Nathan to the full group on the listserv.

Population and project updates

The local lek counts so far this year look good, according to Pat. The final lek numbers are not available until later in the year when they have been compiled at the state level.

Roland noted that he has been looking at historic leks on the reservation, but not finding many active. He has located four possible new leks in the southern part of the reservation (I the Hill Creek area) but they are very inaccessible. Roland is moving to a new job with the tribe shortly after this meeting. He will no longer be working on wildlife but is going to focus on streams and water. He noted that the Towanna Flats lek has been doing well this year, with encouraging high counts so far. Also, a mini/test project done last year to clear a more open space on the lek has birds already using the cleared area this year. There are plans to do more work this year to open up the lek area and help birds move off the road.

Leah has been planning projects for SGI and is working on 9 or 10 that might be funded this year, including the Towanna flats clearing work.¹

Emily, from Dinosaur NM, reported that there are colored birds near the border which are using the monument, but it does not appear that there are any leks on the NPS land. The birds seem to be wintering on the Yampa bench.

Simplot will be purchasing two collars to learn more about how birds are using their land. John also noted that they have been having challenges with sagebrush reestablishment. The group discussed that challenge and offered some thoughts.

The new Little Mountain lek (Grass Bench) between Maeser and La Pointe has one collared bird, which has been moving to the La Pointe bench.

Brian Maxfield sent an update via email as he was unable to attend the meeting due to trapping schedules: "Lek counts have started and are going well. Looks like we may be around last year's numbers but it's still early. We still cannot access some leks because of snow. GPS transmitter work is going well too. So far we have placed 3 transmitters and have 20 more to go. Trapping has been slow early but we are in the best time right now. I hope to get them all on by the end of next week (if all goes well). We placed our first transmitter on a grouse south of Little Mtn. Getting good info already and I hope to get 2-3 more out in this area."

Dave Allison asked for additional information on planning being done at the landscape level, but could not recall the exact name or who is working on it. It was determined that the project is probably related to the BLM's LLC processes. Karl and Sonja may have additional information and will send it to Lorien to determine if UBARM may want to be involved or if it is out of the scope of our normal discussions.

BLM update

Natasha reported that BLM is working on NEPA for projects. Also, they recently had a training

in SLC for BLM and other federal employees regarding implementation of the sage-grouse amendments. She noted that mitigation, grazing, oil & gas, vegetation projects, and monitoring details are being developed. New BLM IMs may be available on these topics soon (maybe September).

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will send out the Cat-Fire information to the listserv.
- Sonja and Karl will forward the LCC information to Lorien.
- The group would like more information on conservation banking opportunities from Alan or others involved in mitigation
- Lorien will bring peanut M&M's to the next meeting

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be a field tour. Several individuals provided ideas; Lorien will connect with the UPCD team and engage others in planning as summer gets closer.