

**LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: 5/24/11

Time: 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Place: USU campus in Vernal, Utah

Present: Diane Coltharp (Uinta County Public Lands), Kirk Wood (Duchesne County), Mark Peterson (Farm Bureau), Boyd Kitchen (USU Extension, Uintah county), Josh Kaze (BYU), Scott Ackerman (USFWS), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Gary Wieser (UACD), Gary McRae (NRCS), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Plan Revision

The LWG reviewed the threats table and the strategies and actions from the plan. Most comments were captured in the document revisions, but key notes from the meeting follow:

- The Diamond Mountain population is not as influenced by oil and gas development concerns as are other populations, but the impact of energy development on the more fringe populations, such as Anthro Mountain, is greater. This is reflected in the note on the threats table.
- Wind power might be a concern on Diamond, but it does not currently appear to be of major concern
- Increasing numbers of sage-grouse (rather than just maintaining current population levels) will probably involve both core (like Diamond Mountain) populations, as well as increasing populations in fringe or currently declining areas
- Roads are probably not a barrier for populations interacting, but may cause other problems. Josh noted that he has personally observed at least three sage-grouse dead on the road from vehicle collisions on Diamond Mountain.
- Fences create different concerns than powerlines and other tall structures, and in some cases, fences can improve situation for sage-grouse, such as when they improve grazing management, so the “fences, powerlines, and other tall structures” category was split into two for the threats table.
- Grazing itself is not necessarily a threat to sage-grouse, and can even be a benefit. The threat category was changed to “overgrazing” and the grazing related strategies should make clear what actually needs to be done to address the concerns that do exist, such as overgrazing.
- The impact of OHV use on sage-grouse in the Basin is not well known, but seems unlikely to be a major concern. Most OHV areas are not close to critical sage-grouse habitat with one exception in Duchesne County. The group in attendance agreed that Brian Maxfield should be consulted about this potential impact.
- Weed issues are primarily related to cheatgrass, plus spotted knapweed on DWR land
- West Nile has not turned out, as far as we know, to be the threat it was anticipated to be in this area. It could have an effect on lower elevation populations but the group at this meeting suggested that the elevation of the large populations on Diamond could mean

less potential impact

- Much remains unknown about specific predation concerns. John Kaze noted that just this week (May 18-24 or so) the raven presence on Diamond Mountain, and the rates of nest predation, have increased dramatically. The group agreed that a better understanding of where the ravens are and when they move would be very useful information to better understand their impact on sage-grouse next success.
- Vegetation management has been listed in the threats chart as a threat. The group agreed that some vegetation management practices (particularly widespread sagebrush removal projects in the past) have the potential to be devastating to sage-grouse. However, carefully planned mosaic treatments can be beneficial to sage-grouse. Continuing mosaic projects and educating agricultural producers (through SGI funds, etc) about the negative impacts of other types of treatments is very valuable.
- Josh reported that sage-grouse are using the P-J treatment areas off the rim, so those projects appear to have been beneficial to grouse populations on Diamond Mountain
- The lack of water does not appear to be a major threat on Diamond. Some previous water projects, however, are popular areas for the Diamond Mountain birds. Josh noted one example of a slow-release catchment area on private ground on Diamond where birds spend up to one and a half months of the summer.
- The group recommended that the strategies be simplified to focus on habitat management, research needs, rather than the current 20 strategies. Lorien will incorporate the groups' comments and suggestions and send a draft document to the full list for review.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will compile the results of this meeting and send the results to the full list for comment.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be a joint field tour with the UBPCD to the Book Cliffs on June 29-30. Miles Hanberg will be leading the tour.