

**LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Planning/scoping
meeting

Date: 16 December 2008

Time: 10:00-12:00

Place: Uintah County Building, Vernal Utah

Members Present: Brian Maxfield, Eric Thacker, Lorien Belton, Bob Christiansen, Terry Messmer (Recorder), Bill Rasmussen, Leah Smith, Steve Strong, Natasha Gruber, Boyd Kitchen, Scott Chamberlain, Drew Crane, Stephanie Tomkinson, Darrell Gillman, Ben Williams, Sherel Goodrich, Dixie Sadlier, Jim Spencer, Kirk Wood, Danny Anderson, Lauren Imlay, Carlyle Rollins,

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Introduction and Welcome

Projects and Monitoring Updates

Terry Messmer updated the group on the status of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision. The decision will be delayed until mid-summer.

Brian Maxfield and Terry Messmer updated the group about the status of the revision to the 2002 Utah Strategic Management Plan. The plan will be completed in Jan 2009 and sent to the RACs and Wildlife Board in February 2009.

Leah Smith – discussed the status of the Seep ridge sage-grouse population. Adult survival is very low. All the mortalities occurred in the Willow Creek area – a mix of mammalian and avian predation. One important finding is that the population is not isolated. Birds are using tribal land.

Brian – discussed the radio-collaring of the 3 birds on Deadman’s Bench. The birds have all died. After capture, the hen moved out of the area. The males stayed around the area but moved out of the area in the summer and were difficult to relocate. The birds move to the north and east toward Blue Mt. They may be part of the Blue Mt. population. They will again try to catch more birds this spring. He explained the capture process. The smaller groups tend to be highly mobile.

Eric Thacker and Bob Christiansen reviewed the Anthro Mt. Project and the burn experiments. The mortality of radio-collared birds in 2008 was higher than normal. Sixteen strutting males were counted on the lek giving an estimated population of 50 birds. This is down from previous estimates of 150. They have 9 birds still with radio collars and 6 are missing. Some of the birds have traveled long distances and are strutting at other leks over 18 miles away. The hens from Anthro have moved up to 20 miles and nested. Anthro seems to be the link between Emma Park and Range Creek. Bob also put transmitters on chicks. The mortality rate last year was 70%. In

previous years it was about 35%. All of the chicks' mortalities were assigned to predation. Brian said that predators seem to be shifting diet to focus on sage-grouse due to lower numbers of alternative prey sources. Predation on sage-grouse in the area has been higher this year.

A question was asked about energy development on Anthro. There are 400 new permits, but most of this will be lower in the pinyon-juniper. There are two wells on top that are located within 1 mile sight distance of the lek. The well traffic will involve travel through the leks. Bob pointed out that the birds are using the tops and ridges. Any negative impacts to birds would mainly be associated with these areas.

A question was asked about seasonal restrictions. Some restrictions have been placed regarding when companies can drill. The restrictions to be truly enforced had to be placed in the lease at the time of the sale.

With regard to compliance with timing restrictions on activities, one major problem is that although the main company may be compliant, communicating and enforcing restrictions with sub-contractor companies is a challenge.

The group discussed the use of brochures and signage to alert field workers of the restrictions. The only way to follow the rules is to maintain contact with the companies. Stephanie liked the idea of signage in the area to announce travel restrictions for companies, and also recommended contacting the main company directly when violations are noted. She indicated that signs could be purchased by the companies.

Stephanie stated that each company holds regular safety meetings. One of the best places to talk to the company is at the safety meeting.

Ben Williams will be responsible to visit the safety meetings to present information about sage-grouse restrictions. The service companies are not always in attendance but should be invited. Stephanie would be willing to go along with Ben.

Brian Maxfield – discussed the plan to transplant birds on Anthro: 30 birds for 2 years – 60 total. A predation management plan is in place using DRC 1339 for ravens. Wildlife Services would start work on this at the end of February. The translocations have been approved by the Director and going through the Wildlife Board. The work would start in the April. Birds would be placed where males are strutting. The intent is to release all hens.

Steve – Wyoming Interstate Company (WIC – Canada Pipeline) is proposing new compressor station on Diamond MT in 2010. The company has bought the 20 acres proposed for development and the preferred location by the companies. DWR has proposed 2-3 alternative sites. This is a FERC process. The USFWS can provide recommendations, but because sage-grouse is not listed on ESA, the recommendations are only recommendations.

The group discussed whether a letter should be sent from the UBARM group. Drew Crane

agreed to draft the letter since he is familiar with the situation.

Boyd Kitchen – asked about proposing project for partners – how research could fit into the funding. He asked about the understanding of using Plateau and the use of various seed mixes. Corey Ranson, an Assistant Professor at USU, is interested in researching timing of seedings and rates of chemical that control downy brome but have minimal effect on desirable forbs in a seed mix. Scott said there is a lot going on about Plateau, but not written down.

Eric Thacker – discussed work on Plateau done by Chris Call and Tom Monaco and Gene Shuppe. Boyd reported that Corey is in contact with them and feels that there are still large gaps in knowledge.

Scott – discussed some of the research that has been done and most has been done in an irrigated situation which could be very different from range conditions.

It was suggested that submitting a proposal to Utah partners would be appropriate. The group felt that there is a need to continue pursuing this line of research. Brian suggested this could be designed into a current or other proposed project.

Lorien and Terry reviewed the CSI mitigation project proposal in development, and the general concept of mitigation credits for sagebrush habitat.

The new BLM RMP was signed in October and contains several references to sage-grouse, such as no activity within ¼ mile of lek (not surface occupancy).

Role of UBPCD in sage-grouse plan implementation: Boyd discussed the overlap of the sage-grouse group with Utah partners. He noted that UBPCD had made a one-way motion to take the sage-grouse group under its wing and help implement the plan. UBARM will remain autonomous, however. UBPCD also tentatively added a voting representative from the working group. The representative would essentially represent the conservation plan. The group decided that Lorien would be the UBARM representative on UBPCD.

Strategies and actions will be reviewed in 2009 after the Revised Utah Strategic Sage-grouse Plan is released.

Future meeting scheduling was discussed. Meetings will be held quarterly in conjunction with UBPCD meetings.

Actions Taken

The group agreed to co-host meetings with the Regional Team meeting. Lorien would serve as a representative of UBARM and SVARM on the meeting. The UBARM would meet in the morning of the Uintah Basin Partners group on a quarterly basis.

Follow-up Needed

Drew Crane will draft an explanation of the concerns about sage-grouse impact of the proposed compressor station and send it to Lorien.

Ben Williams will attend energy company safety meetings to discuss sage-grouse restrictions. Stephanie would be willing to go along with Ben.

NEXT MEETING: The next UBARM meeting will be after the RAC and Wildlife Board meeting. This will be held in early March in conjunction with the Regional UBPCD Team meeting.