

**WDARM
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2006

Time: 9:00-11:00 AM

Place: BLM Vernal Field Station

Members Present:

Planning/scoping
meeting

Sarah Lupis (USU Ext.)

Boyd White (Chair)

Jason Robinson (USU)

Ashley Green (UDWR)

Lans Stavast (USFS)

Kim Asmus (UDWR)

Tom Becker (UDWR)

Linden Greenhalgh (USU Ext.)

Randy Swilling (BLM)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

The group reviewed the Viability Tables. A few changes were made and a copy of the final draft is attached to these minutes.

The group set “desired conditions” on the Viability Tables. Sarah explained that the desired conditions are set to give the group an idea of how much change might be required and to help prioritize where actions (to be planned at a future meeting) need to be focused. Desired conditions are reflected in the final draft of the Viability Table attached to these minutes. In general, the group elected to make changes to poor and fair categories, raising them by one step over the next 5-10 years and elected to maintain categories that were in good condition. Only one category “connectivity of populations and subpopulations” will be maintained in Fair condition. This was decided because so little information is available about the movement patterns and potential interactions of sage-grouse in the Resource Area with sage-grouse outside the area. The group was not comfortable assigning an indicator ranking for “good” and didn’t want to set desired conditions until more information is available that allows them to define “good”.

The group discussed how to find new project participants, primarily private landowners. Ashley suggested using Jason, Boyd, and Alan (or other group leadership) as liaisons with private landowners to get people with crucial sage-grouse use areas involved in developing and implementing habitat improvement projects, where appropriate. Boyd suggested approaching Cecil Douglas about improving land he has enrolled in the CRP program. The group discussed the need to make contact with this landowner as the CRP renewal approaches in 2008. Sarah indicated that fewer acres will be enrolled in the next signup, but the group agreed that there are many other opportunities through the NRCS and UDWR to do projects like that. Tom suggested

pursuing easements on some crucial areas. Ashley suggested that the NRCS can help involve private landowners. He also said that the UPCD has a lot of money for habitat improvement projects and that the Central Region team is in the process of prioritizing and planning for the next 5 years and are looking for input from WDARM about where priority areas are and what projects should be pursued.

The group discussed fire management. Tom wondered if it was possible to let certain areas burn once a fire has been established to help with habitat management objectives. Randy said that the BLM's policy is for total suppression but that the Resource Advisor can try to influence what areas are protected. He said that it is easier for areas to be protected than for them to be burned.

The group discussed how the sage-grouse in Vernon might mix with a lek that neighbors their winter habitat on the south side (Kopopolos). Jason felt that the birds could likely mix because suitable habitat appeared to be available for them to move through but little is known about this. The possibility that Vernon birds might be connected to birds in Mona and Nephi was discussed.

The group brainstormed a list of threats as the next step in the CAP process. Threats included:

- Invasive/noxious weeds
- Incompatible fire management practices
- Incompatible livestock grazing (including a lack of grazing)
- Altered water development
- Incompatible recreation (OHV, hunting, etc.)
- Extraordinary predation (especially the presence of red foxes)
- Renewable/non-renewable energy development
- Powerlines/fences/tall structures
- Disease & parasitism
- Administrative constraints
- Home/Cabin development
- P/J encroachment
- Conversion to agriculture
- Incompatible vegetative management practices

The lek search/count planned for this morning was canceled due to wet weather. Jason will send out an email to the group the next time he is going and conditions are good. He will be looking for help in catching another ~15 birds this year during the 2nd and 3rd weekends in April—please contact him if you are interested in helping trap!!

Actions Taken

Meeting minutes from February were approved.

Follow-up Needed

Sarah to update CAP workbook with new information and bring summary to next meeting.

Boyd to coordinate with Richard Clark for April meeting.

Boyd and Alan to write letter of support for USFS project and submit to Group for approval.

Group to review Stresses & Threats Ranking Guidelines for next meeting

NEXT MEETING: Friday, April 28th, 10:00 AM-noon, USU Extension Office, Tooele, UT.

Conservation Action Planning: Greater Sage-grouse Viability Table for the West Desert—Population Size and Distribution

Category	Key Ecological Factor	Indicator	Indicator Rating Bold =current conditions, <i>italics</i> =desired condition				Basis for Indicator Rating	Comments
			Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good		
Size	Population Size	Maximum no. of males counted on all active leks in each subunit	Vernon: <200 Ibapah: <50	<i>Vernon: 200-350</i> <i>Ibapah: 50-100</i>	Vernon: 350-500 Ibapah: 100-200	Vernon: 500+ Ibapah: 200+	UDWR lek count data; Historical counts and personal observations. 2005 counts: Vernon = 96 Ibapah = 42	Important to separate by subunit because they are separate populations. Lek counts are inconsistent, especially in Ibapah. New leks were found in 2005 which will be considered active in 2007 if males continue to be counted there.
Size	Population Size	Number of active leks in the entire Resource Area	Vernon: <4 Ibapah: <2	Vernon: 4-8 Ibapah: 2-4	<i>Vernon: 8-16</i> <i>Ibapah: 5-7</i>	Vernon: 16+ Ibapah: 7+	UDWR lek count data; number of active leks, and number of historic, now inactive, leks. Also the potential to find new leks in the future with additional effort. Number of leks in Vernon = 4, Ibapah = 2.	Several new leks were found last year which will be considered "active" if counted again this year and next year. "Active" defined according to Connelly's assessment and the UDWR protocol.

Minutes

Category	Key Ecological Factor	Indicator	Indicator Rating Bold =current conditions, <i>italics</i> =desired condition				Basis for Indicator Rating	Comments
			Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good		
Size	Population Distribution	Lek Distribution as measured by geographic areas of potential habitat.	Vernon: anything less than current distribution Ibapah: current distribution	Vernon: current distribution <i>Ibapah: current distribution plus additional leks west of the highway.</i>	<i>Vernon: Current distribution plus more in Rush Valley</i> Ibapah: "Fair" plus bench areas	Vernon: "Good" distribution plus additional leks in areas of potential habitat. Ibapah: "Good" plus all of Ibapah Valley.	Vernon: Potential habitat includes Stansburys, Simpsons, Sheep Rocks, Rush Valley, and along Hwy 6. Ibapah: although there are 2 established and 2-3 potential leks they are all very close together.	

Conservation Action Planning: Greater Sage-grouse Viability Table for the West Desert—Seasonal Habitat Condition

Conservation Target	Enter # of Target	Category	Key Attribute**	Indicator	Indicator Ratings				Current Indicator Status	Current Rating	Desired Rating	Date of Current Rating	Date for Desired Rating
					Bold = Current			<i>Italics = Desired</i>					
2	West Desert	Condition	Breeding Habitat Quality	Shrub cover and height, availability of open patches, understory height and cover.	shrub cover <15% or >25% and <30 or >80 cm tall, no open patches, understory cover <15% and <18 cm in height.	shrub cover <15% or >25% and <30 or >80 cm tall, open patches sparse, understory cover <15% and <18 cm in height.	<i>15-25% shrub cover and 30-80 cm in height, open patches abundant, understory cover >15% and height >18 cm</i>		Fair mainly because lacking in understory cover and lack of open space (shrub cover too dense).	Fair		February 2006	
2	West Desert	Condition	Late summer/fall habitat quality	Sagebrush cover, availability of insect food resources, availability of perennial water sources, availability of forbs.	Sagebrush cover <10% or >25%, no insect food resources, no perennial water sources available, no forbs available.	Sagebrush cover <10% or >25%, insect food resources lacking, few perennial water sources available, few forbs available.	<i>Sagebrush cover 10-25%, insect food resources abundant, perennial water sources abundant, sufficient forbs available.</i>		[Ibapah]Fair—lack of insects and water, not enough sagebrush cover. [Vernon]Fair—lack of insects and water.	Fair		February 2006	
2	West Desert	Condition	Winter habitat quality in the Resource Area	Sagebrush canopy cover and height.	Sagebrush <10 or >30 % cover and/or never above snow.	Sagebrush <10 or >30 % cover and/or rarely above snow.	<i>Sagebrush 10-30% cover and mostly above snow.</i>	Sagebrush 10-30% cover and always above snow.	Birds using areas with sagebrush generally above snow on southwest facing slopes.	Good		February 2006	
<p>**You will need to decide how to handle some seasonal habitat types. Do you want to lump or split breeding habitat (lek, nesting, early brood-rearing)? Do you want to include Fall Habitat separately? Please describe your decision-making criteria and reasoning.</p> <p>***I am suggesting this attribute. You do not necessarily have to deal with it at this time.</p>													

Conservation Action Planning: Greater Sage-grouse Viability Table for the West Desert—Landscape Context

Conservation Target	Enter # of Target	Category	Key Attribute	Indicator	Indicator Ratings				Current Indicator Status	Current Rating	Desired Rating	Date of Current Rating	Date for Desired Rating
					Bold = Current			<i>Italics = Desired</i>					
2	WDARM Resource Area	Landscape Context	Connectivity of seasonal habitat types		Seasonal habitats are sparse and dispersed with many barriers between.	Seasonal habitats are isolated and/or narrowly connected with some barriers between.	<i>Seasonal habitats in close proximity and/or mostly connected with some barriers between.</i>	All habitat patches are within a similar matrix and functionally connected.	Habitats are well connected within Vernon and Ibapah, some roads, tall structures, fences.	Good		January 2006	
2	WDARM Resource Area	Landscape Context	Connectivity to other subpopulations/populations		Population does not interact with any other population.	<i>Population occasionally interacts with other populations</i>			Radio-telemetry studies indicate that Vernon and Ibapah do not mix. Unknown if they mix with others but seems unlikely to the west due to large barriers (development, roads, etc.).	Fair		January 2006	