

**WEST DESERT  
(WDARM)  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date:** January 28, 2016  
**Place:** Tooele County Building  
**Members Present:** Janet Larson (Shambip CD), Chris Bryan (BLM), Justin Small (USU), Melissa Chelak (USU), Hugh Hurlow (UGS), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (DWR), Darrell Johnson (Shambip CD), Matt Philippi (NRCS), Chris Haller (State Parks), Dave Brown (Tooele County), Karen Hartman (USFS), Erik Valder (BLM-WDD), Brad Jessop (BLM-WDD), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Whitney May (Logan Simpson), Keeli Marvel (DPG), Jerry Caldwell (Tooele County), Alyson Eddie (Logan Simpson), Mark McKendrick (Tooele County), David Smedley (DWR/NRCS), Boyd White (NRCS/UDWR), Matt Howard (UDWR), Jessica Henrie (Tooele Transcript Bulletin), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

### Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

#### *Proposed WRI projects*

Multiple proposed WRI projects were presented to the LWG for discussion.

Brad Jessop explained that previous fuels projects to remove juniper were focused on reducing fuel loads, but not improving sage-grouse habitat, so there are many trees still left in previously treated areas. BLM is proposing projects that re-treat some of the previously entered areas (this is convenient since the arch clearances have already been done), involve some new lop-and-scatters, and also incorporate projects on adjacent private land, which would involve 400 acres of initial-entry bullhog work. Brad showed a map of proposed polygons for project #3635 in the Government Creek area. The group was very supportive of the work, particularly the shift to dual-purpose treatments that improve both the fire situation and sage-grouse habitat more directly.

Elizabeth asked about the weed situation in the Government Creek area. BLM and the County are both aware of the knapweed situation there and have been working actively to address it.

Boyd White has several proposed projects in the area on private land, including #3687, which is just southeast of the projects area Brad showed on his map.

Alison Whitacre and Jim Priest have worked together to map out 17 years of PJ projects. The first proposed area is about 3500 acres, but future years will aim for 5-6000 acres annually. This year, the first area of focus will be project #3727, south of the South Tintics. This year they are only requesting cultural clearance funding for one project. Subsequent years will see proposals for implementation of the previous year's project (which will then have arch clearance done) as well

as a separate project to get the arch done for the next phase. Most is for lop and scatter, with a small amount of bullhog as needed. For now this is all on BLM, and will largely be on BLM for future phases, but provides an opportunity to work closely on private ground during each phase to engage adjacent landowners.

Projects #3691 (Boulter) and #3683 (Furner Valley) were also discussed. Boulter will connect past BLM projects. The closest lek is about 6 miles to the southwest, but hopefully the area can be useful for grouse in the future. Furner Valley is about 900 acres of bullhog, and is right next to some private projects. Eventually, the 17-year plan from Alison and Jim will link up to this area.

Jimi asked what we know about the birds in the Furner Valley area. In 2008 Jason followed a few collared birds there, but not connected to any larger studies. The area is outside the SGMA but the leks are still monitored. There is not a lot of information known beyond that.

### *Utah Geologic Survey presence*

Hugh Hurlow, from the Utah Geologic Survey, was in attendance to learn about the habitat projects going on in the area, as he has been discussing with Alan Clark how to evaluate the impacts of habitat projects on water quality and quantity, such as stream flow, springs, etc. Listening to the project discussions was helpful for him. Ideally, to have a baseline that represents more than just one year, three years of data would be ideal before a project was done, to assess its impact on groundwater and be able to differentiate that from fluctuations caused by other factors like climate/weather conditions. The 17-year proposal from Alison and Jim might be a great testing ground. He will contact Alison and Jim to discuss the idea further.

Jimi asked if he would be looking at soil water in addition to flow. Hugh explained that the project was still in formation stage, although other individuals would have to be involved depending on what needed to be monitored. Elizabeth mentioned that the flow in many areas is highly dependent on snowpack and other seasonally variable weather conditions.

Darrell asked Jason how sage-grouse use open water, and how important it is to them. Jason explained that most of the time, sage-grouse get the water they need from the vegetation they eat. As summer goes on, the birds follow the wetter areas (not necessarily flowing water), which may mean they go up in elevation, or descend to irrigated areas like alfalfa fields. One important aspect of wetter areas is that they support more insects, which the chicks need when they are very young.

### *Research and translocation plans*

Melissa Chelak, a graduate student at USU, introduced herself to the group. She will be the primary researcher on the project to study the local population and the effects of the upcoming translocations.

Jason Robinson explained that the translations were approved by the Wildlife Board, and the research proposal was also formally approved on January 27<sup>th</sup>. Funding is in place, so the translocations can move forward. The goal is 30 females and 10 males moved this year. The first trapping effort will be in Box Elder County in March, and then in April on Parker Mountain. Jason also noted that DWR is planning a media event for the release. He is still working out details of exactly where the birds will be released.

### *Recreation-related updates*

Chris Haller provided updates on the ongoing recreation work. Every weekend, State Parks and DWR enforcement teams have been making contact with individuals out in the Sheeprocks area. Their efforts are just focused for the time being on the established roads, and focusing on road-related state laws, such as helmet laws, registration, and age of operator. They are only doing “probable cause.” Right now the law enforcement efforts are not dealing with off-road or sage-grouse issues, but they can technically cite someone if they are off road in an area not designated as open, but there is much more gray area with that than some other things. For now the efforts are focused very narrowly. Chris noted that they are following Utah code 41-22. Other information can be found in publications at [OHV.utah.gov](http://OHV.utah.gov).

For sage-grouse issues, this group needs to develop appropriate wording and an approach to how it can be effectively handled and communicated. The group brainstormed several ideas, such as a kiosk, a big sign saying “this is sage-grouse country,” an information sheet from DWR, and an Eagle Scout project to get a tiny flyer for sage-grouse issues that could be included in the maps that people can get. Dave mentioned that Tooele County is happy to include something but this group needs to provide that. Stedman’s is a local retailer for the OHV community that would be a critical point for dissemination of information.

Lorien asked the group if there would be support for a program that would help build local community pride in the sage-grouse locally. The group was enthusiastic about exploring many options, and decided to have a focus on problem solving at the next meeting. Lorien will do some pre-work to make sure we are prepared to have a good discussion, such as asking the list for ideas in advance of the meeting. Also, she will ask Chris what some of his recommended distribution methods might be.

### *Other updates:*

No predator updates were available but the group was very interested to know how the raven and red fox control efforts are going so far. Lorien will follow up with Wildlife Services to get an update.

**Follow-up Needed**

- Hugh Hurlow and Allison will discuss PJ and water research opportunities
- Lorien will talk with Chris Haller and others, and email the listserv, to gather information in advance of the next meeting, which will focus on possible recreation outreach and messaging for sage-grouse.
- Lorien will get additional info from Wildlife Services on predator control efforts

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be March 7 at 1 pm. (It was tentatively scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> but needed to be changed).