

**LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: November 2, 2009

Time: 2:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: Tooele County Building, Tooele

Members Present: Boyd White (Chairman), Mellissa Rosenhan (BLM), Jim Priest (BLM), Jan Knerr (UDAF-GIP), Karen Hartman (USFS), Alan Mitchell (Bennion Ranch), Renae Bragonje (Spanish Fork USFS), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Sonja Wallace (SITLA), Linden Greenhalgh (USU Extension), Bruce Clegg (Tooele County Commission), Jerry Hurst (Tooele County Commission), Burke Davenport (NRCS), Robbie Knight (Dugway Proving Ground), Tom Becker (DWR), Traci Allen (BLM SFLO), Steve Gray (UDWR), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Scott Pehrson (Shambip Soil Conservation District), Jeff Williams (NRCS/Great Salt Lake RCD), Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator/recorder)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Lorien Belton reviewed the agenda and everyone introduced themselves.

Plan and Population Updates

Jason Robinson gave a presentation which included sage-grouse biology, population trends both regionally and locally, status of listing decisions, and information on the new Utah state sage-grouse management plan. Several items of note include:

- Unlike most populations in Utah, the populations in the West Desert management area occur primarily on Forest Service land.
- The federal listing decision is currently slated for February 26, 2009.
- The Utah state sage-grouse plan is all approved with the exception of Appendix 5, regarding energy development and sage-grouse, which is currently under review. This appendix should be available in January of next year.
- Utah sage-grouse are only hunted in four areas where population numbers are large, as well as stable or increasing.
- Helicopter surveys were conducted around Utah to see whether additional leks could be found. No new leks were identified in the West Desert area, but were in other places in Utah .

Someone asked whether Appendix 5 would address linear projects such as transmission lines. Jason indicated that those projects are not addressed specifically unless they pass within a specific distance from a lek; however, the final guidelines will include information, such as that related to raptor perching issues, which should be helpful in guiding decisions.

Another question addressed the value of water developments to sage-grouse. Jason explained that sage-grouse don't usually use unnatural water sources, but do use seeps and springs, so water developments can be designed to be beneficial to both wildlife and livestock.

The group discussed the difficulty of knowing exactly where a migratory population spends its time, particularly since it is difficult to track them in the winter when conditions are harsh. It was noted that migration times may be difficult for sage-grouse if they are migrating through unfamiliar habitat areas.

One member of the group asked about the impact of predators, particularly crows, on sage-grouse. Jason noted that crows are not as much of a concern as ravens locally. There is ongoing raven control in the Vernon area to help with sage-grouse concerns. Raven control options are limited by federal migratory bird regulations as well as by Native American spiritual concerns. Raven control is also only effective at a very local level because numbers have increased dramatically in recent years, and ravens do well around increasing human populations. Wildlife Services also works to control red fox, another predator of concern for sage-grouse.

Jason gave a brief synopsis of current research going on in the WDARM area. Several birds were radio-collared and are being tracked to determine nesting success and migration/use areas. The females spend time in the Ferner Valley.

Transmission Line

Boyd White and Tom Becker provided an update on the Mona transmission line. The various entities involved are working together well, and will identify whether any sage-grouse populations are threatened by the project. UDWR will be doing sage-grouse surveys in the spring in conjunction with the BLM and the company involved with the transmission line.

Recreation Concerns

The impact of recreation on sage-grouse, particularly ATV-related activities and trails, is of concern to the group. Tom Becker noted that the UDWR may approach the county commission to request that they consider sage-grouse impacts as they formulate a county trails plan. The primary concern is that some currently abandoned two-tracks might be designated by the county as ATV trails, thus dramatically increasing traffic in those areas. The county commissioners at the meeting agreed that they would like to know WDARMs concerns about which roads, if developed as trails, might pose a problem for sage-grouse. Tom, Alan, Jim, Renae, Jason, Mark, Steve, and Boyd may be interested in working on these recommendations and providing information to the county. Tom will be in touch with the county to discuss this further.

Additional recreation concerns, particularly around the Sheepocks area, relate to the timing of ATV use and motorcycle racing in sensitive sage-grouse areas, the danger of sparks from machines igniting wild fires, and also habitat loss due to the widening trails. The BLM has

information on when the races are scheduled, and can provide that information to the group.

Project Updates

Several people provided updates on current or planned projects in the WDARM area.

Mark Farmer reported that knapweed treatments in Tintic Junction have been completed, as have the Benmore Pastures habitat improvements, which entailed punching holes in dense sagebrush and then reseeding those areas to provide better brood-rearing habitat.

Karen Hartman noted that the USFS has several upcoming projects, including a lop and scatter designed to prevent further expansion of PJ into sage-grouse winter range. They are also trying to plan new Dixie Harrow projects on the front/north side of Vernon.

Alan Mitchell reported that he is working on putting together a joint project with GIP, USFS, and the Rush Valley Water Conservation District to get water to the Vernon area.

Burke Davenport and Steve Wilcox are currently working with the Goshute tribe on grazing management. Mark Farmer will communicate with Burke and Steve about how to improve the area for sage-grouse.

UPCD Sheeprocks Project Area

The Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) Central Region team is planning a series of joint projects on a section of land near the Sheeprocks. The area includes federal state, and private land, and is a critical area for sage-grouse in the area. Lorien showed a map of the proposed area, and the group discussed recommendations from the point of view of sage-grouse, as well as related other concerns relevant to members of the group. These recommendations include:

- Projects that would help prevent further burning on the Vernon side would be beneficial for sage-grouse
- Good projects might address the PJ encroachment between Ricken Rock and Allison Knolls, and include some greenstripping
- Greenstripping near roads should be avoided to decrease the chance of ATV use in the areas (if greenstripped areas are seen as potential ATV travel corridors)
- In general, projects should be careful with fire because any burns in the winter habitat could be very problematic for the sage-grouse winter range in the area
- Very small acreage sagebrush projects to diversify sagebrush habitat age classes would be good for grouse, with the caution that the sagebrush in the area takes a very long time to regenerate due to the lack of moisture, so this should be done sparingly. Cheatgrass is likely to be an issue in the area as well.

It was noted that there will be an informal site visit on November 17th by project planners for the area.

Rena indicated that she knows of a landowner in the area who might be interested in projects. She will pass the information along to Steve Wilcox, Mark Farmer, and Burke Davenport to explore the possibilities.

Summer Field Tour Ideas

Dugway could host a visit so the group could see their work with kochia seed and seeding. DWR is interested in learning from Dugway and the BLM about how to most successfully seed forage kochia.

The BLM may have several project sites to visit.

The field tour will take place sometime in later May, with the exact date to be determined later. Lorien will ask the group later to identify more potential field tour sites.

Review of Upcoming Year's Actions

The group discussed each strategy in the local conservation plan for sage-grouse and indicated what steps were planned for the upcoming year.

Strategy 1: (Maintain and increase coordination and communication with agency and private partners.)

- March meeting will include lek visits by group members
- Summer field tour will include visits to new key sites
- BLM, Dugway, and UDWR will communicate about kochia seeds and seedings
- WDARM will take an active role in developing project plans and suggestions for the UPCD Sheeprocks multi-jurisdictional project
- All Forest Service projects are UPCD funded; therefore, UPCD is a critical partner in continued habitat work in the WDARM sage-grouse habitat areas

Strategy 2: (Reduce pinyon/juniper stands from sage-grouse areas.)

- The Sharps Valley lop and scatter project is likely to occur
- BLM's fuel shop may have other PJ removal planned
- The Vincent McIntyre ranch may focus on PJ removal as well as some spike for sagebrush and fencing. This is in conjunction with NRCS.

Strategy 3: (Increase brood rearing habitat quality.)

- Vincents' project will remove sagebrush in areas where that will likely improve brood-rearing habitat

Strategy 4: (Maintain and protect winter habitat distribution and quality.)

- Sharps Valley lop and scatter project will assist. Much of this work has been done already.

- Feedback will be given to UPCD to make sure that winter habitat in the area is protected.

Strategy 5: (Reduce threat of conversion of sagebrush stands to noxious weed communities.)

- Tintic Junction knapweed spraying is an ongoing battle.
- The Forest Service has an ongoing weed program in Vernon, and also works with the BLM
- The BLM and DWR coordinate on weed issues
- NRCS works on a small scale on private land to address weeds.
- USU Extension (Linden Greenhalgh) just got a grant to work with the Goshute Tribe on weed management

Strategy 6: (Minimize impact of excessive predation.)

- Wildlife services will continue red fox and raven control efforts, paid for by UDWR
- The county also has a bounty on coyotes

Strategy 7: (Implement livestock management plans that address seasonal needs of sage-grouse and livestock operations.)

- All NRCS plans in the area incorporate sage-grouse information
- Forest Service allotments have criteria for grazing in sage-grouse habitat
- Kendall Bagley and Frank Vincent on McIntyre Ranch have sage-grouse issues worked into grazing plans

Strategy 8: (Increase population and habitat monitoring efforts.)

- DWR will continue to conduct annual spring lek counts
- The UPCD wildlife team will be monitoring sage-grouse on a project near Benmore
- Helicopter surveys will continue for finding new leks as long as funding remains available

Strategy 9: (Encourage the use of this plan in local, county, state, and federal natural resources planning efforts.)

- Working group meetings include a wide diversity of partners who have the opportunity to participate in upcoming plan revisions, as well as gain a better understanding of the current plan during meetings

Strategy 10: (Minimize impact of oil and gas development on sage-grouse and their habitat.)

- BLM will keep alert to potential sage-grouse concerns related to energy development in the Fillmore BLM district
- BLM is looking at Magnum, a FERC project, that hasn't had adequate pre-data surveys yet. Helicopter work this spring will be required.

Strategy 11: (Minimize the amount of quality sage-grouse habitat eliminated by residential and commercial land development consistent with private property rights.)

- This is not an issue of current concern to the group

Strategy 12: (Maintain and increase distribution and quality of mesic sites available to sage-grouse during summer months.)

- The Mitchells are working on a water development plan, in association with other work
- NRCS is helping to develop springs on the west side of the Simpsons that has high potential to help sage-grouse. Partners include the Richins family, NRCS, GIP, and UWDR). Although it is in somewhat marginal sage-grouse habitat, this project may help move pronghorn and other native ungulates up the bench, providing longer-term benefits for sage-grouse habitat in the area.

Strategy 13: (Maintain and improve breeding habitat quality.)

- The McIntyre Ranch spike project will assist with this goal.
- BLM is begin planning for brood-rearing habitat improvements on BLM land (After the meeting, a subgroup stayed to help identify priority project areas on BLM land, particularly for improving brood rearing habitat.)

Strategy 14: (Minimize the negative impacts of recreation on sage-grouse populations and their habitats.)

- Group members will work to identify ATV concerns, particularly with regard to trail designation, and work with the county to avoid advertising new potentially problematic trails in sage-grouse habitat.
- When BLM approves races in the Sheeprocks/Tintic recreation area, Jim Priest will keep the group informed

Actions Taken

No formal actions were taken. An upcoming meeting was scheduled for March 9th.

Follow-up Needed

- **Lorien, Boyd, and Jason will coordinate to plan the March 9th field trip and meeting**
- **Lorien will develop the list of future actions into a formal Plan of Work for the year and distribute it to the group.**
- **Renae will discuss a possible private landowner project with Steve Wilcox, Mark Farmer, and Burke Davenport.**
- **Burke, Steve, and Mark will communicate further on how to improve Goshute tribal grazed areas for sage-grouse.**
- **Lorien will get the group a laminated map to reference during meetings**

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will take place March 9, 2010. The first half of the meeting will be an early-morning field tour (beginning before sunrise) and will continue through breakfast to a morning meeting which will be focused on revising the local WDARM plan. The group will likely meet at the Silver Sage about 45 minutes before sunrise, bringing scopes, binoculars, and warm clothes, and head to one or more leks, depending on the size of the group and the need to reduce impact on the leks. The BLM fire station as a meeting place after the meeting. Breakfast should be provided. Lorien Belton, Boyd White, and Jason Robinson will coordinate to plan the meeting.