

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

**Date: November 3, 2015**

**Place: Tooele County Building**

**Members Present:**

Janet Larson (Shambip CD), Loralie Cox (UACD ), Darrell Johnson (Shambip CD), Karen Hartman (USFS), Traci Allen (USFS), George Garcia (USFS), Robbie Knight (DPG), Alison Whittaker (DWR), Terri Pope (UDWR), Avery Cook (UDWR), Boyd White (NRCS/UDWR), Alan Clark (UDNR), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Chris Bryan (BLM), Ben Nadolski (UDWR), Matt Howard (UDWR), Jessica Henrie (Tooele Transcript Bulletin), Mike Tamllos (USDA-WS), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Tom Becker (UDWR), Matt Briggs (UDWR), Julie Palette (BLM), Matt Philippi (NRCS), Renee Chi (BLM), Quincy Bahr (BLM), Chris Haller (State Parks), Kyle Clyde (State Parks), Masako Wright (BLM), Whitney May (Logan Simpson), Brad Jessop (BLM), Randy Burke (Rocky Mountain Power), Kerry Schwartz (BLM), Bekee Hotze (BLM), Dave Brown (Tooele County), Mark McKendrick (Tooele County), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*Listing Decision in September*

Lorien noted that the USFWS decision of not warranted for listing had happened in September. That still leaves lot of implementation work to be done to make sure progress is made over the next five years before it is reviewed again.

*Task Force Efforts Updates*

Ben Nadolski provided brief updates on the work being done as a result of the Sheeprocks population decline.

- Predator control: DWR and Wildlife Services have renegotiated their contract statewide. It now includes the Sheeprocks needs, including red fox and corvids. Mike Tamllos has already started on this work, which will be in full force during the winter.
- Translocations: the proposal to translocate sage-grouse to the Sheeprocks from other areas of the state needs to be approved by the Regional Advisor Councils in areas both where the birds are coming from and where they are going. The December RAC meetings will include this topic. The current plan is for 40 birds/year from Parker and/or Box Elder, starting this upcoming spring (2016).
- Ben has been helping agencies coordinate law enforcement activities to address recreation damage in sage-grouse habitat. It was noted that in the land use plan amendments for BLM, the recreation “allocation” (which determines what areas are open or closed to

different activities), has changed from “open” to “limited to existing.”

- Fire updates: this year, there was one fire in the Sheeprocks area: the Berry fire, at 265 acres. Ben explained that the DWR was keeping records on fires in SGMAs, to comply with the Governor’s Executive Order. There is a lot of fire-related coordination happening that is good for sage-grouse.
- The research proposal, from Terry Messmer, includes tracking the translocations (with some GPS and the rest VHF collars). It will likely provide BLM with habitat information they will need. It will also hopefully allow us to see how grouse use past treatment areas. There are 10 recently installed traffic counters on prospector, which may be able to be used to learn about how grouse respond to recreation traffic if that element can be worked into the survey. The Governor’s office was committed \$90,000 to the research, and has met with BLM. The Forest Service may be asked to help contribute to the effort as well. George Garcia said that the Forest Service would not be willing to fund this.
- Habitat project planning will be addressed later in the meeting. There is a need for large-scale projects which address the landscape-level movement needs of the birds.

### *Population Information*

Jason Robinson presented information on the Sheeprocks populations. His research ten years ago added 6 new leks to what was known in the areas. The population locally is migratory. He showed general areas where birds nest. Most collared birds ended up in Horse Valley at some time of the year. In the SGMA, there used to be around 200 males counted on leks. This last year, it was only 23. There are also two leks in the Tintics, which are not within the boundaries of the SGMA. Jason also showed maps of the priority sage-grouse areas.

### *NRCS Update*

Matt Phillippi noted that there is a special West Ecosystem Vernon project which landowners can sign up for. The deadline is November 20<sup>th</sup>.

### *Proposed Large-scale Pinyon-Juniper Removal Project Plans*

The conversation on PJ removal projects began but was mostly discussed later.

Updates on ongoing work:

- 635 acres of lop and scatter, on private ground, was completed very recently.
- BLM fire noted that the SL field office will be proposing many projects this year through WRI, about 2500 acres.
- Forest Service has plans they will not be changing. They would like the shape files proposed for projects, however.

Alan Clark noted that he has been working on a NRCS application to help bring additional project implementation money to the Sheeprocks. The application has made a final cut and now has

approximately a 50/50 chance for funding. It would bring extra money to projects in the Sheeprocks SGMA/watershed area. It is different than the Stansbury Project. It would fund restoration/habitat improvement (essentially anything that EQIP would fund) and easement-related projects as well. Standard income requirements and project caps (in case people have done previous projects) would not apply for this money. Alan needs to submit the application by Monday (Nov 9) and will contact people if they can write letters of support. We will know in January if the award is granted.

The remainder of the PJ project discussion was postponed in order to get the recreation discussion started.

### *Recreation Impacts Discussion*

Several different agencies explained their role in recreation management in the Sheeprocks area.

#### State Parks: Role and Process

Chris Haller presented briefly about the State Parks OHV program. Regarding the Prospector Trail area, State Parks previously submitted a proposal for how to manage and develop the trail system, which runs across multiple different lands. The State Parks OHV program is tasked with developing and promoting ATV/recreation, but always works with the relevant landowners/agencies to implement the plans. In the case of the Forest Service, which has a travel management plan from 2007, State Parks is helping implement approved plans. This includes installing signs on County B roads in Tooele County that are used as ATV trails and are part of the Prospector System. BLM – which does not have a travel management plan currently but is working to implement travel planning in the Sheeprocks due to the sage-grouse land-use-plan amendments – has had a limited response to the State Parks proposal, including the signing of the County B roads.

Matt Howard asked if it would be possible to get the locations of the new signs that have been placed – or will soon be placed – in the area. Chris Haller indicated that he is the contact person for that information.

#### BLM and Prospector

Julie Pallette, Outdoor Recreation Specialist with the BLM, updated the group on Prospector Trail details from that agency's perspective. County B roads on the trail system have been signed because there is a standard Categorical Exclusion (CX) for BLM that allows signage. No interior routes (smaller roads between County B roads) can be marked until the EA has been completed. Julie provided a handout explaining the timeline for additional analysis and work on the system. The agency was going to do an Environmental Assessment (EA) for Prospector system enhancements proposed by State Parks, but the sage-grouse EIS became a higher priority and so

the Prospector EA was put on hold. In the spring of 2015, when it became clear that some kind of travel planning for the Sheeprocks would need to be done for sage-grouse reasons, a route inventory was begun. The data for that inventory has just been gathered, but not analyzed. Just on BLM, about 2700 miles of routes were identified. That is a large amount. Analysis will need to be done before any additional conclusions can be drawn. The data is not available yet publicly because the attributes have not yet been assigned in the database (size, other features, etc.).

### Trailheads on Federal Land

As clarification, there are currently no official “trailheads” anywhere in the system: on BLM or on Forest Service. That need for some clarity in the system to help direct people where to go is one element included in the State Parks proposal. However, officially designating trailhead areas, including parking, bathroom structures, etc. will involve additional NEPA analysis. (CX, EA, and EIS are different levels of NEPA analysis depending on what is needed for the situation.)

### Tooele County Trails

Dave Brown, with Tooele Trails, noted that within 45 days of this meeting, Tooele will have a map available online at [tooelecountytrails.com](http://tooelecountytrails.com) of all the marked roads in the system. He noted that there are close to 200,000 registered ATVs or side-by-sides on the Wasatch Front, many of whom use this trail system as it is close and convenient to the Wasatch Front.

### Forest Service Travel and Recreation Management

Several Forest Service employees helped explain the agency’s current travel and recreation work. The USFS currently has a travel management plan that covers Forest Service land in the Sheeprocks area. However, there are not currently any projects (i.e. no new trail heads or other new infrastructure planned). There is ongoing enforcement of existing regulations, and some smaller projects in development for closing some user-created (unauthorized) routes. The Forest Service has no funding for infrastructure improvement. If a need were to arise, that would likely involve a request to State Parks OHV program for funding.

The Vernon Reservoir, which has been discussed at past WDARM meetings, is designated as a campground, but not as a trailhead. There has been concern that the area might be considered for a trailhead in the future, but the group was told that there are no plans for that.

### *Data Management for Recreation Issues Impacting Sage-Grouse*

Tom Becker asked that all agencies help provide relevant data so that the relationship of ongoing projects or planning to sage-grouse habitat can be better understood. Matt Howard with DWR is the point of contact and gathers the layers. Matt and Tom noted that having an overlay of BLM trails, signage locations, and county trails would be very helpful. Bekee noted that the BLM data

from the route inventory may take a few months to get all the attributes assigned, at which point the data would be more meaningful. Dave Brown agreed that having accurate data is very important for sage-grouse habitat and for helping address issues on private land with recreation planning. The county has some data that can also be shared. Relevant individuals at the meeting shared contact information so that additional conversations about data gathering can take place.

Boyd noted that anyone who needs data layers from Tooele County should contact Mark Nelsen.

### *USFS Land Use Plan Amendments*

The Forest Service provided an update regarding the new land use plan amendments for sage-grouse. It is an ongoing process to get all the implementation details figured out. The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache forest has two Forest Plans, and the details from the amendments are being worked into those plans. There will be a two-year transitional period before all elements of the new Record of Decision are implemented. A meeting coming up on Nov 9 will be the first step in this direction. Above the level of the individual forests, USFS is managed regionally, not at the state level. This means that additional coordination between states needs to happen to ensure that the plans are implemented consistently.

### *Continued PJ Discussion*

The USFS merged into a PJ discussion, as the meeting shifted back to what is going to be done to help address the sage-grouse decline in the Sheeprocks.

In 2010, the previous district ranger over the Sheeprocks area completed a 5-year plan for conifer removal. The most recent activity was a lop-and-scatter project right around the Shambip land this year. It was noted that this work did spark a small fire (7 acres) which was quickly extinguished.

A new USFS proposal was born about two years ago. The scoping period for that ended last week (end of October). It involves about 9000 acres of treatments, and includes some proposed road closures on redundant roads. Karen Hartman noted that grazing permittees in the areas are very supportive, and requested more closures than are currently included, as they are interested in protecting the land from recreation damage. This large proposal is the next thing USFS will do a NEPA analysis on, with a goal of submitting conifer removal projects into the WRI funding cycle in late 2016 (for funding in 2017). They noted that lop and scatter maintenance can be performed on past projects as needed under the previous NEPA for that work.

Alison Whittaker has some proposed shape files, based on what is known about sage-grouse movements and needs in the Sheeprocks, for a long-term project planning effort in the Sheeprocks. A subteam for habitat work planning will be formed. Alison Whittaker, with DWR, agreed to be the point of contact. Anyone interested in being kept apprised of the effort should

contact Alison directly.

Alan noted that due to everyone needing to learn the new WRI database, the deadline for project submission would be pushed later into January, like around the 19<sup>th</sup>.

## *BLM presentation*

Because the meeting ran considerably over time, the BLM provided a shortened version of a presentation they have given at most other sage-grouse groups and other venues. It explained the basic structure of the BLMs new land use plan amendments. Additional detail on particular areas of interest for this group can be discussed at future meetings. They also handed out the text of the presentation and a handout covering the vegetation-based habitat objectives that the BLM will be using in sage-grouse habitat areas.

Highlights of the presentation include:

- The new plan amendments include
  - Minimizing additional surface disturbance
  - Improving habitat condition for sage-grouse
  - Reduce threat of fire in sage-grouse habitat
- There are priority and general habitat designations.
- There is a 3% disturbance cap that applies at two different scales: the project level and the level of the entire Sheeprocks area. There is a specific list of what counts as disturbance. Two-tracks are not included in that calculation. That does not mean that recreation damage to habitat cannot be addressed; it just means that it would need to be addressed through a travel management plan and other management actions, not through the disturbance cap.
- Buffers are not standardized, and differ according to factors relevant to what kind of threat is being mitigated (for example, buffers for tall structures follow different standards than buffers for noise). This allows for flexibility appropriate to the situation.
- Habitat improvements are not disturbance. Although there are some tools (like fire and sagebrush treatments) which need to be used very carefully, they are still options. It will just need to be carefully documented and well justified as to why a tool with possible negative effects for grouse would be appropriate in a given circumstance.
- There will soon be additional information available about how any possible changes to grazing management will be handled. An internal memorandum on this topic (as well as several others) will be completed by mid-December.

## **Follow-up Needed**

- Matt Howard with DWR is the point of contact for any data gathering that might impact sage-grouse. Trails layers and other recreation management data from Tooele, USFS, BLM,

State Parks, and others would be of value. Matt will follow up with relevant point persons in each agency.

- A subteam for habitat work planning will be formed. Alison Whittaker, with DWR, agreed to be the point of contact. Anyone interested in being kept apprised of the effort should contact Alison directly.
- Anyone with specific requests for more detailed discussion of BLM land use plan amendments should contact Lorien to get the issue on a future meeting agenda.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be in January. As the WRI database deadline is January 19<sup>th</sup>, the group will likely meet after that in order to review any submitted proposals that are relevant to WDARM's project area.