

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

Date: November 30, 2017

Place: Tooele County Health Building

Members Present: Janet Larsen (Shambip CD), Melissa Chelak (USU), Nate Hunter (BLM), Cole Hambleton (RMP), Karen Hartman (USFS), Loralie Cox (UDAF), Matt Philippi (NRCS), Matt Howard (UDWR), Alan Clark (DNR), Brad Jessop (BLM-WDD), Terri Pope (UDWR), Boyd White (UDWR), Susanne Tracy (USFS), Jared Reese (BLM), Quincy Bahr (BLM), Wade Bitner (Tooele County Commission), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Keeli Marvel (Dugway Proving Ground), Tyler Nelson (BLM), Alison Whittaker (UDWR), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Hugh Hurlow (UGS), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

[Note: the planned summer field tour was postponed multiple times due to project timelines for UGS and BDA projects, and eventually put off till the spring of 2018.]

Updates

- Alan Clark reported that the mitigation rule has been updated after all the comments from the spring, and the revision is posted for public comment until January 2. Depending on how many comments are received, it could be ready to go as early as the middle of January. There were several key changes made, including that permanent protection is now a way to provide credits. Lorien will send out the information on how to review and comment via the listservs.
- Hugh Hurlow reported that all the monitoring equipment for the groundwater study has been installed in the springs in the Tintics. The study will be measuring soil moisture, vegetation, groundwater, and stream flow associated with pinyon juniper cuts planned in future years. There will be a spring field tour to visit the sites.
- Alison Whittaker reported that there is a second round of signups for the RCPP money. There is still \$167,000 left to spend. Contact Boyd White or Matt Philippi if you have project ideas.
- NRCS reported that \$1.6 million was contracted for SGI in 2017 in Utah.
- Susanne Tracy is the USFS liaison with DNR and can help connect the LWGs to state-level FS information
- Jessica Delph needs to be removed from the listservs; Katie Potter will be starting January 8th to replace her.
- Lorien noted that the 5-year post-survey done by Tread Lightly is out, if anyone is interested in looking at it. In addition to that survey, a Yamaha-funded survey of recreationists in the Sheeprocks is in development. Melissa will incorporate some

recreation data in her results.

Research updates

Melissa Chelak presented on the current research status and some initial observations from the data. The second year of translocations and tracking is finished. This year they improved the release boxes, and introduced artificial insemination to the research project. They are interested to know if inseminated females settle down more quickly than birds that don't. It takes a couple months before the translocated birds join the resident birds.

This year, 8 nests with 45 eggs hatched. McIntyre had 5 nests, and there was one in Little Valley, one in Benmore, and one in Government Creek. Last year, all the nests were near McIntyre. There were three successful broods, 1 by a 2016 resident bird, 1 by a 2016 translocated bird, and 1 by a 2017 translocated bird. A total of 8 chicks came out of the 50-day brood period. The Gov't Creek and Benmore birds moved a lot to brood, and the McIntyre lek birds stayed close to home. Last year, there were lots of deaths of collared birds in August; this year the mortalities were not as seasonal. Jason mentioned that bringing 40 birds in to produce so few chicks might seem strange, but it is helping buy us time to fix the problems that are causing the birds to decline.

Next spring, a third translocation is planned. 30 females and 10 males will be brought from elsewhere in the state, and 8 resident females and 2 resident males will also be collared so they can be tracked.

Lek counts in the area were about the same this year as the year before. While not large numbers, it is very encouraging that they are not down further from last year.

Predator surveys are also part of this research project. Avian point count surveys and mammal scat surveys are being done along roads. On the predator topic, it was mentioned that any red fox dens or sightings should be reported immediately to Jason Robinson or Chris Perkins. It helps a lot if you can provide a GPS for any dens. Lorien can provide contact information if you need it.

BLM West Desert District 5-year plan of work

Nate and Brad presented portions of the 5-year plan of work that the BLM has for upcoming PJ removal projects in the area in each field office.

- There are two current year projects: Furner Valley Phase three (ongoing now) and Cherry Creek BLM (will be starting in a few weeks)
- Next year, Cow Hollow, near the McIntyre lek, is about 4000 acres, and mostly funded. Railroad Springs is being refined and they are looking for funding. These projects are all largely outside burn areas, but if they encounter burned snags, we'll take them down.
- Future years are still in general planning
- For Brad's projects, the South Willow Bullhog is ongoing this fall in an isolated BLM tract

that is being traded to SITLA. BLM will continue to monitor and manage as long as they officially own it. Erickson Pass Bullhog Phase 2 is also currently being implemented. They wanted to connect the project with nearby NRCS projects, but those got delayed. BLM put it out for bid and it was much more expensive than expected, so it was cut down to just 881 acres. The remaining acres will be added in future projects.

- All projects are focused on improving the health of the land for sage-grouse.
- Due to administrative changes at DWR, bullhog bids may be getting much higher this year. The vendors were frustrated by the process, and bids are up.
- East Onaqui Bench: the past treatments left some trees, so this is a 'second entry' project, with a lot of second-entry acres. They are also adding some 'first-entry' acres in the area.
- For the next few years, there will be an increased focus on aspen, where conifers are taking over. A combination of burning and mechanical, as feasible and appropriate, will be used. For Onaqui aspen, the plan is to cut the conifers and burn the piles. For East Tintic aspen, which are more encroached, they may burn the stands without cutting. Jimi and Scott Chamberlain pointed the project planners to research that indicates that there are important pile-size guidelines, because very hot pile burns may prevent regeneration, so we need to be careful.

State Sage-grouse Plan revisions

Jason Robinson discussed the state sage-grouse plan revisions process, standing in for Ben Nadolski. He touched on feedback received so far that is already being worked in, so we don't have to cover that ground again:

- It will explain how SGMA boundaries and maps change
- Maps will be kept online only so they can be constantly kept up to date
- There will be additional clarity on the 10-year-rolling-average population objective, as it is confusing, and the "viability" objective, as that can be defined different ways
- The habitat objectives will be combined for their acreages (25+50 = 75,000 acres treated/year)
- The protection goal will be changed to reflect a greater focus on habitat quality
- It will clarify that grazing is not a big threat
- The biggest threats will rise to the top
- The new mitigation framework will be included in the plan
- Seasonal habitat and mapping will be refined and improved

Feedback from the group beyond those comments:

- It would be useful to standardize wording in the plan to match WAP, the WRI database, etc. For example, "very high impact" when discussing threats.
- We need to focus on revisions to local plans
- Opportunity areas make no sense to have mapped at such a coarse scale since project boundaries are determined on the ground, although the concept is important to keep

USFS scoping period for plan amendment changes

The Forest Service is opening a scoping period very similar to the one that BLM is just ending. It is asking whether any of the plan amendments from 2015 need to be revisited, improved, etc. There will not be any public meetings, and the scoping period is set to close on January 5, 2018. Lorien will send out info to the group on how to submit comments.

BLM scoping updates

Quincy provided a brief update on the BLM scoping period, which is just ending. It is different from the normal scoping request. Usually it is basically saying “we’ll be planning, what do you think?” but this time has been focused on “should we amend, or otherwise adjust, the current plan? If so, how?” It is focused on how we can keep conservation measures for sage-grouse but be more efficient, not interfere with economic activity, and be more consistent with states. No decisions have been made yet about what might be changed, or how. Quincy noted that noting any areas where federal, state, or other plans are mismatched in what they require would be very helpful. One thing specifically that will be looked at is “untriggers,” so that if conditions that cause a trigger to be tripped improve, how we can go back to previous management if appropriate.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will notify listservs of USFS scoping period and the mitigation comment period
- Lorien will ask Eric Thacker if he would be willing to talk to the group about sage-grouse and grazing research
- Lorien will work with project managers to schedule a spring field tour to the BDA and groundwater research sites.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in late January or early February: Lorien will send out a Doodle poll.