

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

Date: November 5, 2018

Place: Tooele County Health Building

Individuals Present: Scott Edmisten (RMP), Michael Asch (USFWS), Renee Chi (BLM), Robbie Knight (Dugway), Cassie Mellon (BLM), Hugh Hurlow (UGS), Trevor Schlossnagle (UGS), Nancy Williams (BLM), Brad Jessop (BLM), Loralie Cox (UDAF), Terri Pope (UDWR), Tom Becker (UDWR), Keeli Marvel (Dugway), Boyd White (NRCS/UDWR), Robby Edgel (UDWR), Shane Hill (UDWR), Melissa Chelak (USU), Karen Hartman (USFS), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Intros and updates

During the meeting, we were informed of a number of staffing changes that have happened or will soon be happening:

- Mike Asch is moving to a new position with USFWS in Oregon as of mid November
- Trevor Schlossnagle is new at UGS and will be part of the hydrology project data analysis
- Shane Hill has replaced Matt Howard as the impact analysis biologist at DWR
- Renee Chi is the new District Sage-Grouse Biologists for the BLM West Desert District
- Renae Bragonje, long-time range con with the Forest Service in Spanish Fork, is retiring as of January 1. (Karen will forward the position announcement to share with the group when it is available)
- Tom Becker at DWR plans to retire as of January 1.

Research update

Melissa Chelak provided research project and other grouse population updates, touching on translocations, vital rates, habitat selection, and more.

There is a new lek that was found during infrared flights in 2018, named Frederickson Pastures lek. It is north of the Benmore lek. The Government Creek lek had more males this year. The short term data suggest that the population is not declining so steeply anymore, but that is just from one year of data.

Nesting was very successful this year. 17 nests initiated, and 14 successfully hatched (a total of about 85 chicks). Nest initiation was about three weeks earlier this spring (starting around April 4th). Earlier initiators had better success. There was a lot of predator control which likely contributed: wildlife service took an estimated 300 ravens, as well as several red foxes.

Brood survival was at 57%. The bulk of the broods were in the McIntyre lek area. This was the first year of using bird dogs to do all the surveys. The dogs flush birds that people might not otherwise see. Of the 58 collared birds, there were 23 recorded mortalities. Those appeared to be roughly half mammalian predation and half avian (raptors), when it could be determined. The group briefly discussed the potential impact of jackrabbit numbers this year on sage-grouse predation. Robbie noted that their jackrabbit surveys were especially low this year.

Analyses planned include resource selection by season, and will include OHV data and WRI treatments data to see what patterns emerge. Melissa is working with USGS on an Integrated Population Model, to help determine whether additional translocations will be needed in the spring (a fourth year; this is still undetermined). She is also working on genetic analysis to see if translocations helped improve the genetic diversity of the population, and how much they have bred with local birds. She will also participate in research analysis comparing survival of birds tracked with GPS and VHS.

Project plans and related challenges

Forest Service has 8000 acres of lop and scatter planned for fall 2019 in the WDARM area. There will be a suite of project submitted to WRI this year, but none were brought up that required discussion at this point.

There are multiple projects in the Erickson pass area that are happening right now. Next year, there will be more by Highway 6.

It was noted that there was some concern from ranchers about BDAs. A key irrigation partner was unintentionally not notified about plans for the Vernon Creek BDAs, which caused concerns. Also, some grazers see beaver dams (or analogs) as damming water and taking it away from others, instead of understanding how it stores it in the ground and releases it more slowly. It is not considered a concern for water rights except by the Richfield region. Jay Tanner came to a landowner meeting about this earlier in the year to help people understand why BDAs are being put in, but the meeting was not well attended. NRCS is calling the practice “willow weaves” rather than the more controversial term “BDA.” Robbie Edgel noted that DWR is coming up with a workflow for all BDA projects, which includes who needs to be notified about planned or upcoming projects.

Hydrology research updates

Hugh presented updates on the hydrology research. There have been some challenging setbacks this year, including multiple dry wells on one of the control areas and some large storms in August that washed out instrumentation. Most of those washed out areas have been cleaned up again and should be usable. Because the southern Death Wash has no surface flow or groundwater, that area will only be able to be a soil moisture and vegetation control.

This project area (the Tintics) is one of three projects that Hugh is conducting around Utah. The two others are in the SW Grouse Creek Mountains and Montezuma Creek in southeastern Utah.

Dugway MOA springs project

Robbie Knight showed a map of springs in the Military Operating Area (which covers a huge area of Utah including the Ibapah and Sheeprocks SGMAs). Dugway has been working on an inventory of 93 springs, many on BLM, some on private, and some on Dugway (15). They have a lot of cameras out, and have over 6 million photos of animals using the springs. They are working with Randy Larsen at BYU to analyze them. There have also been vegetation surveys, point counts, small mammal surveys, and other data gathered.

The next step is to make the data more widely available. The annual integrated resources management meeting that Dugway holds will present a lot of the information from this study as it has been a major focus for them recently. That meeting is Thursday, Dec 13th. Robbie will send Lorien the information about the meeting to share with the WDARM list.

Plan revisions ongoing

The state of Utah, BLM, and the Forest Service are all in the process of revising sage-grouse management plans.

- BLM is well into its revisions, as comments on the draft EIS were due in early August.
- The Forest Service has a comment period open currently (ending January 3rd) for the changes they are making to management plans that will affect Forests with sage-grouse habitat. Anyone who would like more information or cannot submit comments personally may reach out to Lorien.
- The Utah state sage-grouse plan is also in the final stages of revision, after extensive work in 2017 and 2018 to gather comments at the working groups and from many others. They worked closely with BLM and USFS to make sure the three plans will work together. Ben Nadolski will come to the next WDARM meeting to present about the new plan.

Recreation research updates

Ben Mulhstein, a graduate student at USU, conducted a survey of recreationists in the Sheeprocks this spring and summer. With help from Melissa and some technicians, they surveyed groups recreating at campsites. Some GPS units were given out to see where people ride their OHVs. Ben will be at the next WDARM meeting to present more details.

Tom Becker suggested that future research on sage-grouse movements in relationship to road density on the landscape would be very interesting. Melissa explained that roads, elevation, structures, and other elements would be part of the resources selection function in her analysis.

Landowner dinner planning

A landowner appreciation dinner would be a good way to thank people who have been helpful in Melissa's research on their land and grazing leases, and share results with them. Melissa, Lorien, Boyd, and Matt Philippi will plan that event for some time in January. Possible topics include Melissa's research, recreation study results, and BDA benefits. Lorien will work on planning and invitations though Boyd, Melissa, and Matt as appropriate.

Follow-up Needed

- Karen will forward the range con position posting once it is available
- Robbie will send information on the Dugway meeting Dec 13 to Lorien to distribute
- Anyone with comments on the USFS plan changes who would like Lorien's involvement should reach out in advance of the Jan 3 deadline.
- Lorien will work with Boyd and Matt to plan the landowner dinner

Next Meeting

The next meeting will likely be in February, after the landowner appreciation dinner. Topics will include WRI project comments, the new state plan, and a recreation survey results presentation.