

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

Date: December 1, 2010

Time: 2:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: Tooele County Health Building, Tooele UT

Members Present: Traci Allen (BLM SFLO), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Covy Jones (UDWR), Tom Becker (UDWR), Boyd White (co-chair), Karen Hartman (USFS), Robbie Knight (Dugway), Jan Knerr (UDAF/GIP), Casey Burns (NRCS), Elizabeth Mitchell (Bennion Ranch, representing co-chair Alan Mitchell), Jerry Hurst (Tooele County Commission), Randy Larsen (BYU, on speaker phone), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator/recorder)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Research planning

The group had an extended discussion about research project ideas near the lek at Government Creek (aka Government Wash, see notes below). Researchers from BYU (Randy Larsen and his team) will coordinate with Dugway Proving Grounds, BLM, and others to design a research project. Dugway is interested in funding five years of research on sage-grouse that can help them understand if military actions in the airspace around Dugway have any impact on sage-grouse, and if so how they might be mitigated. Possible areas to focus were discussed, including:

- Better information on seasonal habitat use by sage-grouse: whose land they are on (Dugway? BLM? Private?) and that vegetation conditions they are using
- Better understanding of what the limiting factors might be for this population. It was discussed that late-summer brood rearing habitat might be limiting but it would be useful to test that assumption
- If birds use project areas such as places where pinyon-juniper has been removed to improve habitat
- Possible translocations from other areas, like Parker Mountain
- Impact of military activities like flyovers

Dugway, BLM, and BYU are coordinating to write the proposal.

Traci Allen asked if there was a possibility of standardizing how sage-grouse vegetation monitoring was done between agencies. Range trend, MRCS, DWR, BLM fuels program, and graduate students can have different protocols, for example. Casey Burns noted that NRCS is expecting a new monitoring protocol in the next few weeks. Jason noted that the training in May for NRCS folks combined several approaches. The group agreed that this would be an important discussion but too detail-oriented for the LWG to tackle now.

Updates

Elizabeth Mitchell noted that the name of the Government Creek lek is somewhat misleading and would be more correctly referred to as the Government Wash lek. The group agreed to change the name.

Elizabeth noted that there is a substantial knapweed problem in that area. The group may want to consider proposing a project there for weed management. Jerry Hurst noted that the LWG should involve Jerry Caldwell, the Tooele County weed guy, in discussions. Mark Farmer and Traci Allen will contact the county and discuss how to address the problem.

Tom Becker proposed an idea for how to improve water levels in ephemeral streams. He will discuss it further with Steve Wilcox.

Casey Jones (NRCS State Biologist) announced that new funds for 2011 will be available through the Sage-Grouse Initiative. \$1 Million will be available in EQIP and \$300,000 through WHIP. Funds will need to be obligated by July 1st. Casey encouraged anyone with ideas or feedback to contact him.

Lorien will work with Casey to provide information for a brochure to help advertise the program and explain possible projects to benefit sage-grouse.

Elizabeth noted that there is an assumption among ranchers in the area that having sage-grouse on the land might get someone kicked off their grazing lease. The group felt that that was probably not true. Lorien will discuss the issue with USFS and other individuals and see what we can do to get the correct information to individuals with grazing leases, particularly those who may be interested in sage-grouse initiative funds but be hesitant because of a misunderstanding about possible repercussions.

Boyd noted that there might be some interest in exploring the option of a CCAA locally for sage-grouse. Lorien explained that the mechanism is being looked at in other groups to determine if it makes sense for sage-grouse, and she will keep the group updated as other LWGs learn more.

Lorien and Jason will be going to the counties to present information on sage-grouse and the local working groups. Suggestions for topics included providing information on CCAAs and discussion road to trail conversions in Tooele county.

Regarding the trails and recreation issue, Lorien will look into what the county is doing currently and see if the LWG can provide information resources, make comments, or be otherwise involved in the discussion. Lorien will also check on the status of the BLM Travel Management Plan, which has previously been on hold due to personnel changes at BLM.

Jason updated the group on the collared birds that he has been tracking in the Tintics. After two years of tracking the collared birds, only one bird (of the two remaining) was found this last

time. One was lost, and all the others are either lost or dead. Someone in the group provided Jason with the name and contact information of a local landowner whose land might be where some of the lost grouse have gone.

Jason also provided two other updates: first, that Dave Olsen has retired; and second, that BLM has released a rangewide map showing sage-grouse breeding density. Jason will send it to Lorien, who will forward it to the group.

The group briefly discussed a concern that SITLA lands in the area are up for development discussion, such as a proposed prison site, which has been discussed by the planning commission. The LWG should keep track of any proposals that might create problems for sage-grouse so we can help SITLA avoid negative impacts.

Map

Lorien showed the group a digital map of the Resource Area. The group suggested that we add the military fly zone, MOA, and also consider including UPCD habitat projects from the WRI database (wri.utah.gov). The new shape files of sage-grouse habitat will soon be available from the state, and those will be included as well. Lorien will update the map.

Actions Taken

No formal actions were taken.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will update the LWG map with MOA, UPCD projects, etc.
- Mark Farmer and Traci Allen will follow up with Jerry Caldwell of Tooele County to address knapweed issues in the Government Wash area.
- Lorien will get the BLM breeding density map from Jason and forward it to the group.
- Jason will contact a landowner (Larry Fitzgerald) regarding additional searches for the missing collared Tintic birds.
- Lorien will look into what the county is currently doing with trails planning to see how the LWG can help.
- Lorien will also check on the status of the BLM Travel Management Plan.
- Lorien will discuss the issue of ranchers' concerns about having sage-grouse on their grazing leases to see how we can get them accurate information.
- Robbie, Randy, and Traci will continue to work on the Dugway research proposal.
- Lorien will get Casey info to help with an NRCS brochure for the Sage-Grouse Initiative.

Next Meeting

The next meeting (actually scheduled after this meeting) is planned for 1:00 pm on Feb. 23rd.