

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

Date: February 13, 2013

Place: Tooele County Health Building, Tooele UT

Members Present: Patti Barney (NRCS), Tammy Koldyke (NRCS/SGI), Matt Phillippi (NRCS), Janet Larsen (Shambip CD), Jimi Gragg (DWR), Boyd White (co-chair, landowner), Mike Tamllos (USDA-WS), Darrell Johnson (Shambip CD), Ashley Hansen (UGIP), Covy Jones (DWR), Sherry Liguori (Rocky Mountain Power), Heather Evans (Rocky Mountain Power), Tom Becker (DWR), Jason Robinson (DWR), Kim Hersey (DWR), Lans Stavast (USFS), Karen Hartman (USFS), Traci Allen (BLM), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Planning Updates

Lorien provided a brief updates on the BLM/USFS sage-grouse planning process. The draft EIS should be available for public comment sometime this summer. The Utah state plan will likely be one of the five alternatives considered in the EIS.

The Utah state plan is in draft form still. The group reviewed some of the key points in the plan as it currently exists. Jason Robinson, who has been very involved in the process, answered some questions about it. Many of the detail are still being worked out. Questions and points discussed include:

- There are goals for amount of habitat treated and conservation easements or other legal protections to be implemented annually.
- There will be a 5% disturbance limit. This will likely be looked at on many scales, such as by project, by Sage-Grouse Management Area (SGMA) and for the whole state. Things which count as disturbance will be considered either permanent disturbance or temporary disturbance. Some things, such as firebreaks which may have short term negative effects, but long-term positive effects for sage-grouse, will need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Habitat treatments such as pinyon/juniper removal are unlikely to be considered disturbance. Sagebrush treatments in SGMAs will be looked at very carefully. It will be important not to treat sagebrush in areas where it won't come back. Treatments proposed in winter range will also be carefully examined.
- A mitigation bank will be an important part of the state plan. The details are still in development.
- Mitigation is planned at a 4:1 ratio, in part because we understand that sage-grouse may not use all the habitat right away. Essentially, just the vegetation work needs to be successful for it to count in the short term as successful mitigation.
- Actions on private lands will not be regulated, and the plan will likely not limit private landowners from doing disturbance. However, those disturbances will still matter at a

larger scale, and will need to be mitigated somehow in the long run.

- The basic concept is to have no net loss of sage-grouse habitat.
- The plan still has uncertainty written in. It is difficult to strike a balance between having enough certainty so that it works for USFWS while maintaining enough flexibility that good decisions on the ground are not prevented by an overly strict plan.

Jason Robinson noted that because he is very involved in the plan development and trying to make sure it will be able to handle many different situations, he would appreciate being told about scenarios that people still have questions about. That way the team working on the plan will know what kinds of situations the plan will need to be able to address. More information will make for a better plan. If anyone has specific scenarios they would like to share, email them to Jason.

Updates

A new pocket guide to sagebrush is now available, through NRCS and many other partners. It is available online as well as in hard copy from USU and others.

Multiple UPCD projects were proposed – and ranked – at the recent Central Region UPCD meeting. Many projects have sage-grouse benefit, including lop and scatters near Vernon (West Vernon/Dutch Creek). BLM is also working on NEPA for future PJ work in the Little Mountain/Lookout Pass area.

BLM continues to work on recreation planning issues. Traci has put in a BLM internal request to look at mapping and rehab of ATV trails from 5-Mile Pass to Vernon Pass. This is a Special Recreation Management Area.

There were several fires in sage-grouse habitat in 2012: 1530 acres in Ibapah, of which 1418 was occupied habitat; and the Faust fire, which was 22,000 acres total and burned 605 acres of sage-grouse habitat.

BLM is interested in getting a kiosk up soon in the Government Wash area to inform the public about sage-grouse habitat protection needs.

We need someone from Tooele County trails to coordinate with the working group. Boyd will help with efforts to jump start that again, and Lorien will follow up.

NRCS has set the ambitious goal of marking all fences in high-risk areas for sage-grouse fence collisions, by the end of the 2012 field season. Tammy Koldyke is coordinating for this area. Since we have already done a lot of fence marking in the West Desert (including Ibapah), Tammy will need to coordinate with Jason Robinson to make sure we know what still needs to be marked, and what is on private or public land. If volunteers are needed, FFA and Boy Scouts might be interested. Tammy gathered several contacts from individuals in the room and will follow up.

Predation

Following up on a discussion from last time, the group talked about the increased problem of red foxes coming into the Vernon area. Tom Becker, Mike Tamlos, and Lorien will discuss the situation separately to come up with a strategy for how best to move forward to address the problem and help prevent the spread of foxes further into sage-grouse habitat. This will include outreach to the Utah Trappers Association, coyote bounty hunters, and possibly ranchers.

Actions Taken

No formal actions were taken.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will keep the group updated with information about the state sage-grouse planning efforts, and notify everyone about any comment periods for that or the BLM/USFS EIS.
- Anyone with sage-grouse habitat management scenarios which do not appear to be addressed in the plan can send Jason an email with a description of the situation so he can make sure the plan can address it appropriately.
- Lorien, Tom, and Mike will discuss appropriate next steps for addressing red fox issues.
- Boyd will check on the status of the Tooele County trails committee, since the county has had some staff reductions due to budget cuts. Lorien will follow-up with the appropriate contacts to get them involved as appropriate.
- Tammy will contact Jason Robinson to learn where fence marking is done and where it is still needed.
- At the next meeting, we will begin planning the summer field tour to visit the Tintic populations and discuss recreation impacts.
- Tammy will follow-up on volunteer contacts for possible fence marking in the West Desert.
- Matt will follow up with the Goshute Tribe to see if they would be willing to host the April meeting in Ibapah.
- Matt, Lorien, Kim, Tom, and Traci will jointly plan the April meeting and any surrounding activities or field tours.

Next Meetings

The spring meeting will be held in Ibapah on April 16th. Ideas and recommendations included:

- Coordinating lek counting trips and an optional trip to the burned areas.
- Staying overnight either in Wendover or possibly in the fire station or DWR cabin.
- Carpool! Expect strong interest; the last meeting in Ibapah was well attended.
- Bring maps, extra gas for the vehicles, and food for breakfast.
- Coordinate with one-on-one landowner meetings if people have questions about SGI.