

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

Date: February 23, 2011

Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Place: Tooele County Health Building, Tooele UT

Members Present:

Jerry Hurst (Tooele County Commission), Traci Allen (BLM SFLO), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Covy Jones (UDWR), Tom Becker (UDWR), Boyd White (co-chair), Karen Hartman (USFS), Keeli Marvel (Dugway), Jan Knerr (UDAF/GIP), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), Kim Hersey (UDWR), Mike Tamllos (USDA-WS), Matt Phillipi (NRCS), Alan Mitchell (Bennion Ranch), Paul Cowley (USFS), Scott Chamberlain (SITLA), Jerry Caldwell (Tooele Co. weed management), Renae Braganje, and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Updates

Several WDARM members brought up lek-specific concerns. One is the dog trials that occurred last year right on top of the Benmore lek. The group would like to prevent this from happening again. The group that runs the trials may believe they are on Forest Service land. Paul Cowley will check into this and take steps to ensure that the birds are not disturbed during the lekking season.

Another issue is that the Simpson/Govt Wash/Govt Creek lek has had a sheep camp issue, where the sheep camp guys are camping too close to the lek. They are allowed to trail sheep through but not camp right there. Melissa at the BLM will be working to contact them and explain how to responsibly handle the lek situation.

Lookout lek has changed ownership recently and is now likely being more heavily grazed. The landowner has not expressed any interest in participating in the WDARM, although they have been invited.

Predation

Traci Allen asked whether, for the sage-grouse data call this year, the DWR has good information on predator impacts. Jason explained that he has been working with Randy Larsen at BYU to clarify what we know. Also, there may be a red fox problem developing in the Vernon area. Mike Tamllos will keep the group updated if action is warranted to help protect sage-grouse.

Lek-Counting

Several people were curious to know if volunteer lek counts can count toward official totals. Jason explained that they can, as long as the right form is used, and Kim Hersey, Tom Becker, and Dennis are kept informed.

Projects

Traci noted that BLM is planning several projects in the area of Lookout Lek that will help sage-grouse by reducing PJ encroachment.

Sage-grouse initiative money is once again available through NRCS to do projects for sage-grouse on private land. Anyone aware of landowners who would be interested can contact Matt Phillippi at NRCS.

The group discussed plans a multi-component weed project in the Gov't Wash area. Traci has developed a BLM internal proposal to handle weeds on their land. Mark Farmer from DWR will coordinate with her. Matt Phillippi (NRCS) will also coordinate with Traci to see if adjoining private landowners might be interested in participating as well, as part of the sage-grouse initiative. Ranae suggested one landowner in particular and provided Traci with contact information. Jerry Caldwell (Tooele County weed management) will also help.

Jerry Caldwell also presented maps of current county weed mapping efforts. He encouraged everyone to report GPS locations for infestations.

Dugway's proposal for multi-faceted sage-grouse research in the area has been approved. Robbie Knight, Kelli Marvel, Tom Becker, Randy Larsen, and Traci Allen are working on a research design.

Several projects proposed to WRI this year will help sage-grouse if they are funded. For example, PJ-removal bull-hogs and lop-and-scatters, plus closing illegal roads on Forest Service land (which abuts a BLM project) could be beneficial to grouse in those areas. Jerry Caldwell mentioned that some lop-and-scatter projects seem to have brought in or released weeds in the treatment areas. As a precaution, he reminded everyone to make sure that equipment is cleaned appropriately before moving between sites. He also mentioned that including even \$500 in each WRI project proposal budget to allow for weed management would be very valuable. Better yet, a checkbox (like for wildlife and vegetation monitoring) that indicated plans to do weed management monitoring where appropriate, would be a possible solution. The Sharps Valley project, funded through WRI last year, has almost completed bullhog work as of this date.

BLM has 1000 fence reflectors that could be used locally. Someone suggested that Dedicated Hunters could help put them up. Jason Robinson offered to do this. Jerry Caldwell asked whether Jason could GPS weeds while he was out marking fences near leks.

Tooele County Presentation

In mid-February, Jason Robinson presented sage-grouse and local working group information to the Tooele County Commission. There was some interest in attending lek counts with the biologists. Both Jason Robinson and Jerry Hurst mentioned that they thought the presentation went well.

Trails

The issue of trails management and county planning has come up several times in the past, but the group is still not sure how best to help create a trails situation that minimizes impacts to grouse. Jerry mentioned that he sits on the trails council for Tooele County. Paul Cowley, with USFS, also attends. Jerry explained that the county is working to erase unauthorized trails.

He said that it would be helpful to have the updated polygons of sage-grouse habitat to help identify trails that could be a problem for grouse. Lorien will send those shape files to Jerry. Several individuals expressed concern that a major hindrance to responsible trail management and enforcement in the area is the lack of a BLM travel management plan. After some discussion, it was agreed that Lorien would draft a letter from the group, addressed to Glenn Carpenter at BLM, explaining how helpful a BLM travel management plan would be toward the LWGs goal of addressing recreational impacts to sage-grouse.

Annual FWS Data Call

Jason has been working on the annual data call from FWS, documenting projects that have helped sage-grouse in the year since the ESA finding (released last year on March 5, 2010). The data call is due March 1. A primary focus related to the two areas that the FWS identified as being problems for sage-grouse: inadequate regulatory mechanisms to address species declines, and loss of habitat. The main challenge, Jason explained, is that projects and improvements and explanations of benefit need to be defensible in court. Benefit to sage-grouse can be difficult to prove unless good monitoring is done before and after projects.

Lorien showed the group the current threats chart in the local sage-grouse plan, which needs to be updated this spring. More focus will be put on this in meeting later this year.

Actions Taken

No formal actions were taken.

Follow-up Needed

- Mark Farmer, Traci Allen, Matt Phillippi, and Jerry Caldwell will coordinate to address the knapweed issues in the Gov't Wash area.
- Lorien will send Jerry the polygons to overlay on maps for county trails planning.

- Lorien will draft a letter from the group to BLM expressing the value that a BLM travel management plan would have for sage-grouse in the area.
- Lorien still needs to update the LWG map with MOA, UPCD projects, etc.
- Robbie Knight, Kelli Marvel, Tom Becker, Randy Larsen, and Traci Allen will continue to work on research design and goals for the Dugway project.
- Jason will work with Traci Allen to get fence reflectors, then use Dedicated Hunter hours for putting up fence reflectors near leks in the WDARM area.
- Lorien will prepare for the upcoming meeting by highlighting areas in the local sage-grouse conservation plan that may need to be updated, and send it out in advance of the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be scheduled over email. The focus of the next meeting will be on updating WDARM's local sage-grouse conservation plan.