

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

Date: April 28, 2014
Place: Tooele Co. Health Building, Tooele, UT
Members Present:
Jerry Hurst (Tooele County), Bruce Clegg (Tooele County), Matt Phillippi (NRCS), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Loralie Cox (UACD), Matt Howard (UDWR), Chris Bryan (BLM), Darrell Johnson (rancher/landowner), Mike Tamlllos (USDA-WS), Chet Fitzgerald (NRCS), Boyd White (UDWR), Lans Stavast (USFS), Phillip Kacirek (USFS), Tom Becker (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (UDWR), Mace Crane (BLM), Rachel Brown (Rocky Mountain Power), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

State updates

Disturbance maps should be available later this month on the same website as the current state plan maps. Eric will send the notice to Lorien when the maps are available, and the working groups will be able to comment or correct the map through a process to be identified.

The “wavelet” map, a fine-scale PJ mapping effort, will also be available soon, possibly as soon as a week.

NRCS Updates

Matt Philippi explained that NRCS has begun a process of training more planners to be “Level 2” sage-grouse planners. This includes training about how the new USFWS/NRCS “predictability” works. The process has been going for about 2 months. The intent is to train all range cons and numerous others in sage-grouse planning. Several landowners have recently expressed interest in SGI, possibly as a result of the predictability.

There are many fence markers available, although in this area, most fences have been marked already, particularly in the Vernon area. Elizabeth Mitchell expressed concern that the markers would be used as target practice. NRCS employees asked that if this is observed, someone should let them know.

The new Farm Bill has introduced many substantial program changes. There is still EQIP money, which is the based for SGI. There have been two SGI signups in Juab county, and there have been four in Tooele so far. NEPA is being done on the south side of the Sheeprocks for future PJ removal projects. Another effect of the Farm Bill is the consolidation of the easement programs.

Elizabeth noted that landowners have been asked to be responsible for treating PJ regrowth in

areas of past PJ removal projects by NRCS. Matt Phillippi explained that although it was not possible before, NRCS now has a way (a new practice) to address that problem and help landowners.

Population Information and other DWR updates

Terri Pope has taken over for Kim Hersey at DWR. She will be in charge of lek counts. This year, during the staff transition, Tom Becker had a large role. Tom presented preliminary information on local lek counts, noting that most of the leks are down substantially, including Little Valley, which very worrisomely had no birds counted at all. However, the West Gov't Creek lek had 21 and the Ibapah main lek had 16. The Little Valley news is of particular concern because that has been the core of the population.

Elizabeth Mitchell and Mike Tamlllos noted that birds have been seen using the treatment areas in the Benmore area.

The group discussed the red fox problem in Little Valley at great length. They have been established in Little Valley for at least ten years. The group is concerned that excessive predation may be an acute concern for sage-grouse in this area. Tom Becker will investigate how to help address this problem. Mike and Tom both noted that a separate program would likely have to be developed because of the intense effort that would be required. Mike explained that unlike some areas, like Strawberry, where fox dens are relatively easy to spot, the terrain and denning habits of foxes in the Little Valley area are different and present a much greater challenge. Mike explained that an effective effort would need to reduce the vast majority of the local fox population to actually make a difference. Merely knocking down a small percentage each year would be unlikely to make a difference. Eric Ellis is also willing to take part in the discussion. Tom and Eric will approach Jason Robinson to see what can be done.

County Update

Tooele County had questions about raven control, and whether they can be killed in the winter. Mike Tamlllos explained that a request from a landowner, with a damage complaint, is a necessary first step. Damage could be to livestock, silage, etc.

The county is also very interested in working on sage-grouse more broadly with neighboring counties and Native American tribes. This spring meeting was originally intended to be held in Ibapah, but the large number of staff turnovers at different agencies and the tribe made it reasonable to postpone. The field tour will now aim to be done in late summer in the Ibapah area. Matt Phillippi is taking the lead with the Goshute tribe. The Owyhee tribe would also like to be involved. They are located in northern Elko County. Box Elder and Elko counties would like to coordinate at a central meeting. Lorien will connect with Grant Gerber in Elko County and others. Tom will send Lorien and Matt the contact info for the current Goshute tribal contact for wildlife issues.

Potential Projects

Once the PJ mapping is available, the group will be able to sit down and plan some longer-term, landscape scale PH removal projects. This should be able to be done at the next meeting, and can feed into WRI project proposals on a workable timeline. The Burley Idaho BLM field office made a 10-year plan for PJ removal. Eric asked if someone could send him the EA for this work. Chris will send it to Lorien to get to Eric.

Tom Becker and Chris Bryan will discuss a possible riparian restoration project near the water ski area, and see if the landowners might be interested.

The group also discussed a project on the Shambip Conservation District ground. The new lease will involve SGI. Lars, Matt, Alison, and Darrell will coordinate efforts after the meeting.

Facilitator Updates

Lorien attended the meeting of the White Pine sage-grouse local working group in Ely, White Pine County, Nevada on April 23rd. That group is interested in coordinating and would be interested in participating in a late-summer field tour also. Lorien will maintain contact between the groups for now.

There will be a Rangewide Sage-grouse Forum for everyone involved with sage-grouse management held in Salt Lake City November 12 and 13, this year.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will work with Matt, Bruce, and others to coordinate the field tour.
- Eric will send the link for the disturbance maps, and any appropriate comment/correction process, to Lorien when it is available, for forwarding to the group.
- Chris will send the Burley Idaho EA to Eric (via Lorien if need be)
- Tom Becker and Chris Bryan will discuss a possible riparian restoration project near the water ski area.
- Tom Becker and Eric Ellis will explore options to address the red fox problem in Little Valley.
- Tom will send Lorien and Matt the contact info for the current Goshute tribal contact for wildlife issues.

Next Meetings

The next meeting will be either in mid-summer to look at new mapping efforts, or it will be the late-summer field tour with other counties and states.