

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

Date: March 7, 2016
Place: Tooele County Building
Members Present: Masako Wright (BLM), Jessica Henrie (Tooele Transcript Bulletin), Jim Priest (BLM), Rachel Brown (Rocky Mountain Power), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Chris Bryan (BLM), Boyd White (NRCS/UDWR), Terri Pope (UDWR), Scott Chamberlain (STILA), Brad Jessop (BLM-WDD), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Karen Hartman (USFS), Wade Bitner (Tooele County Commission), Dave Brown (Tooele County), Chris Perkins (USDA-WS), Jerry Caldwell (Tooele County), Erica Fleishman (UC Davis), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (UDWR), David Smedley (DWR/NRCS), Elizabeth Mitchell (Bennion Ranch), Alan Mitchell (Bennion Ranch), Jessica Delph (NRCS/GIP), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator).

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Research and translocation update

Jason provided updates on the translocation and research plans. Original plans to release birds at McIntyre lek have been adjusted due to the amount of snow there. The birds will now be released at Government Wash/Creek lek (on BLM ground). The release will happen Thursday March 10 before 7 am, and will include media presence (though at a distance that will not disturb the birds). The goal is to catch and release up to 30 females and 10 males in Park Valley Wednesday and Thursday nights. If we need more, there will be a separate trapping effort on Parker Mountain in April. The April release would be on the MacIntyre lek – a privately owned area where permission has already been granted to do releases. Jason reiterated how important it is to release new birds where there are already existing birds to help introduce them to the local habitat. Some local birds will also be collared.

The long-term plan is to have 40 birds moved each year for three years. USU graduate student Melisa Chelak will be leading research effort to track the birds. She will likely give an annual report at the working group meetings to show what the birds are doing. Many of the birds will have GPS collars on, so we might learn of new lek locations or wintering areas.

Anyone interested in helping trap on Parker should talk to Avery Cook or Jason Robinson.

Predation Management updates

Chris Perkins provided an update on Wildlife Services predation management activity. So far, only one red fox den has been found. On three flights, 72 coyotes were killed. One raccoon has also been killed. Treated eggs were placed in the area for raven control in January and February, in

areas where ravens congregate, such as near Vernon. Chris guessed that they have removed approximately 20 ravens in that area. Anyone who notices red foxes in the sage-grouse area can call Chris directly at 385-228-0900 to help him locate additional foxes for removal before the sage-grouse nesting season begins. It was noted that original plans for hiring a private trapper for red foxes in the area did not materialize. Chris Perkins is the primary contact for this work.

Pinyon Juniper sub-team proposal

Brad Jessop introduced the idea of having juniper subcommittee like the Box Elder CRM has, in order to more effectively coordinate the interagency juniper removal efforts in this area, particularly for the Sheeprocks. The group decided that it was generally a good idea. A smaller group would be more nimble though there are a lot of entities (including different BLM field offices, etc.) who might be involved. Jason recommended that it be composed primarily of the direct project managers, not higher decision-making levels, to keep the group a manageable size. Brad is willing to lead the effort. Mark Farmer was proposed as a co-chair, and accepted the role.

Allison Whittaker noted that the NRCS grant that Alan Clark applied for (RCPP) was approved, so there is additional funding for work in this area.

Next steps: Brad will pull together a group. It may meet separately from WDARM and just report back to the full group, or the meetings might be coordinated to be in the same location immediately following one another. Brad and Lorien will communicate as needed to decide that.

Climate-cheatgrass research study

Erica Fleishman briefly presented information on an upcoming project that will be conducting research in the Sheeprocks area, as well as in several other areas around the Great Basin. The study is looking at several things, including how cheatgrass may respond to warmer, drier conditions as well as well as changes in precipitation frequency and amounts over time. It will help predict where cheatgrass invasion may change over time. The project also looks at habitat quality for breeding songbirds. Additional detail is available on a summary page that Lorien sent to the group listserv in late February. The project is being funded by the Joint Fire Science Program. Fieldwork will start in this area this spring, probably in May, and will also occur in 2017.

Recreation communication discussion

The group discussed next steps on several outreach ideas for getting sage-grouse information to the recreationists who use the area, especially the ATV users: a kiosk, a leaflet, and information on a future iteration of the Prospector Trail map.

Kiosks

Dave explained that there are plans to put up multiple kiosks around the Prospector trail system.

Two have been approved and will be built and installed soon: one near Vernon about ¾ of a mile off Hwy 36, and one in the Five Mile Pass area. They will have several panels, including one for a map, one with some history of the area, and one panel for safety/regulatory information and other information. Sage-grouse topics could be included here. Although the group discussed having sage-grouse only kiosks, Dave recommended keeping all the information together.

Lorien handed out black and white copies of two other sage-grouse and recreation kiosks in Utah, one at Strawberry (focused on winter recreation, near a treatment area), and one in the Panguitch area. Elements that people liked from those kiosks included:

- Pictures of sage-grouse females, or males not strutting—the way most people would see it
- Maps
- Positive messages
- Simple “how you can help” messages
- Clear instructions on what not to do
- How to report violations by peers

Additional suggestions:

- Have the sign be welcoming, not off-putting: say “welcome”
- Include a website link or QR code for more info
- Pictures of things that are not sage-grouse but might be confused for them, to help people learn (general wildlife info could be worked in here)
- Talk about habitat (link to message about staying on trail)
- A kiosk at Vernon Reservoir could include information on projects visible nearby (like the Strawberry kiosk does) but most other possible locations are not necessarily near habitat projects, particularly not the two currently approved projects discussed earlier.

Chris Haller is developing a lot of the non-map kiosk content. Lorien will follow up with Chris after this discussion to share ideas for incorporating sage-grouse info into the content he is pulling together. The next steps include Lorien checking with Chris to see how much space we have, then contacting a designer to produce some drafts that the LWG could provide feedback on in the upcoming month or so. Mark Farmer as the original files for the Strawberry kiosk, and could share those with someone who could design a new one. Several possible avenues for getting a designer were discussed, including in-house at an agency, reaching out to participants in the group, or close connections, with those skills. Once there are some alternate versions to look at, Lorien will send them out to the group for feedback.

Dave noted that the Prospector Trail group is meeting on March 15th and this can be on the agenda.

Additional kiosks are also in the works. Dave noted that the kiosk structure itself (not the content) only costs about \$250 to build. There are others in the works in other areas, but the two discussed earlier will be going up this spring. Dave noted that if a kiosk is not going on private or

county land (i.e. it is to be placed on federal land), a NEPA process is required. Other locations under consideration include Vernon Reservoir (where there is an existing Forest Service kiosk, though attendees noted that it has recently fallen down and needs to be repaired), Little Sahara/Cherry Creek, and three others which would still need NEPA.

Elizabeth noted that many private landowners would not want a kiosk on their property as it could encourage parking in that area without any associated control options to manage the recreationists' behavior in the area. Janet asked about trash concerns in areas with a lot of recreation activity. There is a fine of \$1850 or three days in jail for littering.

Someone noted that there are other existing kiosks in the area which could be better used. Dave noted that there are but many of them are not ones the Prospector Trail Committee has permission to use.

Three suggestions to reduce signs being used as target practice: add an American flag to the sign, make it brown instead of white to reduce long-range visibility, and place on the landscape so it is not visible from a long distance.

Leaflet

At the last meeting, the group discussed how best to use a leaflet to share information. One concern, if it were included in the folded maps, would be increased litter. The group suggested that if we try a leaflet, we try a very small sample to see if we start seeing them on the landscape, in which case we would discontinue the idea.

Terri Pope distributed several copies of a draft done by a DWR outreach person in the Central Region, Scott Root. It has four simple bullet points under a picture of several sage-grouse. The bullet points are:

- Prospector Trail is located within a State of Utah designated Sage-Grouse Management Area.
- The Sheeprocks population of sage-grouse has been identified as vital to the survival of the species in the state.
- Due to the specific habitat preferences, sage-grouse are especially susceptible to human disturbance.
- Please stay on designated trails.

The group was very supportive of the message on the flyer, and suggested that it, or something very similar, be produced and distributed in some fashion. A test inclusion in some of the new maps was discussed. Other distribution suggestions for a leaflet included:

- Including with ATV registration materials send in the mail
- Requiring some information about sage-grouse in an online training like for shed hunters
- Distribution at Stedman's with purchases (would require the store's buy-in, obviously)

Jerry noted that the Department of Agriculture is already distributing flyers related to weeds, in plastic containers similar to those used for real estate flyers in front of homes. There might be opportunities to use the back side of those materials as well.

Lorien will follow up with Chris to see if including something with ATV registration materials would be feasible, and also to inquire about existing relationships with Stedman's in Tooele.

Map

Dave Brown showed the group proofs of the Prospector Trail map (this is what will go on the kiosks). He noted that it is a living document, and they will only do small printings of approximately 5000 at a time, so that as additional trails are marked, they can be added to the map. Right now there is no sage-grouse related information on the map, but some could be added if the group has recommendations. The bullet points on the leaflet might also be appropriate for the map. Someone noted that a picture of a sage-grouse (as before, not one strutting as that is not what people would actually see) would be valuable.

App?

Elizabeth wondered if an app might be an appropriate thing to develop as an educational tool. The group was interested but did not have time to discuss the idea in depth.

Follow-up Needed

- Anyone interested in helping trap for the translocation effort should contact Jason or Avery.
- Anyone who sees red foxes in the area should contact Chris Perkins directly
- Brad and Lorien will coordinate how to manage the PJ subcommittee.
- Lorien will follow up with Chris Haller regarding kiosk content and design that is already in progress, flyer distribution options, etc.

Next Meeting

The spring meeting is normally in Ibapah, so Lorien will check with NRCS and others to see whether the other (NRCS and Conservation District) meetings that happen at the same time are planned yet. If so, the group will meet in Ibapah in April or May. If not, the spring meeting will be held in Tooele or potentially somewhere more accessible for local landowners, such as Rush Valley of the Vernon area. Once it has been determined whether we are going to Ibapah for the next meeting, Lorien will send out a doodle to schedule if needed. Dave offered to lead a field trip out to some specific recreation sites this summer if the group was interested.