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| Uintah BasinLocal Working Group |  | **Date: 11/30/21**  **Place:** Virtual meeting via Zoom  **Present:** Christine Fletcher (BLM), Heather Talley (DWR), Tyson Todd (SITLA), Jason DeForest (PLPCO), Brian Maxfield (DWR), John Spencer (Simplot), Terrell Thayne (GIP), Ethan Hallows (SITLA), Jared Reese (BLM), Dixie Sadlier (BLM-fuels), Natasha Hadden (USFS), Bob Christensen (USFS), Boyd Kitchen (USU), Christine Osborne (DWQ), April Abate (DOGM), Cal DeBerard (BLM), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension facilitator). |

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*New staff*

Cal DeBerard has be hired to fill Natasha’s role at BLM. Paul Baker (DOGM) has retired. Tyson Todd has a new position at SITLA.

*Population updates*

Heather presented the year’s lek count update numbers. There are a number of drops which are likely to be at least partially drought-related. She noted that the Parker hunt was closed this year, and a causal factors analysis will be done in that area.

Brian provided a local Basin population update. Counts this past year were a little lower than he expected. The grouse in the Basin are less dependent on the monsoon cycle that affects the southern birds a lot, but drought during the recent years at the bottom of the cycle didn’t help. This year had good chick survival, so that will hopefully be helpful next year. The birds in Three Corners, by Flaming Gorge, are not rebounding as fast as some other areas. Diamond Mountain counts drive the numbers in the SGMA, however, Blue Mountain went up this year, on both sides of the state line. The late summer rain helped dramatically. The trends in Uintah often lead the state.

For GPS tracking, there were no new captures in 2020, but 10 new transmitters went out on Diamond Mountain in 2021. Brain showed us the locations; most birds caught on Diamond stayed there. One grouse on Taylor Mountain is still transmitting after four years. It disappears each winter to Colorado and then comes back. Currently, 9 of 11 transmitters that were put on are alive now – a great survival rate. Raptor migration may be a factor in the grouse mortality in the area, based on the timing. Plans for the future include putting more transmitters out. A collaborative effort between DWR/USFS/BLM/Hawkwatch is also putting transmitters on golden eagles, so there may be more information about golden eagles and sage-grouse on leks.

*BLM updates*

A Notice of Intent came out Nov 22 that there will be a new planning effort for sage-grouse efforts. There will be a 75-day public scoping period. One area that will be revisited in this process is the sagebrush focal areas. Others include oil and gas leases, mineral development, fire and invasives, monitoring, new science, and alternatives that people would like to see. On a separate note, BLM has reinstated the mitigation policy which was revoked in 2016.

*Transmission lines*

The Gateway South transmission line goes through the Basin in GHMA, and in the SGMA in Emma Park. Transwest goes through Fruitland. BLM is looking at NEPA adequacy to make sure that the RMP is still meeting the original EIS for these lines.

*Railroad*

The railroad mitigation plan is also in development. It will likely include a 4:1 mitigation ratio, a lump sum for research, some noise management, and many other topics. The most disturbance to sage-grouse habitat will be in the Carbon SGMA, but we will keep this group apprised as well.

*WRI and other projects*

* There are no sage-grouse focused projects this year coming from Forest Service in the area.
* BLM: Dixie noted that the seeding in Three Corners was just completed, and the next steps are fire/weed management.
* SITLA is working on aspen on Tabby Mountain. Ethan may do some sagebrush work on Blue Mountain (possibly spike). Brian and Annalyse looked into it; thre may be a wet meadow priejct potential on Blue Mountain in the future, but not this coming funding cycle. Other wet meadow project ideas were discussed, including an idea Natasha has for Diamond Mountain on SITLA.
* The Uintah CD has some money leftover from the Matt Warned project, and could use 319 dollars to work on Pott Creek erosion reduction. SWCA is working on a plan.
* Terryl noted that UGIP will have money for water development this year, so anyone interested in that type of project may want to coordinate with him.
* Natasha noted that the WRI project due date is January 7th, and the proposal meeting Jan 18 for the northeastern region.

**Follow-up Needed**

* Lorien will keep the group apprised of how to participate in the BLM scoping process

**Next Meeting**

Next meeting is not set but will be next year late winter/early spring.