UINTA BASIN SAGE-GROUSE

Planning/update meeting

Date: **January 18, 2005**
Time: **10:00 AM**
Place: **County Building**

Members Present;

Todd Black (USU CCES)
Renee Chi(USFWS)
Nicky Frey (CCES)
Sarah Lupis (CCES)
Verl Bagley (USU Extension)
Terry Messmer (USU Extension)
Dwayne Elmore (USU)
Dave Dahlgren (USU)
Chris Johnson (UDWR)
Joanne Stenten (USFWS)
Tom Jarmin (NRCS)
Ron Torgerson (SITLA)
John Keeler (UFB)
Larry Greenwood (BLM)

Information Presented

Todd Black announced the Western Governor's National Sage-grouse Local Working Group Conference in Reno, NV on February 11-12, 2005. The meeting is to provide working group members from several western states the opportunity to share successes, ideas, etc. Gary Hallows has committed to going.

Terry Messmer reviewed the recent UPCD meeting held on January 11, 2005. He explained that the meeting brought agencies together to coordinate their activities. However, the meeting illustrated how several different groups (Farm Bureau Sensitive Species Task Force, UT Grazing Lands Network, Soil Conservation Districts, Sage-grouse Local Working Groups, CRM, and QRM) have been formed that all focus on local-scale conservation efforts. Terry also presented an overview of the UDWR project tracking

database. The system should help to facilitate cooperation and coordination. Future projects conducted on Parker Mountain will be included in the database. Projects related to sage-grouse and other sagebrush steppe species will hopefully be driven with the PECE process (USFWS) in mind. The USFWS needs specific information about sensitive species to be able to make listing decisions. Projects and information gathered must be meaningful to the USFWS for them to make listing decisions.

Terry Messmer presented the DRAFT MOU to the group. The DRAFT is a re-write of the last MOU. The agreement would be good for 10 years to mesh with WHIP funding. He asked that everyone look it over and share it with the appropriate people in their agency or group. Once everyone agrees on the DRAFT, a final signature sheet will be passed around. It was suggested that BYU's PYRA study be incorporated into the MOU.

Todd Black presented some information on the SOP. The SOP contains general guidelines on how the groups are going to function. The SOP doesn't contain anything new and should piggyback with the MOU to help structure how the group does business. The SOP and MOU should be kept as separate documents. However, under the Obligations section it could state that the group is willing to participate under the guidelines set forth in the SOP.

Dave Dahlgren provided an update on the sage-grouse research being conducted on Parker Mountain. He had nothing to report on recent (fall-winter) sage-grouse survival. Dave is working on the Annual Report and thanked everyone who contributed to that document. Dave reminded the group that lek counts are coming up in the first few weeks in April. He is

striving to get a big group out to do lek counts during the peak. There will be monitoring during those first few weeks to determine the specific dates. Dave is trying to capture 60 hens so that at least 30 broods will be able to have chicks radioed (3 chicks per brood). Trapping will occur prior and after the big lek count. Help would certainly be appreciated. The hens captured will first be used for research, then for translocation (35 hens). Also, a few (4) hens will be transferred to Kosherem Reservoir to see if they come back. This summer, chicks will be radioed to help determine chick survival. The chick study will continue for 3 summers. As well, vegetation data will continue to be collected on the treatments. Finally, Dave proposed doing a pilot study on pen-raised pheasant chicks to develop a method for extracting crop contents without killing chicks. If successful, he would like to implement this method in the field in 2007. He is interested in the group's comments and suggestions.

Dwayne Elmore provided an update on the Utah prairie-dog project. He explained that they will be continuing work that was done in the past. Burrow activity will be monitored, and they may try to trap ~50 (total) animals in study pastures twice during the summer to determine weight gain. Main Tank Colony: A proposal was submitted to reduce sagebrush (with a mechanical treatment) in some of the draws surrounding that colony to increase dispersal habitat around the colony. The hope is that animals will recolonize those areas, which had historic use, if sagebrush is reduced. Should this be successful, treatments could be used to reconnect isolated populations which would reduce the chance of local extinctions. The proposed project could be done by tacking on to another graduate study. Funding for the project could be provided by the

Endangered Species Mitigation Fund.

Tom provided an update on the WHIP funding. He suggested that soon we identify areas on the map where projects will be taking place. Currently projects include aspen treatments, prairie-dog sagebrush reductions, grazers. In some instances, ARCH clearance may be needed and that process should get started. Todd told the group about an outfit that removes aspen trees and then uses them to make AC filters. The outfit has a faller to remove trees and has experience with aspen removal. It was also suggested that Ronny Hunt, a local forester, could do the aspen removal.

Tom provided an update on the soils mapping project. Conservation Security Program identified three watersheds have been selected in UT (San Pitch was one of them) for the Conservation Security Program. The Conservation Security Program is a reward system for landowners who are doing excellent work regarding soil, air, water, plants, human at the NRCS's quality criteria level, across their entire ranch/property. Maximum payments are $45,000 a year. Tom felt that one of the watersheds in this area would have been included had digital soil maps been available. Tom believes that this area is now a priority for soils surveys/mapping. Much of the surveying has been completed. Most work involves digitizing existing maps.

Discussion Highlights

Who would be responsible for getting project information into the state-wide database? The Project Manager and Regional team representative would be responsible for entering project information into the database. Although originally designed to track UDWR projects, the database will likely be expanded to include all projects effecting sagebrush-steppe

habitats and species.

Will there continue to be a graduate student working on sage-grouse issues on Parker Mountain? Yes. Dave Dahlgren will continue for several years. Dave Dahlgren and Sarah Lupis will be compiling data collected on Parker Mountain over the past several years and work towards publishing this information in the scientific literature. It is important to report on the monitoring of treatments. Kris Johnson commended those that have been working on collecting information on sage-grouse broods, lek counts, and mortality because that information is very useful. Kris recommended that monitoring efforts like that should be given the highest priority because it is so helpful. Terry noted that the monitoring that has happened on Parker Mountain would not have been possible without the cooperation (financial, resources, etc.) from the group (PARM).

Kris Johnson pointed out that the DWR has a range monitoring crew that takes detailed vegetation data. Because this information is so important to them, the DWR is putting together a secondary range monitoring crew that will be able to visit sites more often than the primary crew. The focus of the secondary crew will be to collect baseline data on areas prior to treatments. Sites have been established on Parker Mountain.

Meaningful information on forage production should be collected with each treatment so that the studies are also relevant to the landowners, grazers, and ranchers on Parker Mountain. NRCS has a monitoring point in each pasture where they measure production and baseline. **This information should appear in the PARM Annual Report.**

The group felt it was important to develop SOPs specific to PARM.

Terry Messmer offered to send USU Wildlife Society students to help collect wing data from hunters. In the past, they established check stations on the mountain at strategic locations. Checkers were able to collect information on sex, age, etc.

Sage-grouse Days: The purpose of PARM is also to increase awareness in the local community. Sage-grouse Days (in Loa, Bicknell, etc.) would provide local communities an opportunity to hear what is going on with PARM. It would also help publicize PARM and bring revenue to the local economy (via wildlife watching). Birding groups would be able to watch strutting sage-grouse and observe other sagebrush steppe birds. 1st year: small-scale function with a dinner for local community, tours of the leks, tours of range sites, and presentations about ongoing projects on Parker Mountain. Need to investigate DWR policy on lek viewing. DWR would be concerned that participants would revisit the lek at a later date and that this would cause excessive disruption. Todd pointed out that you are probably not telling people things that they don't know. Renee suggested that involving the H.S. kids. Dwayne recounted their visit to the Bicknell middle school last summer. Both agreed that increased awareness of the younger population is important. Dwayne pointed out that maintaining the hunting season is important to maintaining local interest in the species.

Terry suggested that community involvement could also come from having local students and science teachers can help with monitoring of sage-grouse or vegetation. They are collecting useful data and information while increasing educational opportunities and awareness in the local community. It was also suggested that PARM have a booth at the County Fair.

Actions Taken

USU Extension requires the PARM Chair to sign a Nondiscrimination Assurance form. Gary Hallows will sign for PARM.

In Part 4, section C of the MOU Verl B. will be representative with both Wayne and Pyute Counties.

In Part 8 of the MOU, a DWR representative would suffice, rather than a DNR representative.

April 7-9 was scheduled as the tentative dates for lek counts. We want to encourage local grazers to participate in the lek counts. Ron will announce the lek count weekend at the next grazing association meeting. USU will provide a breakfast for participants.

Follow-up Needed

Todd Black will mail the MOU with the meeting minutes. The Group will provide comments and identify signatories for the MOU. This assignment will be due 2 weeks prior to the next meeting.

Tom will provide a summary report on the forage production information collected for 2005 by the NRCS to include in the Annual Report.

Identify potential project areas/sites for WHIP funding at the next meeting.

Todd and Sarah need to ask Kevin about predator management plans for the Parker Mountain.

Todd will send out the Conservation Plan issues table with the meeting minutes. Issues, measurable objectives and actions/strategies are due to Todd by March 15, 2005 so he can distribute a DRAFT Plan before the next meeting.