

**LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date: December 2, 2008**

**Time: 10:00 am – 12:10 am**

**Place: Heber, Utah; Wasatch County Building**

**Members Present: Alicia Moulton (USU Extension), Mark Farmer (DWR), Mike Bornstein (USFS), Jared Baxter (BYU), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), John Rice (Mitigation Commission), Mike Tamillos (APHIS), Randy Larsen (BYU), Brian Maxfield (DWR), Kim Hersey (DWR), Jason Robinson (DWR), Bob Riddle (Wasatch County), Steve Smith (Wasatch Co. CWMD), Al Mickelsen (Wasatch County), Lorien Belton (USU Extension).**

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

Jared Baxter updated the group on sage-grouse movements in the area. There are 60-70 birds left from the last two years' translocations, plus some resident collared birds. No translocations are planned next spring, just monitoring and trapping of some residents. Total population is still 400-500 based on lek counts. There was some weather-related trouble with lek counts this year. The lek counts are also based on Fruitland leks, where there was much more use this year: many birds stayed in Fruitland because of late spring.

One complication that has arisen is that a landowner with birds on their land has recently communicated new restrictions for access for the BYU researchers, down to just six days a year with required notice and approval ahead of time in writing. That's a very short amount of time to monitor, especially with two new leks in that area which need to be monitored. Several folks have tried to communicate with the landowner but she is difficult to contact. Allen Smith may be able to reach her. All relevant parties will continue trying to communicate with the landowner to resolve concerns and hopefully restore access.

Mike Bornstein updated the group on Forest Service projects. In Badger Hollow, the NEPA is almost ready to be signed for a 1500 acre-treatment over several years. The first treatment will be near the lek; later treatments will be further away. There was a musk thistle problem in Trout Creek which may be related to treatment, i.e. the weeds lay dormant until treatment. In the future, he will be recommending larger buffer between treatments and known infestations. Mark inquired about size of infestation: Bornstein guessed that it was in the range of 50-100 plants. The plants or seeds were probably already there pre-treatment, but it is a reminder that we always need to be careful. Steve Smith noted that caution about only treating weeds once and assuming that will be enough. He recommends more small treatments over time, as well as always involving the county and CWMA in projects for weed control.

Mike Bornstein also noted that as part of a watershed benefit project, a new project is proposed

for more brush hog treatments near Trail Hollow. This might open up some more areas to encourage grouse dispersal to the south and west of existing lek sites. That whole project would only be about 400 acres, and is planned for next summer.

Mark noted that the DWR is thinking about treatments, may need a larger mower.

Jason Robinson noted that the State of Utah (DWR) is working on updating sage-grouse management plan. The plan will go through the RAC process in Jan/Feb. Jason also mentioned that that a listing decision from ESA may come out this Thursday, but may also be postponed.

Jan Anderson asked Jason how statewide counts are doing. Jason said they were low but in part due to access issues. It is also difficult to determine where increases are due to increased monitoring effort or more birds.

Jan asked how Forest Service rearrangements have affected the area. Richard Williams has retired, was the head biologist for the Wasatch Cache. Julie King has not been replaced yet but may be soon. Main concern is being overworked and understaffed. Scope of area to manage is now larger.

Jan asked how FOSV is involved. John Campbell is tied into FOSV so association will continue.

Bob Riddle noted that there are two existing subdivisions on SW corner of reservoir across the dam, with another proposed south of that one, which is currently being discussed for year-long access. Economic situation seems not to be slowing them at least currently. The hold-up now is the location of a road to cross the dam. County would like stricter requirements for the road than the developers.

Someone asked if there was any oil drilling in the county. There is no activity in the Strawberry Valley area, and only one that has been proposed in the Ashland Forest/White River Area.

Windmill discussion: Mike Bornstein reported that someone who has developed a personal residence on Ed Collard's land has applied to the county for a windmill permit in area that is important sage-grouse winter range. The propose windmill would be about 2-3 miles from a lek. Ed Collard notified several individuals about a county meeting to discuss it, but no one here [prior to Al Mickelsen's arrival, see p.4] was at that meeting, so no one could provide an update on the status of the permit.

Bornstein noted that Ed Collard FWS has recommendations that no windmills be put within five miles of a lek site. This group may want to take a stand on the issue, and learn more.

It would be good if development could avoid that area. The development is just south of windy ridge. There are also plans to extend it further: a new road is getting graded, and will go even further into wintering habitat. That road is required as secondary access. There is another road going southwest to Chicken Springs into more winter habitat, to connect to a new development

near the campground.

Maybe SVARM should write a letter to Al Mickelsen to let the county know about sage grouse and windmills, to incorporate into conditional use for any permit for windmills. If the planning commission not aware of SG concerns, they won't take it into account. Need to let them know it's something to consider. Also let them know that it's not just about leks, but critical winter habitat.

Points to include in the letter:

- FWS regulations exist
- Behavioral avoidance in critical winter habitat
- Link to the FWS plan
- Some of the problems it would cause
- If questions, bring it to the SVARM group.

Mike will draft, and we will circulate it.

John Rice notes that we need to make sure we know well what we're doing, learn about what kinds of windmills would be problems, etc.

Mike Tamlllos of APHIS updated the group on raven control efforts. He feels that control in the Vernal/Uintah area is not being very effective. There are restrictions on timing and what you can use to kill ravens. They put out 4000 poisoned eggs last year in Uinta basin.

Bornstein asked if there were fox issues in other areas. Tamlllos: not so much. Red fox is the issue in Strawberry Valley. When the grouse are wintering in Fruitland, then there are ravens down there, which we aren't doing anything about. We are treating too far and wide, and should be treating ravens in Duchesne earlier. We can't work on them before grouse nesting season. There are more and more of them.

Jared and Randy noted that ideally, predator control would be able to be reduced at some appropriate time in the future so that the grouse populations could be long-term sustainable. In the short-term, some predation control needed.

Jason pointed out that the first step to testing population viability in the area is first to stop translocations to see if population is viable without that, then later seeing how predator control reduction would do (can the population survive without it?). Good to know if the population can survive without predator control money, since we cannot be sure it will always be available.

## **Plan Implementation**

The state plan says that local plans have local authority as locally recommended. The state plan is also actively trying to define the implementation phase and how to do it.

Several individuals noted how their agency/group uses the plan. For example, the Forest Service

uses the plan as a reference. He is also doing some project monitoring. Mark Farmer uses the plan to get projects funded, as they can get ranked higher if they can show that grouse are helped. Mike Bornstein noted that the Badger Hollow project wouldn't be in place if not for the UPCD.

Jan Anderson said it would be good to revisit the threats, to see how we're doing.

Jason says it's really important to have field tours, continue meeting, and identifying projects through the UPCD process. Getting one project a year to UPCD would be very beneficial. Other actions for the group to take: further involvement in lek searching, rallying people to get involved. The group should also try to getting local knowledge to people who can use it, like in the case of the windmill situation.

Kim Hersey noted that we need to be proactively aware of key acquisitions that might be coming down the line.

Bornstein: there is also tribal ground that could be involved. The Badger Hollow project is supported by the tribe, and they would like to get involved. Karen Corts is their biologist. She is focused on big game, but is a good contact anyway. Mike will get Lorien the contact information for someone from the tribe who has shown support for the project. UPCD money could be used there. Right approach might be to design a larger project and include some tribal land in it. Lorien will remind Brian Maxfield about bringing this up at the yearly coordination meeting.

Next step on involving the tribe: get a small group out to have a field tour. Carlos Reed is their director of Fish and Wildlife. Mark, Brian, and Michael should be involved.

### **Windmill and other developments update:**

Al Mickelsen from county planning arrived at the meeting at this time and provided an update on the windmill. It has been conditionally approved but comments on those conditions would be welcome. Mike Bornstein explained that SVARM is planning to send a letter discussing adverse bird impacts. Mickelsen indicated that would be appreciated. The homeowners association has also objected to the windmill on the grounds of visibility and noise issues.

Mickelsen noted that sometimes DWR is not responsive to requests for comment about wildlife issues so action from the group on this point would be appreciated. He also asked if the group were aware of another project proposed by the Roanies. Planning would appreciate comments from this group to support sage-grouse friendly concerns.

Robin Pierson in DNR is the current primary contact for notifications about requests for comment. It was suggested that Lorien Belton and also Ashley Green receive those comments so the group could receive them more quickly. Al noted that a 14 day turn around for public comments is considered reasonable by the county, so DNR/DWR comments need to go through the process faster if they want to be considered.

He noted that it would be useful to know more than just concerns about projects, but also ways to mitigate those concerns given the reality that some projects will go forward but with conditional use permits, and information that informs those conditions is very helpful to planning.

Maybe SVARM could respond, as well as separate comments from both state and federal agencies. For example, the Burke Roanie proposal noted earlier will involve a road up Twelve Hundred Dollar Ridge and then down. They are asking for a zoning change which would allow for lodges, houses, etc. This would be on the west side of soldier creek dam. This is being proposed as a year-round operation. There has been some sage-grouse nesting in that area. This land may also be the migration route for getting to other land.

Bornstein says there is some concern with about a conservation easement and a bald eagle in the area. Bureau of Reclamation may need to complete a document before the information gets officially to the county.

Jan notes that we need a map and to have a small meeting to gather our resources and knowledge about the area. Maybe after the meeting we should go to the planning office to understand the area.

### **Implementation Phase, Continued**

Lorien asked Jason how the state-wide plan impacts our discussion/review of our adaptive plan. Jason said that the statewide plan addresses state-wide threats, and has the goal of no net loss of population and habitat. Goals include finding and growing more grouse. Same for habitat: how to we improve what we have, or create more habitat (for example, through PJ removal). The state plan is not designed to restrict the LWG plans. SVARM may want to, when state plan comes out, go back to look over SVARM plan, and see if there are other issues (like wind energy) to include. Also, a project wish list, or proposed acquisitions would be useful for helping with a statewide prioritization. Possibly we could prioritize strategies and actions.

Lorien reviewed the strategies and actions to remind the group of the main focus areas of the plan. Jan noted that it is key that we stay current with immediate threats, and also design something with the tribes.

Snowmobile use is a problem potentially. Everyone should keep their eyes open this winter to potential impacts to grouse from snowmobiles. The area around Badger Hollow may be restricted.

Mark Farmer indicated that DWR is looking at treating knapweed to keep past treatment areas in good condition. This will require spraying. A proposal will be going in for this winter.

Deer Creek has seen a Dalmation toadflax explosion; Steve says the weed folks are trying to

figure out how to deal with it.

Lorien asked what the group felt the role of the co-chairs is given that one current co-chair has indicated a lack of interest in the position, and the other is too busy to devote substantial effort to the group. Neither was able to attend this meeting. The group discussed the value of having co-chairs with time to devote, and nominated Alicia Moulton and Mike Bornstein to be the new co-chairs. Mike and Alicia both accepted the positions. Alicia noted that she will be going on maternity leave later this spring so may not be able to keep the position for long. The group agreed that that was fine.

The next meeting will be lunch meeting, provided by Extension via Lorien.

### **Actions Taken**

- Nomination of new group co-chairs: Mike Bornstein and Alicia Moulton
- Agreement that the group will send a general letter to the county concerning windmills and sage-grouse
- Next meeting scheduled for March 3, 2009 will be a lunch meeting

### **Follow-up Needed**

- **Bornstein will check to see what regulations are in place to restrict snowmobiles in winter range, and bring it up during travel management plan unless that plan is already complete.**
- **Lorien and Alicia will coordinate to get a large laminated map of the area to every meeting so we can locate threats and write on it. It can be kept in Alicia's office. It should include winter and breeding habitat, grouse locations from Randy, landownership data and 2006 photos, noxious weed info, etc. It might be nice to have more than one copy. Careful with sensitive lek locations but have grouse on there.**
- **Lorien will create a SVARM listserv.**
- **Bornstein draft windmill letter and Lorien will circulate it to the group**
- **Al Mickelsen will provide maps of the Roanie development plans to Lorien.**
- **Tribal project development follow-up:**
  - o **Mike Bornstein will provide contact information to Lorien for the tribal member who expressed support for Badger Hollow.**
  - o **Brian Maxfield should bring up tribal involvement in sage-grouse project planning at the next yearly coordination meeting between the tribes and DWR.**
  - o **A small field tour should be organized with Mark Farmer, Mike Bornstein, Brian Maxfield, and Carlos Reed from the tribe.**
- **Consider creating a small team to discuss, evaluate, and respond to potential**

**county-level development impacts to sage-grouse in a timely manner**

**NEXT MEETING:**

Meetings will be held at the following times:

- Early March (March 3, 2009) possibly as a way to coordinate group lek searches as well.
- Field tour in August (not any sooner) to see impacts of the next project. Know that the first week in August is the county fair and we might want to avoid that.
- First week in December, on a Tuesday. Good to coordinate with the CWMA meetings if possible.