

Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) Sage-grouse Local Working Group

The Strawberry Valley Adaptive Resource Management (SVARM) sage-grouse LWG is facilitated by Lorien Belton.

Description of Area and General Population Information

The LWG conservation area covers Wasatch and Duchesne Counties. There are leks and associated nesting/brood-rearing areas both at high elevations around the Strawberry Reservoir, as well as in the lower-elevation Fruitland area in Duchesne County. The birds winter primarily in Fruitland. In recent years, the population has grown increasingly stable, estimated to number between 400-500 birds. Predator control efforts, particularly with regard to red fox control, have played a large role in helping the sage-grouse population rebound from previous lows.

SVARM Meetings and Field Tours, October 2014 – January 2016

Type	Date	Location	No.	Comments
Meeting	December 4, 2014	Heber, UT	13	Disturbance and conifer mapping, planning
Meeting	January 15, 2015	Heber, UT	10	Sagebrush condition assessment, BYU research updates
Lek visit 5:30 am	April 30, 2015	Wildcat lek	3	Wildcat lek visit
Field Tour	August 4, 2015	Strawberry Reservoir area	10	Habitat project tour retrospective and future planning
Meeting	November 18, 2015	Heber, UT	8	BYU research updates, future project plans

Project and Research Highlights

The Strawberry Valley sage-grouse areas are relatively stable and there are not many urgent threats. Long-term maintenance efforts for the populations are done through weed management districts and gradual habitat improvement projects.

Brigham Young University students and faculty have maintained a long-running presence in the Strawberry Valley area, collaring birds and observing their locations and habitat usage. The working group gets regular updates from the BYU researchers, and often questions the students to gain specific on-the ground knowledge to improve habitat project design. The researchers, in addition to tracking the sage-grouse, observe how the birds respond to newly treated areas, by comparing their locations to the polygons of treatment areas done on past projects. Overall, the

results suggest that the birds select the treated areas. This has generated interest in continuing the process of treating specific areas.

Several years ago, the last of a series of habitat improvement projects was finished up in the area, most involving sagebrush mowing or other disturbance methods in high-elevation brood-rearing habitat. The first of those projects has now grown in somewhat, and other project areas have been discussed by the group. Considerations such as whether the area is grazed, weed concerns in the adjacent areas, and wet meadow locations were taken into account. A new NEPA process to cover the next set of projects (one project to be implemented every year or two) has been begun, and is being led by the Forest Service. Some additional retreatment will be proposed in previously treated areas in order to maintain good habitat for sage-grouse in those areas as well.

As needed, the group discusses potential concerns, such as proposed developments and power transmission lines when they come through the county.