

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL  
WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date: January 13, 2014**

**Place: Wasatch County Health Building**

**Members Present:** Jim Spencer (NRCS), Natasha Gruber (SGI/NRCS), Robert Riddle (Wasatch County), Anthony Gray (USFS), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Matt Howard (UDWR), Chelcey Holbrook (NRCS), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Jared Baxter (BYU), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*UPCD/WRI Projects Proposed*

The group looked at two projects proposed for the Fruitland area, both listed as beneficial to sage-grouse.

The first, Tabby Mountain WMA Browse Plots (#2977), proposes scalping the crested wheatgrass, then planting sagebrush and other shrubs to re-introduce the shrub component and improve sage-grouse habitat in that area. The group is strongly supportive of this project, as it meets objectives the group has been discussing for some time in that area. Several people indicated that seeding other grasses to help outcompete the very dominate crested wheat in the area might also be wise. Lorien will comment to this effect in the database on behalf of the group.

The second proposal, East Sand Wash Winter Range Improvement (#3009), has similar goals in an area historically used by sage-grouse but currently dominated by nonnative grasses as well. The group was supportive of the project and did not raise any notable concerns.

*Upcoming Sage-Grouse Summit*

Lorien reminded the group about the upcoming sage-grouse summit in Salt Lake City on Feb 18-19. Topics will include several key components of the state plan, as well as presentations from the USFWS, research updates, and several workshops. Registration is free but requested to ensure appropriate headcounts for food.

*Local Development Updates*

Brian updated the group on the Coleman well drilling project. The leases expired without any drilling. For now, no action is being taken. If there are updates pertinent to sage-grouse in the future, Brian or Randall Thacker can update the LWG.

The Strawberry Highlands Development is progressing slowly. It is a phased development which

includes a lot of open space. Right now they are working on just one small portion, as well as the road. At this point, there is no clear impact to sage-grouse but the group will continue to stay abreast of the proposed phases.

### *Transmission Line Update*

The Gateway South line will have a draft EIS coming out soon for comment (the predicted date is February 7<sup>th</sup>). Lorien will notify the group when the EIS is released.

### *Federal Planning Efforts: Draft EIS out for Comment*

January 29 is the deadline for comments on the BLM/USFS Draft EIS for Greater Sage-Grouse.

The document is large, so the group discussed only a small subsection of it, focusing on disturbance calculations, mapping, and fire. These included:

- Tabby Mountain area (in orange/PGMA) on the Alt D map was excluded from state SGMAs because the group felt that was biologically appropriate. It does not need to be added back in and have stipulations attached.
- Calculations of percent disturbance which attempt to quantify what existing disturbance is already there are confusing to the group. It was not clear enough to the group how the existing percent disturbance calculations would be differentiated from “non-habitat.”
- The question was raised: are we managing habitat or are we managing disturbance?
- Some members felt that the % disturbance was odd in that it gives equal weight to all disturbance, whereas the impact of a two-track road is very different from that of a well pad, for example.
- The group felt that the severity of a burn (referencing disturbance and fire calculations in Alt D) should be taken into account. In the Strawberry area, burns could be very positive or very negative and should not all be treated equally without a more nuanced understanding of the situation.

Lorien will include summaries of the group’s concerns in a compilation of comments from all the LWGs that she facilitates. This will be turned in to the BLM by January 29<sup>th</sup>.

### *NRCS and SGI Update*

Natasha provided updates on NRCS work for sage-grouse. SGI projects applications are being accepted for this year. The tentative deadline is March 21<sup>st</sup>.

The statewide fence marker project will have many fence markers very soon. Natasha has already been very proactive getting Dedicated Hunters to make and install fence markers in the Uintah Basin. These markers will be provided for free but will need to be put up by volunteers. Natasha is the point person for this area.

**Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will notify the group when the Gateway South EIS is released in February
- Lorien will send the group info on registration for the sage-grouse summit.
- Lorien will submit comments to BLM on the EIS on behalf of the LWG.

**NEXT MEETING:**

The next meeting will be held in the spring (maybe April), once there are draft habitat maps to look at for disturbance, PJ mapping, etc.