

**STRAWBERRY
VALLEY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: January 15, 2015

Place: Wasatch County Health Building

Members Present: Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Matt Howard (UDWR), Terri Pope (UDWR), Chelcey Holbrook (NRCS), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (UDWR), Jimi Gragg (UDWR), Jared Baxter (BYU/UDWR), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Transmission line updates

Brian Maxfield noted that the Transwest transmission power line will be skirting Tabby Mountain, but will be going through the Wildcat WMA. The Final EIS for the Gateway South line is in development currently.

BYU research update

Jared Baxter provided an update on ongoing BYU research efforts in the area. The BYU crew will continue to collar more birds this spring at Strawberry. Several analyses are finished or in progress. Suzanne Duncan, whose thesis involved comparing genetic diversity of the sage-grouse in the area before and after translocation, defended last summer. Her research looked at changes in fitness. Lorien will provide the link to this research over the listserv. Jared is looking at sage-grouse use of the treatment areas. He will be presenting at the Utah Chapter of the Wildlife Society at their upcoming meeting. This portion of the research will form the first chapter of his thesis, which is still in development.

Private and tribal land updates

Brian Maxfield noted that a local landowner has expressed interested in helping with sage-grouse conservation. Brian and Randall Thacker will follow up with the landowner and discuss possible project opportunities. The tribe has also recently showed interest in sage-grouse issues, and will be doing counts of leks on their land this spring.

Public Outreach processes

Eric Ellis showed several short promotional videos that the state has developed for a public outreach process. The focus is to help a variety of constituencies understand the benefits of state-level sage-grouse management over federal-level management, and how we need to work together to achieve that goal.

NEPA update

No Forest Service representatives were at the meeting to provide updates on progress toward a large-scale NEPA for future habitat treatment projects. Lorien will follow up with Anthony Gray to ensure that he has access to the information provided in Jimi Gragg's presentation.

Sagebrush Condition Assessment

Jimi Gragg presented about a new tool available for sagebrush (or other habitats) condition assessment on very large scales. The model uses data from the LANDFIRE database, including pixel data on biophysical setting (BpS) and vegetation classes (S-class). It essentially allows a land manager to examine a large scale piece of landscape and assess the amount of departure for vegetation from what expected values for a healthy system would be. For example, it might show that there are very low percentages of new young sagebrush areas, and high percentages of areas invaded by conifers or cheatgrass. The tool is good for thinking broad-scale about the condition of sagebrush in a watershed, but it is not designed to make individual project recommendations.

There is software associated with the database that allows you to consider "what if" scenarios with different management and project cost variables. In the Cedar City field office, this tool has been used to consider sage-grouse and Utah prairie dog habitat needs on a large scale also. The model can be adjusted to add your own "desired condition." Dave Dahlgren with USU helped provide data regarding sage-grouse for that process in Cedar City.

Jimi will send more information about the tool to those who attended the presentation (via Lorien), as it is fairly complex. Anyone who is interested in learning more can contact Jimi directly. His email is jimi.gragg@utah.gov.

NRCS update

Chelcey shared with the group that NRCS now has the possibility to design their prescribed grazing practice for the specific purpose of habitat management. Although it is a small technicality, this will be helpful for sage-grouse. This change is new this year.

WRI Project

Only one WRI/UPCD proposed project this year is relevant to the sage-grouse in this area. On the Tabby Mountain Wildlife Management Area, fencing is being changed on the south and east sides. It will address trespass problems by making the top rail of the fence a rail rather than barbed wire. This will make it more difficult for trespassers on ATVs to cut the fence and drive through, but it also has the added benefit for sage-grouse that the top line of the fence will be more visible, serving much the same purpose as fence markers.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will provide the link to BYU research over the listserv.
- Jimi will send more information about the sagebrush condition assessment to Lorien, who will forward it to the group at this meeting. Anyone else who is interested in learning more can contact Jimi directly. His email is jimigragg@utah.gov.
- Brian, Jared, and Lorien will coordinate to schedule and design the trip when the time is closer and on-the-ground conditions are known.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will hopefully include a lek-viewing field tour to the Wildcat lek. Depending on weather and snow conditions, the lek may be accessible in late April to early May. Jared offered to lead the trip. Brian, Jared, and Lorien will coordinate to schedule and design the trip when the time is closer and on-the-ground conditions are known.