

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date: November 16, 2009**

**Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

**Place: Wasatch County Building**

**Members Present: Nathan Berg (USFS), Jason Robinson (DWR), Lowell Gardner (NRCS), Mark Ewell (NRCS/UDWR), John Rice (Mitigation Commission), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Steve Gray (UDWR), Mike Tamillos (USDA Wildlife Services), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Randy Larsen (BYU), Riley Peck (UDWR, BYU), Lorien Belton (USU Extension: recorder)**

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

**Project Updates**

Several project updates were discussed:

- The sagebrush treatment at Chicken Springs is now completed.
- There is still concern about musk thistle at the Trout Creek project area. The group discussed the possibility of the weed management group treating around the lake and also possibly the gravel pit, which is a source population of thistle. Nate Berg offered to contact the weed management group and discuss this further.
- The Wallsberg Knapweed Project is now all done except for the private land portion. It appears the landowner changed his mind about allowing the proposed treatment. This is a large problem for the long-term effectiveness of the project, since the private land is a key area of concern for the knapweed. Jan Anderson will work with Mark Farmer to see if additional discussions with the landowner might address his concerns.

**Kiosk Development**

The group discussed the informational kiosk planned for the Trout Creek parking lot. Lorien presented a draft design and message, created by several USU students as a class project, to the group. An alternate design and more detailed message draft, prepared by Rick Baxter of BYU, was also discussed. The group commented on the options and provided suggestions. Lorien will pass along both designs and the comments to the USU students to prepare a final draft for their class. The final design will need to meet Forest Service design specifications, which Lorien will manage if the students' final product is insufficient. The final product designed by the students will be circulated to the group.

Several key comments included:

- Keep the message positive

- Some history is valuable
- Emphasize current efforts to help the bird
- Key message is to not harass sage-grouse, and be aware that there are efforts to help sage-grouse ongoing in the area
- Include pictures that look like the birds people may actually see, rather than just the beautiful strutting pictures

In addition, the group concluded that an identical kiosk should be placed at the parking lot entrance to Soldier Creek campground, which is on Ed Collard's private land. At the Trout Creek site, the kiosk itself may not be sufficient. Nate Berg suggested several additional measures to improve the efficacy of the kiosk, including moving the existing kiosk (currently two panels; will be three with the sage-grouse section added) to a better location. Currently most vehicles park behind the existing kiosk and would be unlikely to read the material there based on its location. Nate distributed diagram of two potential new locations, as well as the boundaries of a fence which would maintain the current size of the parking lot. The current lot has expanded and may continue to do so without a barrier in place.

### **Presentation**

Jason Robinson gave a presentation on the basics of sage-grouse ecology and population trends, the current status and purpose of the state sage-grouse plan and associated appendices, and the status of the federal endangered species decision for sage-grouse. Jason explained that the listing decision is expected to be published in the Federal Register at the end of February 2010. The Utah state plan will continue to serve as a resource for the local working groups, including SVARM, regardless of the listing decision, as it contains a locally relevant information, references, additional resources, and recommendations. Appendix 5, about development issues, is the only remaining part of the plan that still is in the writing and approval process. Jason said he hoped that Appendix would be available by the end of January. It will be particularly helpful as the LWGs go about updating the local conservation plans this spring.

Jason answered several questions from the group. With regard to the impact of a potential listing, he noted that one impact would likely be greatly increased paperwork on projects, but otherwise probably not dramatically change what would be possible to do for grouse in the area.

One crucial element of planning for a potential sage-grouse listing, which also applies to all other sensitive species, is to make sure that project proposals (particularly those through UPCD) reference the part of either the state or local plan that indicates how a given project will benefit a species. This helps with record keeping and reporting requirements and enables the DWR to better document what is being done to help species.

Jason noted that there is now a central page for sage-grouse issues on the DWR's website, which includes the plan, plus links to habitat shape files and the local working groups' website.

### **Predator Management**

Mike Tamlllos noted that he is working on improved project design for predator control, particularly ravens. He suggested that strategic placement of poisoned eggs in a flagged environment might increase the effectiveness of the treatment. Randy Larsen offered to help discuss research design so that the impacts and effectiveness of treatment programs might be measured and better understood.

The group also discussed the state-wide limit on raven take, determined by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It became clear that more information was needed about the process for setting the current limit, as well as a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of the current efforts. Jason, Jan, Randy, Lorien, and Mike will continue discussions on this topic to try to learn more.

### **Addressing Development Issues**

Lorien asked the group what process it felt was appropriate to follow when potential development threats to sage-grouse are brought to the attention of the facilitator or another member of the group. Currently it is not clear what the role of SVARM should be in such cases.

Jason Robinson explained that comments from the DWR and from the local working group can and should be separate. For DWR comments, the formal process goes through the Salt Lake office. Another option is to address issues through the Rural Development Coordinating Council (RDCC) process.

Bob Riddle explained that from the county's point of view, any issues could be brought before the Public Lands Committee, which meets the first Wednesday of each month at 8 am in the old courthouse in Heber. Many agency representatives already attend the meeting and it is a good forum for bringing up possible concerns. The agenda is usually open enough to accommodate ideas, or one can request to be on the agenda. The chairman is Val Draper.

SVARM can also have one group member write a letter on behalf of the working group, and submit it to the county. The group expressed concern that most issues require much more rapid action than the SVARM meeting schedule would allow, but that urgent items could be handled over the email listserv.

### **Elected Chair Positions**

Both SVARM co-chairs elected last fall have left their positions. Nate Berg and Riley Peck agreed to serve as co-chairs. Co-chairs are an important local contact for the USU facilitator.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

Two upcoming meetings were scheduled: February 8th at 10 am, and April 19<sup>th</sup>. The April 19<sup>th</sup> meeting time will be determined by whether or not the group will be doing lek searching together or not. The meeting week could change based on weather, but Mondays seem to work well for the group.

### **Overview of Upcoming Year Planned Activities**

The group quickly reviewed the strategies in the local conservation plan and noted items planned for the upcoming year. Lorien will record these in a Plan of Work document and circulate it to the group. The purpose of this documentation is two-fold; first, to record projects and increase the ease of valuable reporting later, and second, to provide a basis for follow-up over the upcoming year. It is important for the group to be able to demonstrate the tangible results that come from the groups' efforts and meetings.

### **Actions Taken**

The group elected, by consensus, two new co-chairs: Nate Berg and Riley Peck. Nate will need to confirm that he can accept the position. [note from after the meeting: he can not currently accept]

### **Follow-up Needed**

- Nate Berg will discuss musk thistle issues in the Trout Creek and gravel pit areas with the weed management group.
- Jan Anderson will contact the private landowner involved with the Wallsberg Knapweed project to discuss options for completing the project in a way the landowner is comfortable with.
- Lorien will follow up with the students regarding the design, and circulate their final product via the group email list.
- Nate will take the lead on approvals and funding for the additional and changed infrastructure in the Trout Creek area.
- Mark Farmer or Steve Gray will contact Ed Collard to discuss the placement of the second kiosk at Soldier Creek.
- Lorien will send the link for the Studies in Avian Biology, as well as the new DWR website, to the group.
- Jason, Jan, Randy, Lorien, and Mike will continue discussions about raven control and limits in the state, as well as potential research opportunities and research design in the context of current control efforts.

**NEXT MEETING: February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at 10 am.**