

**STRAWBERRY
VALLEY
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: November 17, 2010

Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Place: Wasatch County Building

Members Present: Riley Peck (UDWR, BYU), Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Steve Smith (CWMU), Anthony Gray (USFS), Jared Zierenberg (USDA Wildlife Services), Michele Devaney (UACD), Covy Jones (UDWR), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension: recorder)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Mark Farmer reported that the second kiosk has been placed on Ed Collard's land.

Research Updates

Riley Peck provided a thorough overview of recent research work. Data collection is done and they are doing analysis on the major project in the area. Riley explained that questions were asked during the research and what the preliminary results appear to indicate. For example, the researchers were interested in whether the presence of translocated birds would change winter habitat selection of the population, which it does not appear to have done. Another question was about nest site fidelity, and the research shows that some birds do return to the same nest sites again. BYU is also finished additional trapping in the spring (18 birds) and fall (5 birds). The birds have clearly been using the recent treatment areas, which is good news. Unfortunately, nest success in 2010 has been very low (about 6%), which may be related to weather. There has been very high adult survival, however.

Additional information learned through the research:

- Winter habitats did not have to be large to be used.
- Most winter habitat use was west to southeast.
- The population is semi-migratory: some winter close to the lek (generally this is more males) while other winter down by Fruitland (more hens).
- Birds that are in Fruitland year-round very rarely go up to Strawberry.
- One bird from Strawberry goes all the way to Emmett Park.
- BYU tries to trap in Co-op creek because there are lots of birds there year-round. This may be due to the wide natural habitat variation in the area. There is a lot of silver sage, as well as an old burn. The group discussed whether intensive weed management in the area had also helped improve habitat.
- There is still grouse use in the area of Alan Smith's land that was very heavily spiked. (now a DWR manages the area as part of a CMWA)

Mark will send treatment polygons for upcoming projects to BYU for their feedback and review before flagging starts next summer.

This spring, Riley flew flights with the DWR to look for new leks. They found a lek relatively close to the currently known one, but it will be very difficult to count. It may be a second lek of a large complex. Based on current counts at just the known lek, the population in the area is estimated to be between 200 and 500 birds. The new lek will be counted in the spring by flying over. Riley noted that this could help support researchers' instinct that there are more birds in the area than the traditional estimation methods suggest.

Predation Issues

Predator control efforts in the area have continued. Mike Tamlllos did flag tests on eggs this spring. There was a plan originally to back off predator control efforts to determine how the sage-grouse population responded. Wildlife services did not do any red fox control this year. However, a private individual trapped at least 24 red foxes, so it is unclear exactly how this impacts the study. One person noted that the red fox population (and likely ravens as well) are probably sustained by the ice-fishing refuse available in the area; otherwise the area would probably be food-limited for them in the winter.

Ravens continue to be a potential problem for sage-grouse. It was noted that some of the problem ravens appear to be non-breeding birds in gangs, which may impact strategy. Someone else noted that the red fox population (and likely ravens as well) are probably sustained by the ice-fishing refuse available in the area; otherwise the area would probably be food-limited for them in the winter. In order to put out raven eggs, people need to have a pesticide certification. At least one DWR employee is considering taking the pesticide applicator course through USU so they can help place the baited eggs.

BYU and DWR need to discuss the predation management plan to see how we will move forward, or not, with raven control in the area. In addition, DWR and APHIS have a Dec 7th meeting to plan upcoming predator control efforts.

Habitat Projects

The habitat improvement projects in the area are in stage 3 of 4. As Riley noted, past treatment areas have already seen sage-grouse use.

One project is on the Alan Smith property, which is an addition to the largest wildlife management area in the state, Tabby. A fence will be put around that property. It will be a pole fence so that sage-grouse can see it and won't run into it, but also so that elk won't knock it down. The area is currently in crested wheat. It is grazed in the spring to help knock back that grass, and other work is being considered to help improve the vegetation diversity.

DWR crews have also been working on weed control on the management area.

There are still ongoing access issues on the Coleman property, which is a critical area for both sage-grouse and deer. Riley, Jim Spencer, and Brian Maxfield will work to help address the issues.

Another local property owner who has a second home here has been also talking to Brian and Jim. Brian will provide Riley with contact information for the property manager.

Weed Update

Mark Farmer noted that the Wallsburg project area is looking good. Trout Creek musk thistle is still a concern but is being discussed. Treatments in the Strawberry area will be monitored with photopoints. Bugs have been released on dalmation toadflax and it appears to be making progress. Someone noted that Plateau may also take out leafy spurge.

The county noted that they now have money to deal with weeds, so to let them know where there are problems.

Upcoming Issues

Bob Riddle reminded the group that any issues that need to be brought to the county can be address at the Public Lands Committee, which meets at 8 am in Heber on the first Wednesday of every month. The executive secretary for the County Council coordinates the agenda. Her number is 657-3195.

The routing of the TransWest powerline will soon be an issue SVARM will want to address. There will be scoping meetings after the new year. The closest meeting will be in Duchesne. Any new powerline would probably follow the existing pathway for current lines, but lines are required to be 1500 feet apart. It might not affect grouse if it goes through areas where there are no longer any birds, but this will need to be explored further when we know more. NEPA is being done by a third party.

Anthony Gray agreed to be the new co-chair as we currently only have one (Riley Peck).

Actions Taken

Anthony Gray was elected to be the new co-chair, a position which has been vacant for approximately a year.

Follow-up Needed

- BYU and DWR will discuss how predator control works into research design for population monitoring
- Weed issues should be brought to the county's attention
- Brian, Jim, and Riley will work together to address private lands access concerns as well as new opportunities, including exploring opportunities to help the Coleman property owner address unwanted public road access. Brian will follow up with Kirt Winterton at the county to see if we can help.

NEXT MEETING: To be determined

(post-meeting note: next meeting will be March 2nd)