

**STRAWBERRY
VALLEY
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: November 21, 2011

Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Place: Wasatch County Building (Conf Room B)

Members Present: Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Jan Anderson (Utah Farm Bureau Federation), Mike Tamlllos (USDA Wildlife Services), Covy Jones (UDWR), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Anthony Gray (USFS), Kim Hersey (UDWR), Matt Phillippi (NRCS), Tammy Koldyke (NRCS-SGI), Lowell Gardner (NRCS), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Allan Sulser (USU Ext), PJ Abraham (FFSL), Lorien Belton (USU Extension: recorder/facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Sage-Grouse Habitat Pocket Guide

Lorien provided copies of the new habitat guide, produced by USU Wildlife Extension, to all meeting attendees. Jan Anderson noted that he had handed out 30 at the Farm Bureau Convention the previous week.

NRCS Updates

The Sage-Grouse Initiative, an NRCS program that focuses EQIP and WHIP funds on sage-grouse habitat improvement projects, is continuing to build momentum. Many sage-grouse biologists (25-30) have been jointly hired by Mule Deer Foundation, NRCS, and others. There will be three in Utah and others in many other western states. Their role will be to increase implementation of SGI projects. The group welcomed Tammy Koldyke, who will be the SGI biologist out of the Ogden office. The biologists will be doing a week-long training the last week of November in the Tooele area.

There are two proposed SGI projects in the Strawberry area. One will apply this year, and the other will be planned during the upcoming year but will be submitted for 2013 funding. One of the projects is adjacent to the Wildcat chain harrow project on DWR land, so will be able to expand the benefits of that project.

There is currently a staff transition: Mark Chamberlain has retired, and Mark Ewell is covering the position.

Research Update

BYU is at a turning point with research, looking for additional funding to continue as well as new focus.

Jason noted that after the most recent sage-grouse mapping exercise, the Strawberry Valley population is now a red dot on the map that shows how sage-grouse population centers are distributed proportionally throughout the state. This may be partly due to recent declines in the Rich and West Box Elder populations following this year's long wet spring. In addition, this reflects the discovery of the second lek at Strawberry.

Brian Maxfield noted that two new possible leks were identified in the Fruitland area during helicopter surveys. They will be counted on foot next season. Leks are only added to the statewide database if they are counted two years in a row.

BLM planning

Jason explained that the BLM will be updating Resource Management Plans to include sage-grouse protections. An instructional memorandum from BLM is expected out soon. Jason has participated on the national technical team that provided the technical background for the process. Jan expressed concern that this would be overkill, and focus all management energy on sage-grouse.

Jason noted that a new book by Dave Naugle, focused on wildlife and the oil and gas industry, has extensive discussions that may be of interest to LWG members.

Project Updates

Mark and Covy explained the current habitat improvement projects. The multi-phase habitat treatments were continued this summer, when another 500 acres was treated. This is the third of four phases, based on current plans. Trout Creek was done in 2007, Chicken Springs in 2009, Badger Hollow in 2011 (this past summer), and Sage Creek Bay is in the planning stages. If funded, it will be a treatment in 2013, just west of the most recent work. Future treatment areas are being proposed south of the reservoir, based on BYU work. Everyone agreed that continued monitoring to understand the impact of the projects is critical.

The group briefly discussed how valuable it would be to engage the Ute tribe in the projects, since their land is adjacent to some of the treatment areas. Randall is the tribal contact. Covy will be taking the next appropriate steps toward that goal.

A goal for this upcoming year is to coordinate weed treatments with the County. The County has Title II project money and plans to help manage weeds associated with the habitat work. The Wallsburg project, (knapweed focused) is looking good. Also, Dalmatian toadflax populations seem to be collapsing since the county introduced biological controls.

Upcoming Work and Goals for Next Year

Goals for next year include:

- Continued focus on the raven population reduction. Mike Tamlllos is trying to target populations early. Anyone who sees large groups of ravens in the area should alert Mike at 435-840-2474. Having additional individuals focused on understanding where and when ravens are congregating will be helpful.
- Continue working with the two proposed SGI projects (Fitzgerald and Bench)
- DWR will also be doing a chaining on DWR property on Wildcat. In future years, more could be done nearer to the Coleman property, particularly if the new leks turn out to be real. DWR may need help flagging; contact Mark or Covy if interested.
- Updating the plan will continue, with the goal of being done late this spring.

The group expressed interest in getting more updates on political issues, new research, books, etc. that are relevant to sage-grouse issues.

Actions Taken

Covy was elected to be the new SVARM co-chair, replacing Riley Peck, who has taken a new job after finishing his graduate work at BYU. He will be the DWR sensitive species biologist for the northern region.

Follow-up Needed

- Covy will work with Randall to see how to better engage the Ute Tribe in project discussions.
- Lorien will keep the group updated as the BLM process continues.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be February 1, 2012. The following meeting will be held March 28th.