

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL  
WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date:** December 4, 2014

**Place:** Wasatch County Health Building

**Members Present:** Jim Spencer (NRCS), Natasha Gruber Hadden (SGI/NRCS), Ron Johnson (Duchesne County), Anthony Gray (USFS), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Matt Howard (UDWR), Chet Fitzgerald (NRCS), Terri Pope (UDWR), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (UWDR), Richard Mingo (URMCC), Eric Ellis (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*Statewide Conifer Encroachment Strategy*

Eric Ellis presented the statewide conifer encroachment strategy. Using the NRCS tool developed earlier this year, biologists around the state suggested high-priority areas for conifer removal, as a starting point for a long-term strategy. Those were refined further into areas for immediate work (0-2 years), as well as longer-term timeframes of approximately 5 years and 10 years. Colors of the polygons on the map represent those timeframes. Most of the polygons area Phase I or Phase II juniper sites. Most of the polygons for this area are on private and state land in the lower elevations of the SGMA (Fruitland area). The working group did not have any comments at the meeting. Brian Maxfield noted that the polygons shown on the map did not include all of his initial suggestions. They should help direct WRI funding around the state. Eric Ellis will provide additional information on how to access the shape files, so Lorien can send it to the group.

*Scout Availability*

Lorien read an email from Jason Robinson about Eagle Scouts in Wasatch County who are looking for projects and could help with sage-grouse projects. Lorien will pass the information along to Natasha.

*Disturbance Maps*

Eric Ellis presented the draft disturbance map of the Strawberry SGMA. It will be used as a baseline for any disturbances to sage-grouse habitat in the future. The University partners who created the map had some questions about polygons that they were uncertain about identifying. Those blue polygons were reviewed by the group in this meeting. The group spent over an hour working on the map. Many of the polygons were old habitat treatments and road-related disturbances.

Eric noted that the main need is to confirm that the map is an accurate representation as of April 1, 2013. Any future habitat disturbance calculations will be ground-truthed, but this provides a baseline from which to calculate future changes.

### *Upcoming Projects*

No one was aware of specific sage-grouse habitat projects likely to be proposed year in the area. No USFS projects are planned, although the NEPA for a wide-range series of habitat projects (similar to the previous Trout Creek, Chicken Springs, Badger Hollow projects) will be developed. Anthony Gray and Mark Farmer will discuss next steps, including drawing potential project polygons.

The highest priority PJ removal projects will all be on private land, near the leks. Natasha is the lead on this effort.

The Nature Conservancy and UDWR have been working on a sagebrush condition assessment map for Utah, and have information on the Strawberry SGMA area. The group expressed interested in Lorien asking for a presentation on how to use this to inform long-term strategy for projects in the area.

### *Weeds in Fruitland*

Ron Johnson, the weed supervisor for Duchesne County, attended the meeting. The group discussed making sure that Ron is kept aware of weed issues affecting sage-grouse in that county. Someone noted that some spotted knapweed was seen recently in the Fruitland area.

The group reviewed the history of weed management on sagebrush treatment project areas. Mark Farmer noted that the Badger Hollow treatment has been carefully monitored for weeds, and there have been very few concerns. The main problem was with Trout Creek (the original treatment in the series) which had weed concerns due to its proximity to a gravel pit.

### *International Sage-Grouse Forum*

The International Sage-Grouse Forum was held in Salt Lake City in November. Lorien provided a brief overview of some of the sessions. About a third of the people attending this meeting had gone to the event. It is currently available to be streamed live for a fee. There are currently efforts to make the streaming available for free sooner than originally planned. Lorien will send out info with a link to the Forum website, and will also let the group know if the sessions are made available for free at a later date.

### *Private and Tribal Lands Projects Update*

Natasha provided updates on NRCS work for sage-grouse. SGI projects applications are being

accepted for this year. The tentative deadline for SGI projects this year is March 20. Anyone interested in a project should contact Natasha or their local NRCS office. Natasha Gruber, Alison Whittaker, and Mark Farmer discussed working together to propose projects with the tribe in conjunction with NEPA planning for adjacent federal lands in the SGMA. Right now the tribe does not have a biologist and the contact for future projects is Roland. The tribe is also working on finishing many other projects this year, so any new ideas might need to be planned for two years away.

The statewide fence marker project is essentially out of fence markers, meaning that hundreds of thousands of markers have been put out around the state in the last year.

### *Future Meeting Topics and Field Tour Ideas*

Lorien noted that the SVARM group had a good response rate on the LWG survey that was conducted a year ago. One request was for additional field tours. The group discussed going back to visit projects that have now had time to grow, such as Trout Creek that was done 8 years ago. Although previous tours have visited the site, it is still interesting to see the progression. Mark noted that there is some possibility of planning a retreatment there for ten years after the original project. Another possible field tour would be a May lek viewing visit. This could be very difficult based on weather conditions, but can be examined as a possibility this spring when we know more about the snowpack. A trip to Wildcat would be most feasible, if snow conditions permit.

Lorien asked the group to consider what information or presentations would be of interest at future meetings. Ideas from the group included:

- Updates from BYU on their research efforts
- Information on the sagebrush condition assessment
- Information on the Badger Hollow and silver sage projects (Mark Farmer)
- Updates or planning coordination regarding the NEPA planning for future projects on Forest Service land (such as commenting on draft ideas)

Lorien will follow up with these people to schedule presentations at future meetings.

### **Follow-up Needed**

- Eric Ellis will take the new information on the disturbance maps back to the UDWR GIS department to have it digitized.
- Lorien will pass the eagle scout information along to Natasha.
- Lorien will notify the group when the SGI applications deadline is confirmed.
- Lorien will explore opportunities to have presentations at future LWG meetings from BYU researchers, or about sagebrush condition assessment tools, or other projects.
- Lorien will send out info with a link to the Forum website, and will also let the group

know if the sessions are made available for free at a later date.

- Lorien will work with UDWR in the spring to determine the feasibility of a lek viewing trip to Wildcat as a field tour.

**NEXT MEETING:**

The next meeting will be held January 15, in Heber, to discuss any WRI project review comments prior to the January 21 ranking committee meetings in Northeastern and Central regions, both of which overlap the Strawberry SGMA boundary.