

**STRAWBERRY
VALLEY
LOCAL
WORKING
GROUP**

Date: February 3, 2016

Place: Wasatch County Health Building

Members Present: Terri Pop (UDWR), Roland McCook (Ute Tribe), Dave Hales (Strawberry Cove II), Mark Peterson (UFB), Leah Lewis (NRCS/SGI), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Alison Whittaker (UWDR), Jared Baxter (BYU/UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

Project Proposals

Alison presented the one WRI project proposed for the Strawberry area, a re-treatment of sagebrush in the Trout Creek area (#3798). The re-entry is possible based on the original NEPA, and will involve retreating the area to open up brood rearing areas which were originally treated in 2008. The sagebrush has since filled in to the point that additional sagebrush removal would improve the area for sage-grouse habitat. The new project will be done with the chain harrow, and will create polygons with partial overlap with the original treatment polygons, with the intent of creating a large diversity of different sagebrush heights in the area.

NEPA for a suite of future projects (discussed in detail at the November 2015 meeting) in new areas is in progress through the Forest Service, with Traci Allen and Anthony Gray leading the effort.

The group discussed additional potential projects on tribal land, as well as contracting and equipment options. Someone raised the possibility of using spike in future treatments to reduce the regrowth of sagebrush in this higher precipitation zone. Roland noted that the tribe would likely be averse to any chemical usage in projects on tribal.

Mark Peterson suggested looking at overland flow paths where understory is missing in sagebrush. Understanding the surface hydrology will help design better habitat improvement projects.

Alison demonstrated several features of the new database, including range-trend photo-point history that is accessible through the WRI portal. Alison noted that she is replacing Nathan Kota as the primary database manager in the Salt Lake office, so her position in the central region will be open.

Allison will send Roland some photo points (before and after) to use in demonstrating potential project results to tribal decision makers.

Strawberry Cove update

Dave Hale, representative for Strawberry Cove proposed development, updated the group on the status of the development, near Soldier Creek Marina on Strawberry Reservoir. It has received preliminary approval from the county. It would be a seasonal use area, and the road would not be improved. The group discussed the location and other surrounding land. The private land forms a small extension into public land. According to Jared, the sage-grouse in the area do not use the area proposal for development at the end of Soldier Creek Road, but do come fairly close. More critical wintering habitat is found on the private land at the of the small area to the south. Dave noted that he did not know the owners but was not aware of any plans to develop that area. There may be complex title issues associated with some of that ground as well.

Farm Bureau easement program

Mark Peterson explained the basis for a program developing for landowners who are interested in being paid, via mitigation credits, for managing their land well. The program is via a company named KCoe, a large finance and planning company that works with agriculture. The Farm Bureau is also supporting Mark's efforts. Right now, Mark is trying to guage interest from landowners. He has a no-obligation sign-up sheet for landowners who might be interested, so that as opportunities arise they could be contacted.

The program would essentially use corporate mitigation requirements to provide funds for private landowners who could provide credits on their land. KCoe's Conservation Services arm (KICS) works with the companies, and Mark works with landowners. They are working to create a mitigation program for sage-grouse. It would need to conform to the various FWS requirements to ensure that the companies can get credits that they need through the system. KCoe has a scientist who would help with determining "how good is good enough," and state wildlife agencies would also be involved where appropriate. The program is just developing. Interested landowners can fill out a form, or contact Mark directly at 801-450-5981.

It was recommended that Mark connect with Alan Clark, who is working on other mitigation efforts for sage-grouse in the state of Utah.

Mark noted that he is also working in the Price area. Lorien will add Mark to the CaCoARM email list.

NRCS updates

The sign-up deadline for SGI projects is February 19th. Leah's current efforts are on getting known interested parties signed up. She will be working during the spring and summer to do project planning so that next year's winter deadline will be well-timed for projects that have been planned already.

SIG will be focusing on wet meadow restoration as a big part of future efforts.

Leah also noted that she can help ensure that the permittees on the proposed Strawberry projects that are currently on grazed areas get involved as early as possible in the project planning process.

Follow-up Needed

- Allison will send Roland some photo points (before and after) to use in demonstrating potential project results to tribal decision makers.
- Lorien will contact Mark regarding the sagebrush conference, UGS efforts in the state, mitigation, and the Price working group.
- Leah will contact Traci and Anthony to make sure she can contact the permittees on the possible grazed project areas to be included in the upcoming NEPA.

Next Meetings

The next meeting will be scheduled for late spring, using a doodle poll. A field tour in late June or early July would be an idea to visit some of the proposed project areas for the upcoming projects, particularly Co-op Creek.