

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date: March 2, 2011**

**Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm**

**Place: Wasatch County Building**

**Members Present:** Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Jan Anderson (Farm Bureau), Mark Farmer (UDWR), Anthony Gray (USFS), Jason Robinson (UDWR), Mike Tamlllos (USDA Wildlife Services), John Rice (Mitigation Commission), Michele Devaney (NRCS), Covy Jones (UDWR), Jim Carter (FOSV), Pam Juliano (Congressman Jim Mattheson's office), Lorien Belton (USU Extension: recorder)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

**Research Updates**

Jason Robinson provided updates on the ongoing research in the area, as Randy Larsen and Riley Peck were unable to attend the meeting.

- The most recent annual survival numbers were low, particularly in comparison to last year's unusually high survival. Final figures will be available near the end of March.
- BYU now has tracked ATVs to improve their ability to track birds during the time when neither ATVs nor snowmobiles are adequate for reaching remote locations.
- Last year's helicopter flights found more birds, so this year there will be a focus on trying to understand whether lek numbers are going down or whether a new previously uncounted lek has drawn birds away from previously counted leks.
- Riley's project is wrapping up. The next step is to evaluate new needs and 13 years of data. A meeting is scheduled soon to begin that discussion.

Mark Farmer noted that we really need to understand how the habitat projects are affecting grouse. Ideally, quantifiable data would be very helpful, particularly for WRI reporting and to respond to FWS data calls. John Rice noted that with declining numbers of collared birds, that will be more difficult. Jason explained that there are plans to collar more birds to answer those questions.

Jason noted that each state does an annual update in early March to report the good projects that have been done in the last year for sage-grouse. Specific evidence that there is a benefit to grouse is very helpful for those reports. The two things noted particularly by the FWS when the greater sage-grouse was given candidate species status last March were inadequate regulatory mechanisms to protect sage-grouse, and habitat concerns. The more data we have on sage-grouse use of habitat treatments, the better we can understand how to help the birds. Projects done for sage-grouse that do not show any evidence of definitely improving things for the birds are still put in the database, but do not carry as much weight.

**Updates**

*Shape Files Updated*

Jason reported that UDWR now has updated shape files for winter and brood rearing habitat – available as a link from the Division’s sage-grouse web page – as well as a new category of shape file, “occupied habitat.” Lorien will send out the link to all the counties and groups. The shape files are of particular interest to counties since they can help with planning of developments.

*Proposed Powerlines*

The group reviewed the TransWest Powerline routing proposal currently being discussed in scoping meetings throughout the region. The group’s main concern was that the powerlines could provide raptor perches and increase predation concerns. Next week, Jason will be attending a tall structures working group that will consider those concerns. Overall, the TransWest powerline’s preferred route is acceptable to the sage-grouse group, as it will follow the existing corridor. The proposed Gateway South powerline may also come through Wasatch County, in the Soldier Summit area. That process is not as far along. Lorien and others will keep the group updated if Gateway South issues appear to be relevant to this working group.

*Development Concerns*

Jim Carter gave a presentation to the group about a large potential proposed development (the Strawberry Ranch Development) in the Strawberry Reservoir area, which could involve year-round residences and a large number of recreation opportunities, on 6600 acres of private ground near the reservoir. It might have implications for the lek if the project gets off the ground. Currently, formal proposals to the county with regard to the housing/recreation portion of the development are waiting on the development of an appropriate access road, which involves discussions with the Bureau of Reclamation, Wasatch County, Forest Service, and others. NEPA for the road is ongoing. The development could, if realized, bring substantial traffic and recreation use to the area, particularly during seasons when that has not been a concern for sage-grouse in the past. Jim will keep the group updated with any relevant details.

*County Presentations*

Jason and Lorien presented to the Public Lands Subcommittee of the Wasatch County Council. The three council members in attendance at the meeting had a number of questions and were appreciative of the information that was provided about sage-grouse in general, locally, and the work of the LWG, as well as a better understanding of the listing decision from last year.

*FOSV Info Request*

Friends of Strawberry Valley is a local group that coordinates information sharing between many

Strawberry- area agencies and other interested parties, including the public. They have asked that SVARM produce a one-page description of the history and status of sage-grouse in the area, ideally with several pictures as well. The group provided many suggestions of places where some information has already been written. Lorien will draft a page and send it to the group for any suggestions before providing it to the FOSV folks.

### *UPCD Habitat Projects*

The Badger Hollow/Chicken Springs project will be flagged in July. This is a wildlife habitat improvement project and the area is not grazed. The Strawberry mowing proposed project needs more discussion to be very helpful to sage-grouse. Mark Farmer will get the original maps to Anthony Gray and continue those discussions.

### *Predator Management*

Predator management starts in early March. This year, the only plans are for raven control (poisoned eggs). Some of the predator control is also related to the deer management unit in the area. Approximately 600 eggs per week is the Forest Service limit. Raven populations will be the focus of the control efforts, not just sage-grouse areas. Fruitland are raven concentrations will be a focus, so that fewer ravens make it to Strawberry to affect the sage-grouse.

There are currently no plans to control red foxes. At the last meeting, it was noted that a private individual had taken a number of foxes, potentially complicating the research design that was going to look at the impact of not controlling foxes. Mike Tamlllos explained that the 24 privately trapped foxes were most likely dispersing individuals, not established pairs. Their presence probably indicates that the number of dens in the area is increasing again, after intensive efforts by USDA-WS from 2003 to 2008 to reduce the number of dens. The number of dens found each year diminished steadily from 7 in 2003 to 1 in 2008. Best estimates of current population numbers are only best estimates because there are not predator inventories beyond what WS learns during the control efforts.

### *Field Tour Planning*

Ideas for the summer field tour included:

- Getting Wasatch County Council members out to the chaining sites to help them understand how chainings can benefit wildlife
- History of the Strawberry grouse populations and research
- Co-op creek to look at the impact snow machines make
- Trout Creek to look at the forb recovery and weed issues several years out
- Chicken Springs to look at a more recent project
- A tour in June if we want to have a vegetation focus, or in August if we are interested to see the machines actually doing treatments

**Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will send a link to the updated sage-grouse habitat GIS shape files to the group and the county.
- Lorien will draft a one-page look at history and status of local sage-grouse for FOSV
- Mark and Anthony will coordinate to improve project design for the Strawberry mowing project proposed through UPCD for WRI funding
- DWR will coordinate with BYU to discuss habitat project evaluation needs as part of future research design goals

**NEXT MEETING: April 27, 2011**