

**STRAWBERRY
VALLEY
LOCAL WORKING
GROUP**

Date: March 28, 2012

Place: USFS Ranger Station

Members Present: Mark Farmer (UDWR), Randy Larsen (BYU), Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Matt Phillipi (NRCS), Doug Braumberger (private citizen), Chris Perkins (USDA Wildlife Services), Anthony Gray (USFS), Clint McCarthy (USFS), Kim Hersey (UDWR), Tammy Koldyke (NRCS/SGL), Ryan Thornock (Farm Bureau), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

Information Presented/Discussion Highlights

BYU Research Updates

Randy Larsen presented an overview of what the BYU research program has been doing and learning over the past few years. One of their goals was to understand what factors in the environment might be limiting the growth of the population. The area is very mesic (wet) compared to other sage-grouse areas, so it seemed unlikely that water was a limiting factor. Predation was very high in the area, however. Research looked at bird populations and predation management. The population increased from about 100 birds to about 400 birds in the span of 13 years.

The research also looked at the bird response to habitat treatments designed to improve brood-rearing habitat. The use of the treated areas by sage-grouse increased, particularly around the edges. The researchers are now looking for relationships with vital rates, such as brood success. They will be trapping again this spring to gather more data.

DWR Updates

Brian Maxfield reported that there were 19 birds on the Fruitland lek and 11 on Currant Creek, and there is one lek which, if it has birds two years in a row, will be a new lek. This new potential lek is on private land.

Several new project proposals are in the works. A Dixie harrow project on Wildcat has been proposed, and the sage-creek bay project will be the fourth of four phases of habitat projects in the Strawberry Reservoir area. It was noted that these sagebrush treatment projects to benefit sage-grouse are sometimes controversial, and success may depend on what kind of sagebrush, in addition to moisture regimes, occur in the area.

It would be great to find additional funding to collar more birds in the Strawberry area.

USFS Updates

Clint McCarthy from the USFS gave a presentation on the role of the USFS in sage-grouse management, and what it would mean for Utah. Eight percent of sage-grouse habitat range-wide is on Forest Service land, but most of that (79%) is in Region 4.

The BLM is working on environmental impact assessments as the first step to amending BLM land use plans. They are treating each state as its own subregion, with its own EIS. The forests in Utah will also use that same Utah EIS for the Forest Service plan amendment process. Although the BLM and USFS will use the same EIS, each will issue separate records of decision. All forests in Utah will be considered for amendment. Ron Rodriguez is the official liaison. USFS is also working on an interim guidance plan similar to the one issued by the BLM. Because sage-grouse are a sensitive species for the USFS, it is important that all the rules for sensitive species be considered.

Bob Riddle asked Clint what he thought it would restrict. Clint explained that it was likely to be more outcomes-based rather than rule-based, but he has not seen the final yet. Clint is also working on a dichotomous key of sorts that would help provide decision support for when to do vegetation treatments.

Additional Discussion

Tammy Koldyke and Natasha Gruber are the NRCS/Sage-Grouse Initiative biologists tasked with helping get NRCS funds for sage-grouse into on-the-ground projects. Anyone with project ideas or interested landowners should contact Tammy or Natasha.

The group briefly discussed the local conservation plan. Ryan requested that the language in the plan be clarified to reflect the idea that overgrazing, not all grazing, was a problem for sage-grouse. The group agreed that this would be appropriate. Lorien will review the text and make clarifications as needed.

The idea of using Eagle Scouts or FFA members to do fence marking was suggested. If future projects arise, we should look into that option.

Follow-up Needed

- Lorien will keep the group up to date with opportunities to comment on the federal processes and what is happening with the state sage-grouse task force.
- Lorien will send Brian the thesis on fence collisions
- Lorien will send the SVARM plan to Ryan
- Lorien will review the local plan and clarify grazing/overgrazing where needed.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be scheduled based on the BLM/USFS process or other feedback needs.

A field tour to the Fruitland area to discuss weeds might be a good focus for the next trip, and a way to engage the weed management coordinators in that area.