

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date:** March 28, 2013

**Place:** Wasatch County Health Building

**Members Present:** Robert Riddle (Wasatch County Public Lands), Garrick Hall (Utah Farm Bureau), Brian Maxfield (UDWR), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Natasha Gruber (SGI/NRCS), Tammy Koldyke (SGI/NRCS), Anthony Gray (USFS), Kim Hersey (UDWR), Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*NRCS and SGI work*

Natasha introduced NRCS's statewide fence marking project. The goal is to have all fences that are high-risk for sage-grouse collisions, on private land, marked with fence markers by the end of the year. Currently, NRCS is using a GIS layer that shows risk in breeding areas, but winter areas will be included as well where known. Right now, they are working to develop estimates of the number of miles of fence to be marked, so the right amount of materials can be purchased.

A significant effort will be required to both make and install the markers. Natasha has posted something on the Dedicated Hunters website, but may extend that beyond northeastern region, to increase the response from the Wasatch Front communities. Jim suggested that the NRCS Earth Team volunteers could be helpful as well. Once we have more information on the scope of the project (hopefully soon), there will be more need for volunteer mobilization. Although NRCS is not coordinating efforts on federal lands, it would be good to coordinate efforts, possibly using similar reporting systems. Anthony noted that the YCC will be helping with projects on Forest Service this season, and might be able to assist with this project. Forest Service has GIS layers for existing fences. Tammy, Natasha, and Anthony will coordinate.

Brian mentioned that the new fences on the Fruitland area WMAs have already been marked, and many have been rebuilt with top rails to prevent big game-related damage. This has been done on boundary fencing, while internal fences are gradually being removed.

The group also discussed general sage-grouse initiative projects. There was some confusion about whether a recent project on private land had been done with SGI funds or not; Tammy confirmed that it had. Several group members will need to follow up as the contractor was not paid. Several positions being vacated at the time of the project likely contributed to the situation. After an extended discussion about the appropriate role of DWR assistance in NRCS SGI and other EQIP projects, the group recommended that SGI biologists confirm with the NRCS leadership about the best

procedures to follow, particularly in the northern region, which overlaps the Strawberry LWG area.

Also, Lowell Gardner's position has not been reposted yet, but some of the duties will be filled temporarily by a range student.

### *UPCD project updates*

Another phase of the sagebrush projects in Strawberry has been proposed for this year, in Sage Creek – and is likely to receive funding.

### *Research Updates*

Randy Larsen and others at BYU have finished a scientific research article on the 13-year study done in the Strawberry area. It will be finalized very soon. A white paper with additional information on the area is also in progress. The same team has just finished some additional spring trapping efforts, and is still tracking collared grouse in the area.

### *State and Federal Planning Processes*

Lorien provided brief updates on the State of Utah and BLM/USFS planning processes. The Draft EIS for BLM/USFS may be available for public comment this summer. We are still waiting for the governor's plan to be released. Based on the previous drafts of the Utah plan, some of the key components will be:

- Voluntary for private lands and SITLA
- Ambitious acreage goals for habitat improvement, easements, etc.
- Population goals for increasing sage-grouse populations.
- 5% disturbance limit inside the Sage-Grouse Management Areas
- Mitigation bank to be a large part of the process
- Local working groups will be part of implementation, though the details have not yet been determined.

The USFS has released interim guidelines, similar to BLM's process in December 2011. Bob requested a copy electronically. Lorien will provide updates on all planning processes, and the LWG's role in implementation, to the group as they become available.

### *Transmission Line Updates*

The large transmission lines proposed for the area (TransWest and Gateway South) both appear to be leaning toward the Fruitland pathway. There is also a third transmission line in discussion. Having three transmission lines going through the area would be a potential large impact. The group will need to continue paying attention to the situations.

*Oil and Gas Development issues*

During the last meeting, a question was raised about how newly issued oil shale/tar sands (OS/TS) regulations would relate to sage-grouse. Those areas where OS/TS will be permitted is largely outside the sage-grouse management areas in the draft Utah state sage-grouse plan. No one representing OS/TS was at this meeting and no further discussion took place.

A small company is currently exploring for oil in the Fruitland area. The company has been invited to participate in the LWG if they are interested. They are aware of the sage-grouse issues, and have been in discussions with adjacent landowners to get access to the area. The current plans appear to mostly have impacts outside of the sage-grouse areas. There is only currently one well likely. If they find oil, they would likely sell to a larger company. Other energy interests in the area include Berry, which was recently bought out, according to one of the LWG attendees, and Bill Barrett. Most other activity is east of the sage-grouse habitat.

**Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will keep the group up to date with opportunities to comment on the federal and/or state sage-grouse planning processes.
- Lorien will send Bob and others the USFS guidelines.
- Tammy, Natasha, and Anthony will coordinate regarding fence marking on Forest Service lands.
- Tammy will follow up with Brian and others regarding the completed private land sagebrush project discussed during the meeting.
- Lorien and others will stay apprised of transmission line and energy exploration developments, bringing updates to the group in the future.

**NEXT MEETING:**

The next meeting will be scheduled based on field tour ideas or progress on the governor's plan. No one had strong opinions on future field tour ideas. Going to the same projects has been good but it may be time for a change.