

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date: March 3, 2009**

**Time: 9:30 am – 12:15 pm**

**Place: Wasatch County Building**

**Members Present: Jason Robinson (DWR), Casey Riches (DWR), Mark Farmer (DWR), Barbara Carey (RC&D and NRCS), Lowell Gardner (NRCS), Steve Smith (Wasatch Co. CWMA), Steve Cox (USU Extension), John Rice (Mitigation Commission), Mike Tamlllos (USDA Wildlife Services), Jared Zierenberg (USDA Wildlife Services), Michael Bornstein (USFS), Alicia Moulton (USU Extension), Robert Riddle (Wasatch County), Jared Baxter (BYU), Lorien Belton (USU Extension: recorder)**

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

**Wind Energy**

Mike Bornstein distributed copies of the letter he drafted to state SVARM's position on wind energy. Anyone is welcome to edit it.

Bob Riddle noted that there is some concern whether the wind energy guidelines for Prairie grouse rather than sage grouse. Jason mentioned that sage-grouse research on windmills is currently coming out of Wyoming and California that indicates there is avoidance.

Jason noted that the state sage-grouse plan will probably have good guidelines on this (once it has gone through the wildlife board and the RAC.) One suggestion has been that no tall structures be placed within one mile of an active lek, and reduced heights within 4 miles. They are also hoping to keep noise levels down to 40 decibels. Mark asked if we should wait to do this letter until after the state sage grouse plan comes out. That way we can take the general guidelines within that but apply it to local conditions. That plan hopefully will be done in May. Everyone agreed to postpone further discussion of wind energy stances until after the completed state plan is available.

**Counties and Sage-Grouse Sensitive Planning**

It would be useful to have critical habitat areas known to county planning. Jason noted that because Utah grouse populations are small, pretty much anywhere grouse are qualifies as "critical."

There is a move within the division to get habitat data to counties. Jason noted that that data is on the DWR website and is available. Lorien should make sure this group and other LWGs know where to get this information.

Don Wood is the county contact to add shape files to the map. Lorien will contact him with appropriate information and to get a copy of the map for the LWG to use during meetings.

### **Other Updates**

Mike Bornstein noted that there is now a new Forest Service District Ranger, Jeff Shram, from Vernal, to replace Julie King.

Jason provided a listing petition update: the listing decision was postponed and not released in December as planned. There may be a decision this summer and it will be based on some new status reviews and some in-progress rangewide articles are available.

The weed folks noted that weeds are starting to peek out from under snow banks, and everyone should be alert to where they see them.

Jared provided an update on the Coleman property. The relationship concerns (discussed at the last SVARM meeting) appear to be improving; BYU folks will be meeting with family soon to discuss requirements for monitoring access.

### **Lek Searching**

Jason says that this year, the Division will use helicopter flights to search for new leks. Nearby efforts will include mid-April flights near Fruitland. They will also be using a standard protocol to show where searches *didn't* find anything, in addition to new leks found. Past on-the-ground lek searching was been coordinated by BYU; however, there may not be records of exactly where searches were done.

Mike Tamlllos indicated that APHIS also flies with the fixed-wing and therefore has the potential to survey for new leks during the course of other operations. Mike will speak to Jason after the meeting about their flights.

Jared says he is willing to spearhead the lek searching this year. Jason asked that he coordinate with Brian and Randall at DWR to avoid overlapping efforts. Also we should keep records of where we've been and get the information to Jason. Lorien will follow up with Jason and DWR to keep the group updated about searches.

The earliest lek dates would be early March in lower elevations, peak in early April, and a little into May. Earliest nesting would be April. Most in Strawberry would be May nests.

### **Forest Service Transportation Planning and Snowmobile Use Guidelines**

A seasonal closure would be very helpful for sage-grouse. Even if it doesn't happen or The Forest Service doesn't have resources to enforce it, just the process of asking will raise awareness. The Forest Service transportation plan was discussed briefly. There had been discussion of a winter closure in critical habitat this winter, but it didn't happen. Jared explained that there is significant recreation use in critical areas. Mike Bornstein will revisit this issue and work to incorporate sage-grouse restrictions into next year's plan.

Someone mentioned that ATV or snowmobile trip planning often happens the night before online, and it would be very useful to put sage-grouse-related information online if that is a possibility.

### **Brochure and Kiosk**

Lorien presented the group with draft copies of a brochure that each LWG can customize to its own needs. The draft brochure provided had general sage-grouse and threat information. The group agreed that a brochure would be useful. It would be good to have a general one, but also one for recreationalists, one for landowners who live in sage-grouse area, maybe also one for ranchers. Although development is a key threat, a brochure would probably be less useful than working directly with the county.

The Strawberry Visitor's Center could provide the brochures for recreationalists, but the winter closure limits exposure to snowmobilers. Other options to reach that group might be snowmobile rental agencies, shows, the Marina, Daniel's Summit, and placement at parking lot kiosks.

The group might make a kiosk strategically placed at the Soldier Creek campground parking lot; that could get more bang for the buck. Could use dedicated hunters to help build a kiosk if we need one; there's nothing there right now. It would be nice to have a map of safer places to go, except there's not much that's "safe" for the grouse. However, reminding folks about basics would be good:

- don't run over sage-grouse
- avoid scaring or stressing them

Other points to consider when developing the brochure/kiosk information:

- Development folks overlap with the recreation, so homeowners are actually a target audience for snowmobiling efforts.
- Also need to add ATV information to the same brochure since the basics are the same.
- We will not include specific lek location data as that is sensitive information.
- It might also include something about shed antler hunting. It would be useful to have in the sage-grouse brochure since, although there is an online course that shed hunters are required to take but it is unlikely that sage-grouse concerns would be incorporated directly into that training since if shed hunters follow the general guidelines presented, potential impacts on sage-grouse would be reduced. Jason noted that, along those lines,

DWR is trying to reduce the number of regulations in the hunting books since it is already so long and the impression is that individuals do not read it thoroughly already.

- Kiosk information could also include information on the vegetation treatments. Could do a kiosk at Trout Creek also with both recreation and vegetation data.
- There are opportunities for a kiosk with locally-relevant trail info, but with a brochure that is general across the state.

### **Kiosk and Brochure Design Next Steps:**

- DWR can put out a dedicated hunters request if we had specifics on what kind of kiosk.
- Mike Bornstein will look into what kinds of kiosk designs template are available, including possibly mobile ones for winter placement only people don't become habituated to it.
- Jared will look for a recreation major at BYU who could help design a kiosk.
- Lorien will coordinate with Mike Bornstein, Jared, and Mark Farmer to start the process of kiosk and brochure information drafting and design.

Someone noted that the draft CaCoARM Brochure provided as an example should be more specific about vegetation treatments. (Vegetation treatments are noted as a primary threat without sufficient information, which is confusing.)

### **Strategies and Actions review**

The groups reviewed the strategies and actions in the sage-grouse plan. Item-by-item updates will be included in upcoming reports.

### **Actions Taken**

No formal actions were taken beyond review of strategies and actions.

### **Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will inform Don Wood at the county how to put sage-grouse habitat information onto the county map, and request a copy of the map for use at LWG meetings.
- Michael Bornstein will work to incorporate sage-grouse concerns into next year's USFS transportation plan
- Michael Bornstein will research possible pre-existing designs for the kiosk (both movable and non-movable)
- Jared will look into finding a recreation student interested in designing a kiosk as a project
- Mark Farmer will look into getting dedicated hunters to help build the structure
- Wind energy discussions will be raised at the fall meeting once the state plan has been

finalized.

**NEXT MEETING:**

Field tour: Mark Farmer will coordinate the field tour; we will schedule it once the relevant projects have been contracted and we can decide when the group should visit various sites. This will likely be late July or early August.