

SVARM field Tour
July 11, 2008
Overview

Approximately 20 individuals attended the Strawberry Valley 2008 summer field tour on July 11th, including several members of the Wasatch County Coordinated Weed Management Area (CWMA).

The tour made two stops. At the first stop, Trout Creek, Michael Bornstein (US Forest Service) and Mark Farmer (Utah Division of Wildlife Resources) showed the group several areas where sagebrush was treated to improve sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat. A mowing treatment done in August of 2007 had reduced sagebrush cover from 46% to considerably less (in some places, as low as 5%). The mowing was done in a mosaic pattern across 55 acres on the lower areas of the slope. Corridors of sagebrush were left to allow adequate cover for safe sage-grouse movement through the area. It was predicted, during discussion, that the mowing treatment would last approximately ten years before the sagebrush becomes thick again.

The group also viewed a Dixie harrow treatment of 112 acres slightly uphill from the mowing treatments. Harrowing did not reduce the sagebrush cover to the extent that mowing had, though forb response was strong in the harrowed area as well. All treatments (mowing and harrow) took into consideration fishery-related water quality concerns and maintained a 50-foot buffer around all flowing water.

Discussion focused around the availability of water in the area and the heavy snowpack from the previous winter which no doubt played a role in the strong first-year forb and grass response the group observed. The group expressed some surprise that the mowed areas had not been seeded considering the amount and diversity of plants growing on the site. Some of the harrowed acres were seeded last year but most of the treatment areas did not require additional seeding. A handout with maps of treatment areas and photographs of the treatment, as well as before and after shots, were distributed and discussed. The treatments had taken approximately a month to complete due to the time it takes to mow an acre of sagebrush with an 8-foot wide mower, about 3 to 4 acres in a 10 hour day.

At the second stop, Windy Ridge, the group viewed areas slated for future sagebrush treatments in the upcoming years. Chicken Spring Ridge, Road Hollow Ridge, and Sage Creek Bay future treatment areas were all visible from the Windy Ridge stop. NEPA is ongoing for these treatments. Weed control will be an integral part of the treatments. In addition, money may be allocated in the treatment budgets for follow-up weed control. In this area, like Trout Creek, a buffer will be maintained around waterways to reduce the impact of dust on water quality.

Lunch, provided by USU Extension, was held at the Strawberry Forest Service Visitor Center. Lorien Belton, the newly hired Extension Specialist based out of Logan, introduced herself. The tour wrapped up at approximately 12:30 pm.