

**STRAWBERRY  
VALLEY  
LOCAL  
WORKING  
GROUP**

**Date:** January 25, 2022

**Place:** Virtual meeting over Zoom

**Members Present:** Heather Talley (DWR), Terri Pope (DWR), Jim Spencer (NRCS), Robby Edgel (DWR), Anthony Grey (USFS), Randy Larsen (BYU), Janae Radke (BYU), Joe Moore (USFWS), Brian Maxfield (DWR), Destiny Allgood (USFWS Partners), Annelyse Matzinger (Pheasants Forever), Sidney Burleson (NRCS/DWR), Richard Mingo (Mitigation Commission), Christine Fletcher (BLM), Cjay Buttars (USDA-WS), Mark Holden (Mitigation Commission), Jason DeForest (PLPCO), and Lorien Belton (USU Extension, facilitator)

**Information Presented/Discussion Highlights**

*BYU Updates*

Randy Larsen gave an update on BYU's work in the Strawberry area. He began with an overview of research in the area, which began in 1998 and has resulted in 10 masters theses and 1 PhD dissertation. Topics have included canid predator removal (1999-2010), translocations (2003-2008), raven control (2003-2010), and habitat work (2009-now).

Recent information:

- 29 new birds collared in Spring 2021 (March-May). These birds have shown very good female survival (68%)
- Lek counts were up 47% for 2021
- 18 of 33 birds nested in 2021 (54%) – very low
- Of 18 nests initiated, only 6 hatched, and none survived
- In summary, adult survival is up, but reproduction is down
- Currently, there are 32 birds with transmitters on them: 29 VHF and 3 GPS

Janae is working on a thesis now. Lots of data is up on the wildlife tracker app. They also have a new way of graphing migration movements, interesting to see in this partially migratory population. They are interested to see how the birds respond to the new treatments on the south side. Randy is hopeful that the counts for spring 2022 will go up.

*Populations Updates*

Brian Maxfield and Heather Talley provided brief additional updates on grouse populations. Brian noted that the Fruitland lek seems to have moved about a mile away from its original location; it is not clear what might have caused the shift. He noted that he was also able to take County Commissioners out on lek counts last spring. As a final note, Brian explained that although we don't know specifically what impact the Dollar Ridge fire has had on grouse, he is optimistic, as the areas that grouse might use look great in recovery.

Heather showed the group the 2021 lek count presentation, noting that 2021 lek counts were up. Other places in the state do not look as positive. She also noted that they are re-evaluating where to place poison eggs for ravens, to be most strategic with the allocation they have. Anyone with ideas can let her know directly.

### *BLM Updates*

Christine Fletcher provided BLM updates. The scoping period for new sage-grouse amendments is currently open. There will be 2 virtual public scoping meetings. The scoping period ends February 8. (15 days after the last meeting.) Pat Deibert and Quincy Bahr are leading the effort. The Plan of Record, currently, is the 2019 plan. However, since it has been challenged in court, the Plan of Implementation is the 2015 plan. What will be amended is the 2019 plan. Both the 2019 and 2015 plan attributes will be alternatives. There is a long list of things to consider, like horse and burro issues, GHMA/PHMA designations, and many others. Lorien will send out information on the scoping meetings and plan comments to this and all the other working groups.

Christine also noted that because of the various triggers hit after last spring's lek counts, several other areas (Bald Hills, Panguitch, and Parker) now have teams working on BLM Causal Factors Analyses.

### *Project updates*

Anthony Grey summarized several project efforts in the area.

- Strawberry Ridge Restoration Project is in its second year – WRI was asked for funding, not sage-grouse related
- Chicken Creek Boat Ramp work didn't start until last fall, but should start in summer 2022. This includes rerouting a stream, and a 2.5 acre parking lot will be decommissioned so we see no net loss of sage-grouse habitat. A weed crew has been pretreating. There are not a lot of sage-grouse in that area right now.
- Chicken Springs re-entry project is on hold, but will likely be submitted next year, for mowing and Dixie Harrow
- There was a rezoning petition for a gas station on Hwy 40.

Richard Mingo noted that the Dollar Ridge Restoration project will hopefully have final recommendations by June 2022. Much work is already underway. The Mitigation Commission is the lead agency. Congress recently gave the Mitigation Commission \$10 million for fire restoration/mitigation.

The group discussed possible areas to use new wet meadow restoration techniques. The Strawberry Ridge project will have some opportunities. Anthony Grey and Robby Edgel are leading. Jim Spencer could advise. Someone noted that there is also boreal toad up in that area that could benefit from wet meadow protections. Another idea is expanding the wet meadow habitat along the (very straight) Chicken Creek.

## *Transmission Lines*

There have been updates and advances on both TransWest Express and Gateway South transmission lines, including discussion on mitigation actions. We should add this to a future meeting agenda.

## *Predator Control*

Cjay noted that they are renewing permits for 2022, and deciding where to focus raven areas, especially in the hard trigger areas of the state. Let him or Heather know if anyone has ideas.

## **Follow-up Needed**

- Lorien will send out information on the scoping meetings and plan comments to this and all the other working groups.
- Field tour location ideas: boat ramp, wet meadow project possibilities on Chicken Creek and Strawberry Ridge
- Next meeting should include discussion of updates on the transmission lines. Lorien will check with Richard and Heather for information.

## **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be a field tour, location to be determined.