

Sage-grouse biologist call

Participants:

Lynn Gemlo	Lief Wiechman	Terry Ireland	Jesse D'Elia
Jay Martini	Alex Schubert	Creed Clayton	Steve Abele
Selena Werdon	Kathleen Hendricks	Brent Esmoil	
Jeff Dillon	Jessi Gonzales		

1. overview of Federal Family meeting –
 - a. Agenda included:
 - i. Process for working together as these plans move forward from draft to final (outline of roles regarding review and feedback on DEIS);
 - ii. Resolving edge mapping – both maps and management prescriptions across shared administrative boundaries;
 - iii. Overview of PECE;
 - iv. Overview of FS viability policy;
 - v. Fire and invasives - BLM and FS will use the resilience/resistance matrix coming out of the work by Ken Meyer and his group as a way to help them prioritize pre-suppression, suppression, and restoration activities. A small group of BLM, FS, FWS, and NIFC employees will be pulled together to develop a prioritization scheme. The plans belong to BLM and FS - we are advisory in the process. We advised that the more certainty they can provide that their prioritization and stepdown plans will be implemented and effective, the more we will likely be able to rely on them as adequate mechanisms to alleviate threats in our listing decision. Ideally, it would be best if BLM/FS could begin implementing some projects consistent with their step-down plans prior to fall 2014 so we have that information as we formulate our listing decision. This is particularly important in the Great Basin, where invasive grasses and fire are one of the primary threats to sage-grouse habitat. Our FWS person serving on this team has yet to be determined.
 - vi. Mitigation – an interagency team will establish on-site and regional mitigation template language for insertion into the RMP/LRMPs. Shauna Ginger and Drue DeBerry will serve as our reps on this team.
 - vii. Monitoring – the draft monitoring framework will be finalized by an interagency team. Then the framework will be inserted into the final plans. Lief Wiechman will serve as our rep on this team.
 - viii. Cumulative Effects Analysis – BLM's team will continue to work on collecting information for this analysis so that it can be completed ASAP after selection of the final proposed alternative.
 - ix. Adaptive Management - language was drafted at the meeting, but all agreed that a bit more discussion between Noreen, Ed, and Marlene was necessary. That was supposed to happen the week after the meeting, but we were furloughed. Pat and Jesse had a call with BLM and we are going to try to work with the language from the meeting and refine it to see if we can reach agreement.
 - x. Route Inventory update – ran out of time at the meeting to discuss, so BLM presented a written update regarding their inventory status.
 - xi. Public Outreach and responding to comments on the DEIS - BLM/FS have produced some public outreach documents that are being reviewed by our EA staff. We will assist BLM/FS responding to any questions/comments they receive on their draft plans that are related to FWS processes/policies.
2. Attendance at public meetings – FWS biologists will attend as many public meetings as possible, travel funding permitting. We do not need a separate FWS booth at these meetings. We will be

identifiable as a FWS employees and answer questions related to FWS role in the process. Do not attempt to answer questions about BLM/FS plans (e.g., which one do we like best?). Redirect such questions on BLM/FS plans to BLM/FS.

3. "New" process for EIS review comments:

- a. FWS will evaluate all BLM/FS alternatives through the lens of the Conservation Objectives Team report. This evaluation will include the use of a matrix with the conservation objectives and measures on the Y-axis and the alternatives across the X-axis. **Each 90-day comment letter will be expected to include this matrix.** Montana has an example of this matrix and it is posted on the sharepoint site.
 - i. FWS will either work with BLM/FS to fill out this matrix - i.e., we should be asking them clarifying questions to ensure we fully understand their alternatives so that we can accurately evaluate whether or not the alternative meets COT objectives and measures.
 - ii. For offices that have already submitted comment letters that did not include a matrix, Pat and Jesse will work with them to figure out next steps. Unclear whether our matrices should use colors or not - Pat is seeking clarification.
- b. We will not send any letters to BLM/FS without fully coordinating those letters with BLM/FS and the entire FMT. Letters need review up through State Supervisors, ARDs, and Noreen. We will be expected to comment within the 90-day comment period, so build in review time as necessary.
- c. After the letter has been through your State supervisor, it will be sent on to the FMT. You can send the letter to Pat and Jesse at that time and we will do a concurrent review.
- d. FMT will be briefed on this

4. WY Core area strategy variance – issue was “hot” during the furlough, and seems to be dissipating, but some rumors floating amongst those states developing plans, and NGOs about the sufficiency of the WY strategy. If any questions arise in your state, contact Pat or Lynn for clarification. Quick summary:

- a. Core area in question was not the best habitat and already exceeded the disturbance threshold when designated;
- b. Core area in question included due to location and potential (undocumented) as a connectivity area;
- c. Mineral subsurface is mostly private, and was leased when the core area was designated. Much of the surface land is private;
- d. Company with leases has been working with WY Governor’s office to develop a strategy that will allow drilling, but with provisions for sage-grouse conservation. Current plan is better than simply honoring the drilling rights with no provisions for conservation;
- e. The variance received a lot of press and landowners in the core area were angry that the negotiations between the Governor and the energy company were not public. There were other concerns by the landowners (e.g. apparent illegal flaring, land damage) that were not sage-grouse related, but were identified during the sage-grouse discussion.
- f. Our preference would be to be compliant with the core area strategy, but there is no regulatory authority to do so given the land and mineral ownership.
- g. The State will acknowledge this variance as a variance, and has committed to making this the exception.

- h. Lessons learned – much of the negotiation between the State and developer occurred behind closed doors. The Governor’s office has determined that they may have done better to be more public where possible.
- i. We have not provided any written correspondence to date, but the WYESFO is drafting a letter regarding this variance. That letter will be posted to the sharepoint when complete.