

Rangewide Inter-Agency Sage-Grouse Conservation Team Aug. 16-18, Fort Collins

Attendees:

Shawn Espinosa	Joe Bohne	Raul Morales (8/16)
Aaron Robinson	Tony Apa	Peter McDonald
Tom Christiansen	Kathy Griffin	San Stiver
Jason Robinson	Robin Sell	Bob Hasenyager (8/17)
Rick Northrup	Don Kemner	Jenny Bourbon
Mindy Rice (CO, 8/17)	Ken Mayer (8/17)	Madeline West (8/17)
Tom Remington (8/17)		

Aug. 16, 2011

Review of agenda

- discussion of previous offer by NACD. Jeff Eisenberg is no longer with NACD, so unsure where this offer stands. The ball is in their court now.
- Brief review of EOC meeting – most was focused on BLM which Raul is going to present here. Directors wanted to see progress from BLM by Sept. 30, 2011. Also, concerns expressed with seemingly lack of structure of EOC – how do decisions get made?
- WBCC meeting at Big Sky – (San provided notes) – resulting action items – energy guidelines and sharp-tailed grouse meeting.
- Discussion of how to integrate FS into regulatory mechanisms process for their lands.

BLM Presentation – Raul Morales (see handout)

- Process/plan is still evolving
- Why not one programmatic EIS for all? If it doesn't get done then the effort has failed.
- For plans already in progress, they will continue with sage-grouse additions.
- Amendments take less time than full plan revisions.
- Some plans will be completed and implemented before the 2014 deadline.
- Puts the sage-grouse conservation measures in the RMP instead of deferring to the local action plan – is what FWS dinged BLM on. Will require a huge cultural shift for BLM.
- Interim management will address anything without a decision made – those items with no ROD completed! Will apply rangewide until mapping efforts are completed – will be the base operating level (the map). May be some flexibility if states already have measures in place.
- NTT product will be provided to RISC Team for review.
- Extensive discussion of how sub-regions are defined – currently BLM is considering administrative boundaries, RISCT recommended using MZs. Decision not final and BLM will consider recommendation. May be problematic if a MZ splits administrative units for BLM, but with GIS abilities may be less of an issue that anticipated.
 - Needs to have input from NTT – in developing conservation measures
 - Also State Directors should provide input on boundaries.
- Discussion that this needs to be a living document to ensure new data are incorporated.
- BLM solicitors are engaged at the NPT level.
- Discussion of standards and guidelines relative to grazing and whether they are currently sufficient and the problem is enforcement? (lack of capacity to do the enforcement?).

- Team asked that there be a identified contact point for both the technical folks and the managers.
- Questions regarding about internal coordinator, and external relationships. May want to consider a public access site for information sharing. Maybe social media? WAFWA will check on availability of ftp or sharepoint site.
- Sub-regional teams will capture the “local flavor” of the issues as appropriate for that local effort. This team will also be responsible for drafting parts of the RMP and informing the EISs.
- NTT needs parameters – what loss is acceptable. Refer back to conservation strategy.
- The capacity has to be supported by the agencies.
- Needs to be adaptable – based on the science.
- FS needs direction from higher levels to engage in a similar effort. But there needs to be a transition between the two agencies.

Energy Guidelines – Joe Bohne (provided outline/abstract).

- No work since EOC
- Hopes to have draft by August 26.
- Mule Deer group is done – Joe will get a copy
- Has not addressed surface mining; also surface non-energy mining (e.g. gold).
- Break out mining separately and address all sources
- Objective of guidelines – needs to be tied to Conservation Strategy.
- Bring in Mike and/or Christian for review?

Decision Support Tool – Shawn Espinosa

- Refer to WBCC notes – good report there summarizing the tool’
- Tool was designed to inform activities in properly function habitats. E.g. improving brood rearing habitats. Tool is to inform these decisions – can the proposed management really make this better?
- Desire to assemble a blue ribbon panel to help inform decisions when they come up
- Are some other efforts occurring – e.g. paper in prep by Connelly et al.
- Shawn will contact Rick Kearney, LCC – Great Basin, to see if funding is available.

Sharp-tailed Grouse Guidelines – Tony Apa

- Tony passed out summary he provided at WBCC
- Draft went to technical committee, due Friday
- Comments will be incorporated by Sept. 1
- Tony encouraged a rigorous review
- Will eventually move to publication

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Tall Structures – Bob Hasenyager/San Stiver (see 3 handouts provided)

- EOC has gone through the formulation stage and now is seeking input from the RISCT on actions. RISCT needs to provide input on this for the EOC
- Overview of what has been done (literature, research protocol)
- Discussion now of Scientific Oversight Committee (SOC)
 - Members need to be folks outside sage-grouse world to avoid potential conflict of interest

- Tony suggested that the protocol be reviewed one more time by non-sage-grouse folks to ensure a more diverse perspective, especially of the spatial components.
- Process question – if a State has a project going in and wants to conduct their own research – how do they get the funding? Wind collaborative does it via RFP, in which states can apply.
 - What if the protocols vary? Wind group used protocol as “minimums”
- Request is that this will be presented to the EOC as the basic protocol, but the science committee can make changes as science and objectives allow.
- SOC – Scope of work discussed by San, Pat, Bob, Terry Messmer and Jim Burrus – review of that discussion (qualifications of SOC members). Biggest concern was where the folks with the identified qualifications could be found that were completely independent of the research
- Based on feedback at EOC Bob worked with Jack Connelly and Jim Burrus and excluded references on identify energy transmission corridors, request exceptions to current rules and guidelines, providing credit for funding research, and recognizing research may impact local populations.
- Flexibility in mitigation – mitigation for direct impacts will not be waived; mitigation for indirect impacts may be waived to get research done. Group requested that the terms direct and indirect be removed, in lieu of unknown and known.
- Extensive discussion of siting, “population sacrifice”, mitigation for effects identified by research. Group “feel” is that the research can still happen but states are going to fight against efforts (transmission siting) in good habitats. BLM cautioned that NEPA precluded pre-decisional determination of where research occurs (primarily affects pre-disturbance data collection). May be a work around by staggering construction of the line.
- Group wanted to edit the indirect mitigation text before there is a motion by the group to make a recommendation to the EOC.
 - Group amended language for re-submission to UWIN/EOC

Mapping – Mindy Rice (GIS CO)

- Presentation by Mindy - will be provided
- What is the motivation for a rangewide seasonal habitat map? – State level maps are not compatible – need comparability for management purposes across state lines.
 - Need for BLM process and coordination with FS to help identify priority habitats across the range.
 - BLM has been directed to work with each state at that level, to identify the priority areas. Not every state is going beyond the breeding bird concept due to lack of data.
 - Perhaps MZ is a better scale than rangewide. Still need to address cross-MZ development projects. Also consider connectivity.
 - Need a definition of what is a priority – quality of habitat varies by location – poor habitat in WY may be great habitat in CA.
 - Priority areas are biologically based, but modified by where known impacts will occur (what is leased).
- Question from WGA on timeline – they need it by fall of 2012
 - Most states are significantly moving towards completing mapping in their states.

WGA Resolution – Madeleine West – see copy of Resolution 11-9

- Is an update of previous resolutions.
- Passed the end of June , 2011

- Governors have requested a product from the wildlife council – Policy Statement 1 under part B – to support all reasonable management efforts necessary to avoid a listing.
- Wildlife council would like a simple inventory report – maybe at the state or county level – to see what regulatory mechanisms are out there that may help (or pseudo-regulatory mechanisms - initiatives).
- San also suggested states (different agencies) and Governor’s offices
- Product will be a survey to these different entities to produce a document of actions beyond what is formally considered for a listing decision (items for consideration under PECE policy).
- Concerns expressed that surveying counties may not be productive – perhaps work with state agencies first as they likely know the answers – saving the survey effort.
- Joe reminded folks of LWG efforts
- Madeleine will work with San on creating a straw dog that meat can be added to later.
- This draft document may come back later to RISCT for review and input.

Director’s report – Ken Mayer

- WAFWA EOC meeting was good, still a lot of strong support for technical team and RISCT.
- EOC relies on Ken to communicate our needs to them.
- Directors are generally optimistic and are willing to make the political calls regarding needs, etc.
- Directors keep pushing for a BLM coordinator
- RISCT needs to keep Ken and other Directors informed about roadblocks so they can help us.
- Concerned about the Forest Service not matching energy that BLM is showing
- Bi-state process is beginning – lots of private lands – but much of it a few big wealthy landowners. FS is a concern. Listing decision is due FY 2013 which caused concern with ability of BLM or FS to revise RMPs or LUPs. Need to find a way to get things done.
 - Forming an executive group to pull a plan together to make this happen
 - Greg Tanner (Wilderness Project) did tour for executive level agency folks
 - Mt. Grant (DOD lands) may have funding available and Army wants to play.
- Team identified need for clarity from EOC/Directors on exactly their intent of requested products.

Genetics – follow-up from last call – letter for WAFWA directors for NRCS proposal

- Need a technique to get at fragmentation
- Will do it through next CIG proposal, vs. immediate letter to NRCS
- Use the word “connectivity” not “genetics” as genetics is only the tool to get at connectivity. The word “genetics” carries baggage with some directors and others.

Update on MDL, Gunnison, Bi-State, SPR – Pat

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Path forward on mapping –

- Based on discussions yesterday concluded that a rangewide map may not be worth the effort, but State Directors want the rangewide product.
- Concerns with lack of consistent vegetative layers, will be substantial gaps in data, predictive value of map diminishes as try to use existing data to fill gaps particularly given differences in habitat use across states, differing priorities between states (e.g. ND and WY)

- Do by MZ instead – already established in CS as management level, smaller scale so reduced “stitching” problems, more efficient use of limited resources, increased level of congruence in gaps because of similar ecological conditions.
 - Will require close coordination between states within MZ
 - Connectivity issues across the MZ have initially been addressed by Knick and Hanser – preliminary and can be more fully developed when MZ maps are completed.
 - Need to ensure all the folks doing this work know who is working in other states and talking with each other.
 - End result is seamless MZ maps of seasonal maps which will inform priority areas. Discussion of whether or not we need seasonal maps – is that worth the effort given the time restrictions for working with the BLM
 - Each state needs to identify priority areas and that can be used to create a rangewide priority habitat map (already done by Doherty?). Seasonal mapping would be secondary.
 - The Doherty map is based on numbers and does not have underlying habitat information. So may include areas of non-habitat, and excludes some important habitats. So can only be used as a start.
 - BLM is collecting priority and core habitat maps from each State for their effort. Augmented by seasonal habitat where those states are already doing thing (WY, CO, ID).
 - San will survey the states to see where they are with the BLM maps, and also the other mapping efforts being done by the States.

Workshop update – Tony

- Does not need additional help at this point
- Week of June 18.
- Make a postcard of “save the date” for members of EOC

Wind Energy Studies – San

- Meets a component of CS
- 3 studies ongoing, receiving funding via LCCs (in addition to other resources).

RISCT Report to EOC (see example on tall structures provided by San)

- San has to provide these 10 days in advance of the meeting.

Items for Sept. EOC meeting:

- Review of NRCS items
- Move the recommendations on UWIN and mapping
- SAB document briefing
- SGI discussion
- BLM discussion
- Need staff capacity

Social Media Discussion –

- Utility as a communication tool within this group, and with the BLM effort?
- Need workaround for those who cannot access site as per agency policy
- San will work with NV and see if there is a solution to access, and if not, other alternatives.