

Participants:

Larry Crist	Kathleen Rapley	Mark Sattelberg	Terry Ireland
Renee Chi	Amy Nicholas	Jesse D'Elia	Steve Duke
Lynn Gemlo	Amelia Orton-Palmer	Carl Benz	
Steve Abele	Charles Sullivan	Erin Nordin	

1. Update on work products resulting from the Salazar meeting in Cheyenne
  - a. Task force Meeting at WAFWA – Secretary Salazar charged Governor Mead, Dan Ashe, Bob Abbey and Chief White (NRCS) with chairing a task force to address range-wide sage-grouse conservation strategy. The task force was given four overall tasks:
    - i. 1. Identify actions with greatest potential to conserve and restore GSG and habitat where such actions would have the greatest benefit;
    - ii. 2. Cooperate in efforts to secure financial and other resources needed to carry out such actions on a scale commensurate with the threats;
    - iii. 3. Clarify as much as possible the actions and outcomes that would be likely needed to support a future decision that listing GSG is not necessary; and
    - iv. 4. Review and improve mechanisms to provide as much regulatory predictability for private landowners and public land users as is possible in the event of a future listing.
  - b. This information was presented at the EOC meeting at the winter WAFWA meeting on Jan. 6. The discussion there was that #4 was the lowest priority for now, and they chose to focus on the first 3. However, the task force membership is for gubernatorial level participation, so state wildlife directors (the EOC) may not be a part of this. The EOC was charged with two items – individuals needed to make sure their Governor's designated a representative to the task force – and cumulatively the EOC will draft a letter expressing concerns for not re-inventing the efforts that have been and are already occurring for sage-grouse conservation (e.g. the 2006 Conservation Strategy). To date the letter has not been submitted.
  - c. To date 5 states have identified members for the Task Force – ND, WA, WY, CO and ID. NV thinks they are close. No word from the other states.
  - d. On Jan. 6 the Secretary sent a letter to the BLM asking them to chair the task force from a federal perspective, and gave them two weeks to respond. Part of the response is that we must identify the "bar" for getting to a not-warranted determination. The memo was due today to Dan Ashe and Bob Abbey so that they could present the response to Secretary Salazar tomorrow. The last draft seen provided history of sage-grouse efforts, the need to identify the bar, and suggestions on how to engage entities that are non-wildlife or land management oriented but still influence conservation (e.g. state oil and gas commissions, county governments). WGA has offered to facilitate those discussions, and their assistance was acknowledged in the draft memo.
  - e. DEADLINE FOR THE BAR – is April 1, 2012. The offer was made to the States to engage in that process, although the final determination rests with FWS. Pat is trying to figure out how to make that happen and will keep everyone posted. She does have a "straw grouse" to start the discussions.
  - f. When the memo is finalized, Pat will post on the sharepoint site.
  - g. The task force report is due to the Secretary on March 13, 2012.
2. Update on BLM work
  - a. Scoping – meetings started last week; Steve Abele attended 4 in NV last week – expected parties were present – primary concern is the conflict between user groups, but generally public is just trying to sort it out. There was a perceived lack of clarity as to purpose – "informational exchange period" vs. "scoping period"
  - b. Team status – to Pat's knowledge very few teams (except OR) have been formed (at the state level).

- c. An Eastern Regional Interdisciplinary Team meeting is scheduled for next week in Denver. We received very late notice of the meeting, and as a result Pat can attend for one day only. The purpose is to make sure all parameters for sage-grouse conservation have been appropriately identified for all of the 17 BLM programs (e.g. fluid minerals). Additionally, when to allow exceptions to conservation parameters BASED ON BIOLOGY will be discussed. A representative from the Western Regional Interdisciplinary Team will be present to ensure consistency across the range.
- 3. Update on FS work
  - a. The FS heard concerns that additional forests may be necessary to adequately address sage-grouse conservation. They used a variety of information sources: 75% breeding density, state core area maps (at least what we could glean), status review info. (leks, sagebrush acres, etc.) to try to carve out a rational decision process. Adding these forests will incorporate roughly 98% of the 2.5 million acres of "75% breeding density" polygons on NFS lands. Forests added include: Ashley, Wasatch-Cache, Manti-LaSal, Boise, Salmon-Challis, Targhee, Medicine Bow/Routt, Bridger-Teton, and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge. This brings the total number of forests to 18.
  - b. The FS is struggling with how they are going to go through the process right now. Jesse reported that on the Western Regional Management Team Call today they indicated that they were reviewing the BLM IM to see if something similar would be applicable to them.
  - c. FS is hosting separate scoping meetings
- 4. Update on litigation – nothing at this point
- 5. Annual notice of review activities
  - a. Due April 2
  - b. Status of data call – Lynn hopes to have the call out next week. It is very similar to last year's data call. She has requested the information be submitted back to her by March 1.
- 6. Connectivity (genetic and habitat) workshop – The initial meeting is next week in Denver. It's essentially the initial meeting to launch the project. The effort will be range-wide, and will examine genetic and habitat connectivity, and their relationship. NRCS has committed \$800,000 to the study. Steve Torbit, Science ARD for R6 is attending to represent the 4 LCC's within the range of sage-grouse. Pat will provide any information from this meeting.
- 7. WAFWA biennial sage and sharp-tailed grouse meeting, June, 2012 – this is usually a really good technical meeting. It will be held in Steamboat, CO. Check out the web page for details: <http://wildlife.state.co.us/Research/Birds/WesternAgenciesGrouseWorkshop/Pages/WesternAgenciesGrouseWorkshop.aspx>
- 8. Translocation rumors – Pat had to draft a briefing paper regarding a request to translocate sage-grouse from US into Canada. So far we only know of one incident where this has happened – from MT to Alberta. We are a neutral third party on this, but only encourage this when birds are being taken from robust populations, and where there is a high likelihood of success. There may be more requests in the future.
- 9. Tall Structures Research – to try to understand the effects of transmission corridors and infrastructure on sage-grouse. An established research protocol has been written and accepted by the States. The concern now is that implementation will require disturbing sage-grouse habitats. The recommendation is to site the lines to avoid the best habitats, but we can't get results if some habitats aren't disturbed. So consider letting a route cross sage-grouse habitats so that we can get actual data to base our recommendations vs. educated estimates. Some states are now pushing back and the industry is becoming frustrated (they are providing all the funding for this effort).
- 10. Other good stuff:
  - a. Larry expressed concern regarding staffing relative to sage-grouse issues – any opportunity for BLM funding/support? Question has been asked but we have not heard an answer
  - b. R1 meeting on Jan. 31 in Portland, to discuss sage-grouse (and wolves). An invite will be sent out to all regions if they would like to participate.

11. Next call- Wednesday February 15, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. The date was changed by one day because Pat won't be able to talk after dental work on the 16<sup>th</sup>!