

Sage-grouse conference call

July 21, 2011

Participants:

Pat Deibert	Sarena Selbo	Jessi Gonzales	Julie Moore
Terry Ireland	Jodie Delavan	Terry Quisenberry	Marilet Zablan
Dan Reinkensmeyer	Rich Szlemp	Randy Gray	Steve Abele
Mark Hogan	Kendra Womack	Dave Walker	
Dave Smith	Jeri Wood	Charles Sullivan	
Kathy Hollar	Kathleen Rapley	Jodi Bush	

Overview of NRCS Sage-grouse initiative program and Intermountain Joint Venture - Dave Smith and Randy Gray – IMJV (a handout was sent – Pat posted it on the sharepoint web site).

- In 2010 NRCS received 18 million last year for SGI and then 20 million in 2011
- Put into Strategic Watershed Action teams – use to bolster capacity to implement 10 initiatives across the country
- NRCS needed assistance in performing SGI on top of their “day” jobs.
- Partnership via IMJV and partner groups to get 17 new folks on the ground.
- Program also funds some research projects.
- Communication Strategy is also a part of this program.
- Every state that asked for 1 or 2 positions got their entire request. Additional requested positions will likely be added during Phase 2.
- New positions will be under contract with partner organizations, but will be located in NRCS offices.
- Most new hires will be new, but with background. Randy is planning a “boot camp” for training once all are on board to ensure understanding of biology, sagebrush ecosystem ecology, and how the agencies work. Will also discuss conference opinion at this training.
- Will follow-up with monthly webinars, etc.
- Hope to develop a camaraderie of the 17 folks across the state so that they are working together.
- Have funding for all positions for 3 years. Hope that more funding will become available at the end of this program to continue this effort.
- Are developing a web site describing the program – not yet available.
- Tim Griffiths and Dave Naugle have offered to join this call to describe the research components of SGI.
- Accomplishment reporting for the SGI positions? Randy and Dave Naugle have discussed this – will have a sharepoint site with database for reporting accomplishments. Request for FWS to have access to accomplishments. Need to address landowner confidentiality first.

MDL Update – A second agreement was made with CBD, but judge hasn’t embraced it yet. Apparently there has been a request from a potential intervener and that needs to be resolved before the judge can sign off on the settlement.

Update on Winmill lawsuit – The stay that was put in in place to allow resolution has been lifted. Western Watersheds are the only plaintiff remaining as the others have joined the MDL resolution. Initial court hearings are scheduled for September.

EOC meeting at the WAFWA meeting: Most of the meeting was dedicated towards the BLM planning process. Other topics covered include:

- Tall structures research protocol – the Directors will hear more about this in September at the AFWA meeting. In the interim the WAFWA coordinator will work with the proponents to develop a governance committee structure.
- Mapping – The states presented a proposal to address several concerns relative to habitat mapping across the species' range. Primary concerns ranged from different priorities within each state, congruence with Federal efforts, how maps are to be used, and how to "stitch" the maps together.

–

BLM Planning Process:

- BLM has initiated a process to amend/revise all RMPs within the range of sage-grouse by end of FY 2014 in response to FWS finding that the BLM regulatory mechanisms were inadequate. They presented the plan at the EOC meeting at WAFWA.
- There are 70 RMPs within the range of the species. This excludes the Columbia Basin DPS and the Bi-State DPS as they are under separate planning operations.
- 27 RMPs are currently under some type of revision. Those will be suspended until a review can be completed to ensure they provide sufficient regulatory protection. It is unknown how those currently close to completion will be dealt with.
- BLM is proposing at least 7 teams to make this happen. Two national teams will develop the policy and identify the necessary conservation measures for incorporation into the RMPs. These teams will be of high intensity, but short duration.
- An IM will be developed for interim direction until all RMPs are finished. This IM will provide the conservation measures for use until the revisions can be completed with the intent of precluding further degradation of the species' status.
- BLM is dividing the range into 2 large areas – the Eastern and the Western. This is based on the primary threats. Each area will have its own regional team.
- Regional teams will have sub-regional teams to address local issues.
- It is unknown at this time how many NEPA documents will be necessary for this effort. Currently, there seems to be a disconnect between the BLM staff on this issue.
- The Service can be expected to contribute significantly to these efforts (along with the States). This is a priority at the WO. Each office should identify who may be working on this and prepare for their diversion to this effort.
- The State agencies have also committed to making this effort a priority. They will be drafting a letter of support to Director Abbey of BLM. Pat will post the letter on the sharepoint site as soon as she gets a copy.
- Currently we have no information on the commitment necessary from each person the FWS. Pat will keep folks advised as this effort progresses.
- Cautions were made regarding the tendency of BLM to make our time theirs. That is, they will take what they are given if we do not provide limits. This effort needs to be productive.
- Advice was given to develop a dispute resolution process should the FWS, States and BLM disagree on effective conservation measures.
- We also need to think of this as an opportunity to effect some change knowing that BLM ultimately controls the process and final product.

Next Call: August 25, 2011; 2:00 – 3:30 MST unless developments necessitate an earlier call.