



Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee

Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resource Conservation Service,
U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Nevada Department of
Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

June 8, 2014

Mr. Dan Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Main Interior
1849 C Street NW, Room 3331
Washington, District of Columbia 20240-0001

Dear Director Ashe:

The Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), under the leadership of the Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee (EOC), has been actively addressing elements of the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) in order to demonstrate that conservation actions have been and will be implemented and that these efforts are likely to be effective for the conservation and enhancement of Bi-State sage-grouse populations. In order to do this in a strategic manner, the TAC conducted additional analyses to refine the detail, anticipated costs and results of the actions proposed in the Bi-State Action Plan.

A major asset for cataloging and tracking projects (past, present and future) is the development of a comprehensive database that includes spatial renditions of project locations and polygons. Major assistance with this effort has been provided by all stakeholder agencies with noteworthy support from Mono County. This product has been extremely useful in identifying and filling in data gaps. With spatial data now associated with each project, the TAC was able to review polygon placement, size, and orientation to determine the most effective locations for sagebrush restoration/ PJ removal projects. Refined and newly identified project polygons will be re-run through the Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) model to develop a project ranking and refined cost estimate. Once the model results are obtained, actual treatment areas will be further refined in the field during the project level stage.

Additionally, the Bi-State Action Plan database provides a body of evidence that, even under current staffing levels and budget constraints, several management actions and projects have been implemented and many more are planned to address threats facing Bi-State sage-grouse. There are over 200 projects that have been completed and

address such things as wildfire, invasive weeds, pinyon and juniper encroachment, urbanization and dispersed recreation. This in and of itself demonstrates a high level of assurance that there has been and will continue to be a certainty of implementation because a conservation investment and commitment already exists. Also, contained within the database are columns for completion dates, planned start dates, level of NEPA analysis required and the status of pertinent NEPA documents. These attributes not only help identify anticipated timelines, but also capture details associated with the progress of a particular project. Our intention for the future is to maintain the Bi-State Action Plan database online within Mono County's web-page located at www.monocounty.ca.gov.

In a separate, but related task, members of the Bi-State TAC have been working with the USGS – Western Ecological Research Center to develop an Integrated Population Model (IPM) that utilizes lek counts and demographic parameters to inform population growth and trajectories over time. In subsequent analyses, critical life phases can be identified that can ultimately inform necessary management actions. This process is essential for further refinement of the CPT and will ultimately help address the principles of adaptive management. The TAC is confident that this product and its integration with the CPT model will further demonstrate how the proposed conservation efforts will be effective. The IPM captures quantifiable and scientifically valid parameters to predict the success in achieving the objectives stated within the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan. Moreover, preliminary analyses indicate that the Bi-State DPS, as whole, is a stable population.

An important component of the PECE policy analysis discusses the provisions for monitoring and reporting progress on implementation. The Bi-State Action Plan database will greatly facilitate progress reporting; however, a more robust narrative is likely necessary. The Local Area Working Group, members of the TAC, and pertinent agency personnel will commit to developing a comprehensive annual progress report summarizing project implementation efforts. As a component of this report, a narrative describing monitoring efforts from both habitat and sage-grouse perspectives, is necessary. Assistance with project specific monitoring vegetative conditions both pre- and post-treatment can be provided by the Nevada Partners in Conservation Development (NPCD) program under the Nevada Department of Wildlife. A brief summary of a proposal entitled "Habitat Characterization, Assessment and Monitoring for Conservation of the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment" is attached as support material as well (attached). Specific aspects of this proposal not only assist with habitat monitoring, but also feed into refining the CPT model. Additional sage-grouse monitoring is necessary within various locations within the Bi-State DPS; however, continued monitoring within core sage-grouse use areas such as the Bodie Hills and Long Valley are paramount to further refinement of the CPT process. Other sites will also be investigated such as Mount Grant and Desert Creek to help further inform the model. State wildlife agency TAC members are exploring options through the multi-state State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program to help fund these efforts.

Lastly, members of the Bi-State TAC have developed a science based summary (attached) describing the current body of knowledge with respect to the primary risk factors identified in the Bi-State Action Plan and how management actions are effective in addressing these threats. These risk factors consist of urbanization, infrastructure, pinyon and juniper tree encroachment, invasive and noxious weeds, grazing, wildfire and other habitat based threats.

In closing, I should mention that the Bi-State TAC has worked diligently to provide additional information in a timely manner. We remain available to answer any additional questions or conduct additional analyses to provide further evidence of our commitment to science-based conservation of the Bi-State DPS.

Sincerely,



Shawn Espinosa
On behalf of the Bi-State Technical Advisory
Committee

cc: Tony Wasley, Director – Nevada Department of Wildlife (Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee Co-Chair)
Bill Dunkelberger, Forest Supervisor – Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee Co-Chair)