

## Bi-State Sage-grouse Executive Meeting December 11, 2012

### Introductions

#### Reno:

Amy Lueders – BLM NV  
Randy Sharp – USFS  
Bruce Petersen – NRCS  
Ted Koch – USFWS  
Ken Mayer – NDOW  
John Swanson – UNR  
Thad Heater – NRCS  
Katrina Krause – NRCS  
Bernadette Lovato – BLM Bishop  
Pilar Ziegler – BLM Carson  
Sheila Anderson – RCI – CC, NV  
Robert Pohlman – Douglas CABMW  
Erik Blomberg – USGS  
Shawn Espinosa – NDOW  
Tara Vogel – NDOW/NRCS  
Stephanie Phillips – Humboldt-Toiyabe FS

#### Phone:

Lily Douglas – BLM CA  
Eric Loft – CDFG  
Steve Nelson – BLM  
Pete Coates – USGS  
Tom Kimball - USGS  
Cindy Staszak – BLM CA

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### 1. Introduction and Agenda Review – Randy Sharp

### 2. Approval of last meeting minutes – Randy Sharp

Approved minutes will be posted on NDOW Webpage: <http://ndow.org/wild/conservation/sg>

- Minutes for October 29, 2012 meeting were approved and are to be posted on NDOW's website.
- Value in getting the minutes approved earlier by agency leads – BLM, Forest Service, NDOW, Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS
- For use by the local working group.
- Draft minutes will be sent to Randy Sharp for distribution/approval prior to meetings to get the minutes posted to the website prior to the next meeting.

### 3. Update on Bi-State Local Working Group December 3, 2012 Meeting – Tara Vogel / Bernadette Lovato / Mike Crawley

- One thing they wanted to bring forward was that with the new Lyon Count Land Bill that there might be some opportunity to have some sage-grouse positive input. Some of the local ranchers have been engaged in that process.
- Wanted to bring back to this group – Are there components of sage-grouse habitat that need to be maintained that we want to specify into legislation.

- What Fred Fullstone had requested of the local working group was that the local working group put together a letter in support of that and the group felt that it was best if this group had that input to legislation.
- If land was going to be leaving Federal ownership that there might be some opportunities to show some sage-grouse positive language in those actions.
- What is important is the wilderness component in the Land Bill and being able to assure that we can still do habitat improvement projects efficiently and effectively in the wilderness area and getting that language written into the Bill that creates the wilderness so that can happen.
- As a Federal Agency, BLM, cannot comment on pending legislation so writing a letter from the EOC would be problematic from the BLM's perspective.
  - If NDOW or CDFG could write a letter as EOC members it would be helpful.
    - NDOW to write a letter as representative of EOC
- The priority process was part of updating what had already been done and getting that information – Sherry to compile everything together.
  - Updating of the accomplishments to Fish and Wildlife Service – fed into Sherry – Early January to be all pulled together and sent to Steve Abel
  - Each field office will submit to Sherry and submitted to the service on a quarterly schedule – actions and accomplishments
- Requesting to have somebody come from the FWS to try to get some understanding of if the bird gets listed what impact it may have on policies that the different agencies have as well as funding.
  - Some ideas related to that that were tossed around was the agencies might be best fit to answer how that affects the agency itself so we might have representatives from the agencies along with the Service since the Section 7 process is pretty general but from a policy standpoint it could mean different things to different agencies.
- Next working group meeting scheduled March 18, 2013 – 10:00-1:00 – tentatively at the Smith Valley Library
  - Ted Koch agreed to attend
  - Agency representatives requested to attend also
- Interest in knowing when EOC meets – open invitation to all that would like to come – Tara Vogel to forward the EOC meeting notice to the group for invitation.

#### **4. Bi-State Technical Team Update – Pete Coates / Scott Gardner / Shawn Espinosa**

Follow-up of last meeting's discussion on habitat mapping, standardization of monitoring, and other items.

- Presented map - addresses the concern where the buffered areas were being called out differently. Those areas that are described by the utilization distribution are now hashed areas and the areas that were defined by the resource selection function analysis are now separated and are in the pink.
- A map like this will be posted to our website along with the white paper that was handed out. The white paper still needs work.

- The land cover types that went into this map are broad scale. They are 30 meter pixel resolution. That means the land cover type identifier has to be greater than 50% of that 30 meter pixel. Even though there is sagebrush mixed in there it is a different land cover type it is picking up on. We are accessing the initial land cover maps that went in and we have completed that assessment and we are at about 82% accuracy on the land cover maps that we used to develop the model. The model is predicting 95% accuracy because it is a collection of all of the land cover types. However, those land cover maps because of that core scale it is classified as salt brush.
- One of the main reasons for doing the utilization distribution was to capture areas that grouse are using based on the space use of data that we have accumulated over the years and be able to incorporate those into the map, even if they are poor habitat conditions.
- The map has been called preliminary – it is going to evolve over time and get better.
- One of the reasons for the feature analyst tool is to refine this map in an inexpensive way. We could use NAIP imagery which is available to classify things like pinyon juniper and get much better special resolution than the coverage types going in on this. We are going to keep improving the coverage types that went into this model.
- Boise, Idaho – January 14-16, 2013 – Great Basin Consortium Meeting – at least one person from USGS will be there.
- Change the wording of “Draft” to “Preliminary” on the map to be consistent with terminology.
  - Application Management section of the white paper will be worked on with comments sent to Shawn – Draft will be taken off once posted.
- Standardization of monitoring was discussed at the Technical Team meeting in November. Steve Nelson has taken the lead on developing a proposal to the Great Basin LLC that will go to Todd Hopkins. There are 3 elements that we are covering with that proposal.
  - To evaluate the existing habitat measurement or evaluation protocols for the different agencies, look at whether or not there were any components important to sage-grouse habitat needs that were missing and suggest ways to standardize data collection
  - The other part was to build a framework to help validate basically this model. There could be a feedback loop there basically. This vegetation monitoring protocol and results of it can go back into feeding this resource selection function analysis.
  - Roll up the existing information that was out there and summarize it into some sort of synthesis.
    - Thad Heater is helping.
    - Steve Nelson has spoke with Todd Hopkins to see what the framework of the proposal needed to be. He said that he would make himself available to help us with that. We are thinking we are going to put together a short proposal and then if he wants to float it up to whomever to get a read out

on it. The last thing Todd and Steve talked about was using the EOC as the focal point for pushing that proposal forward ultimately.

- Timeline – there is no RFP with timelines.

## **5. Proposed USGS Support for Bi-State effort – BLM/FS**

BLM/FS proposed priorities for USGS science support for Bi-State Sage-grouse conservation efforts (Attachment)

- Table of projects that would utilize USGS expertise
- Support for the Bi-State Action Plan needs to be weaved in
- Funding is always a question.
- Ongoing research efforts are important to continue – add another category “Ongoing Field Activities”
- Using the Bi-State as a test bed and developing on the ground local level science for management and then use that also to inform the effort on the greater. In addition there are things that we need to be working on range wide that are going to take higher effort level than what we are doing in the Bi-State currently.
- Would like to set up another meeting to organize the table with USGS.
  - The Table is a good start with regard on what USGS has been doing with the Greater on some of the habitat objectives and how they are going to carry that through to the Bi-State and maybe change some of those objectives for the potential alternatives and RMPs.
  - Two areas that USGS are working in, they are obtaining new data and then we have existing data to inform all of these four different parts (EOC, Bi-State Sage-grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, and Governor’s Sage-grouse Strategy). I think we need to outline each one of them more specifically about what data we need to still collect for each of these and what data is available right now to answer the questions for each of them.
    - We have developed a priority map based on existing habitat coverage or existing land cover – we really need better input maps to go into this.
      - One thing working on now but could use support on is a nice pinyon juniper map to help guide management on where to cut trees if that is a management project that is going to be carried out.
      - Using Feature Analysts, we are testing a couple areas in the Pine Nuts that are working out really well. It is something that we could do throughout the entire Bi-State and get a very nice high resolution map with PJ and use that map in relation with the sage-grouse telemetry points with utilization distributions.
      - Need resources to continue to do that as far as hiring a GIS person that can sit and work with each of the mosaics for that PJ map.
  - Need to determine how and where UNR can be of use.
  - The most important question is what is the finish line and how do we measure it – do we have the tools to measure it?
- Provide comments regarding the table in discussion – suggest the principle lead agencies who have a component of it all have a representative and the representative get together and flush it out in terms of the amount of work, the timelines, the major milestones and address where we need additional data.

- California Nevada Sub Regional effort
- Comments to Randy Sharp and notification of agency leads by the end of 2012 and a meeting to be scheduled in January.

## **6. Status of FWS review on Bi-State listing determination – Ted Koch**

- Three things to mention – generally feel positive about the Bi-State Action Plan and the fact that the Local Working Group never really went away and has been working on a lot of good things.
  - Pinyon Juniper encroachment – The Action Plan is not very specific it says within this PMU identify where PJ removal needs to occur and then implement
    - In our table we do have a list of specific actions we foresee in the next couple years
    - Lacking the how much is enough part
      - Example: in this PMU we think we need to get rid of x number of acres of PJ and that will be sufficient to restore connectivity here or it will add enough acres or whatever the reason is.
      - For that Action Plan to be adequate in that regard we think we need to take that extra step.
      - This is specific to PJ – not as certain if there are other components that we might want to beef up in that regard but it was definitely outstanding on the PJ issue – Something we might want to get the Technical Team talking about as soon as possible (How much is enough and where).
  - Measuring the bad with the good – Technical Team
    - Ted’s concern right now is that is up to FWS to say what the bad stuff is – Steve Abel is piecing together on his own – he is going to come up with all of the good stuff that has been documented and then there will be Steve’s version of the bad stuff
      - Would much rather have everyone that is on the ground sitting down and deciduously documenting all of the bad stuff because we need to be upfront with the public with the rule making.
      - Need to document the accurate assessment of the existing conditions
  - Grazing
    - Litigation was filed against the Bishop BLM by Western Watershed
      - Hearing was in March 2012 – District Court - on some of the grazing allotments in the Bodie’s
        - The Services position on grazing and sage-grouse in general is proper livestock grazing absent cheatgrass is not a major threat to sage-grouse.
          - To the Service proper is 1) grazing prescriptions that are adequate for sage-grouse and 2) They are being met
        - Bernadette Lovato will pull together information from the Administrative Record on how they are meeting the standards for Ted Koch/FWS

- Data from Bi-State wherever grazing is occurring showing that standards are being met – 1 page summaries

## **7. Priorities for EOC in CY/FY 13 - All**

- Will be discussed at the next meeting.

## **8. Agency Update – All**

- BLM – Amy Lueders
  - Signed BLM Nevada's Bi-State Interim Guidance
    - Modeled very closely after the Greater Sage-grouse Interim Guidance
- NDOW – Ken Mayer
  - Was on a conference call and asked the WAFWA sage-grouse technical team to get together (Montana, Utah, Wyoming) to talk about the edge mapping – Consensus of the biologists was that the maps are just fine. Some of the stuff that doesn't look like it is congruent is because there are physical features that change significantly – Maps will change but there are not any drastic changes that would affect analysis
- USFWS – Ted Koch
  - Changed how process species listing packages internally.
    - Now have a listing team approach. Steve Abel is the lead for the Core Team (Scientific Team within the FWS) they are assembling the science document and evaluating status and threats without looking too far down the road to determination on the outcome of that assessment. It has gone to the Core Team once, it will go again early next week and they will get the second round of feedback. It will eventually go to Recommendation Team (involves the FWS Regional Director, FWS Assistant Regional Director and Ted Koch) starting in February and then when that team makes a decision to either conclude that listing is no longer warranted or that preparation of a proposed rule is warranted it will be made sometime after that team first gathers in February. The outcome of the Recommendation Team still remains a recommendation; it does not become a decision until the Director of FWS in Washington, D.C., Dan Ashe, signs a federal registered document. That federal registered document will either be a finding that listing is no longer warranted and we are done or a rule proposing to list Bi-State sage-grouse.
- UNR-CABNR – John Swanson
  - Helpful if there were delineation of science responsibilities between USGS versus University of Nevada, Reno – EOC needs to agree on UNR's role.
    - UNR to can assist on priority lists for USGS discussed earlier
- Forest Service - Humboldt-Toiyabe – Stephanie Phillips
  - Forest Plan Amendment for Bi-State
    - Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register

- Scoping documents out – postcards were mailed out about how to get access to the document.
  - Public Meetings scheduled – January 10 & 11, 2013 – Smith Valley and Gardnerville.
  - Some comments received already – OHV users concerned about access based on the Forest Plan Amendments.
- New Forest Supervisor – Bill Dunkelberger
- NRCS – Bruce Petersen
  - From a program standpoint we do not have a Farm Bill and we don't have a budget but we are proceeding with applications. The extensions in the continuing resolution did give us some program dollars.
- USGS – Eric Blomberg
  - The utilization distribution component of the habitat map, we recently completed a manuscript. It is undergoing our internal review process right now and we will be submitting it to the Journal of Wildlife Management shortly.
- NDOW – Shawn Espinosa
  - Held annual sage-grouse wing bee in mid November. The most interesting thing that came out of that was that we had recorded our second lowest recruitment rate ever. It was 0.73 chicks per hen, which was pretty concerning. The lowest we have ever recorded is 0.58 and that was in 2006 or 2007. Within the last decade we have recorded two of the lowest production values we have ever had. Conditions during the spring time of those years were particularly poor.
- BLM – California – Lily Douglas
  - They have started some planting on the Rush Fire but they had some trouble with the last big storm.

## **9. Wrap-up, Assignments, Next Meeting**

- Next meeting – Thursday, February 7, 2012 – 10:00 – 12:30 – Location TBD
- Action items
  - Technical Team gets together to talk about:
    - Specificity in Action Plan
    - Measuring good with bad
    - How much trend is enough
    - Finalizing the monitoring proposal and getting it into Todd Hopkins
  - Information on efficacy of grazing prescriptions and extent to which prescriptions are being implemented or met in the Bi-State. BLM/FS
  - Subsequent meeting with USGS.
  - Comments on white paper to Shawn Espinosa by close of business on Thursday, December 13, 2012.
  - Meeting minutes sent to Randy Sharp for distribution to agency heads for approval – once approved by agency leads they will be posted to NDOW's website prior to next EOC meeting.

**FY 2013 Program of Work for  
U. S. Geologic Survey  
To Assist  
Federal and State Agencies in  
Sage -grouse Planning Efforts**

Project	Task	Lead Agencies	Funding (\$)
<b>Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan Amendments</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scientific Review of Alternatives.</li> <li>2. Determine if Best Available Science is being referenced.</li> <li>3. Technical Review of the analysis for each alternative.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bureau of Land Management</li> </ol>	
<b>Bi-State Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan Amendments</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scientific Review of Alternatives.</li> <li>2. Determine if Best Available Science is being referenced.</li> <li>3. Technical Review of the analysis for each alternative.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. U. S. Forest Service</li> <li>2. Bureau of Land Management</li> </ol>	
<b>Governor's Sage Grouse Strategy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete 'Conservation Planning Tool' for the Greater Sage.</li> <li>2. Identify effective mitigation to offset impacts to sage-grouse habitat.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State of Nevada (NDOW)</li> </ol>	
<b>EOC support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assist the EOC Technical Team in identifying appropriate and consistent monitoring techniques for determining effectiveness of management actions for conservation of the Greater Sage Grouse.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. EOC members</li> </ol>	\$5,000 per Agency