

Sage-Grouse Conservation Team

*Nevada Farm Bureau
2165 Green Vista Drive, Suite 205
Sparks, Nevada 89431*

*February 19, 2009
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.*

MINUTES

Those in attendance were:

Steve Abele – USFWS
Jason Benson – NV Energy
Kent Bloomer – Summit Lake Paiute Tribe
Teola Brady – Yomba Shoshone Tribe
Doug Busselman – Nevada Farm Bureau
Dawn Carter – NDOW
Ali Chaney – NNH
Pete Coates – USGS
Duane Coombs – Private Lands
Shawn Espinosa – NDOW
Scott Kessler – Ormat Nevada
Elroy Masters – BLM, NV State Office
Robin Powell – Audubon Society
Donna Stammers – US Geothermal
Rose Strickland – Sierra Club
Rita Suminski – BLM, Carson City
Sherman Swanson – UNR
Gil Yanuk – Carson City ABMW

Those attending by videoconference:

Elko –	Leta Collord, Russell Woostenhulme, Kent McAdoo
Battle Mountain -	Rod Davis
Ely -	Nancy Williams

Agenda Item #1: Welcome – Introductions

Shawn opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance and those participating by videoconference. All attendees were asked to introduce themselves and their affiliation.

Agenda Item #2: Review Agenda Items/Changes

There were no Agenda additions or changes so Shawn gave a few announcements.

1. The studies in Avian Biology document entitled: “Ecology and Conservation of Greater Sage-grouse: A Landscape Species and Its Habitats” is progressing. Below is a brief synopsis of the status of the manuscript as of January 2009:
 - a. A total of 28 chapters were originally identified for the manuscript;
 - b. 10 chapters have been peer reviewed and accepted into SAB;
 - c. 6 chapters are in the final stages of development after draft, review and revision;
 - d. 3 chapters are in peer review;
 - e. 7 chapters are in preparation of draft and have many steps to complete;
 - f. One has been rejected through peer review and another has been withdrawn.
 - g. 13 of the chapters have been requested by the USFWS for listing information including:
 - i. Genetics, Sagebrush Habitats, Land Use, Population Trends, Energy, West Nile Virus, Fire, Footprint, Habitat Use, History, Predation, Connectivity and Wild Horses.
2. There has been some progress on the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act
 - a. A copy of a briefing paper can be downloaded by going to www.sandcounty.net/uploads/NASECA Briefing Package
 - b. The foundation of the act would be built on three elements identified by a Blue Ribbon panel of sagebrush ecosystem conservationists, these include:
 - i. Leadership
 - ii. Organizational structure to sustain the effort
 - iii. Funding
 - c. Provisions of the Act include:
 - i. Leadership through the NASECA council
 - ii. The Act and Strategy provide for the infrastructure needed for a long-term conservation commitment
 - iii. The Strategy proposes a five year budget of \$425 million to increase the capacity for conservation actions
 - iv. The Act should distribute funding by:
 1. Management zone
 2. State and need

- v. Funding should be on a cost share basis at a ratio that reflects the proportion of public to private lands.
- vi. The Act should provide support for and increase the capacity of agencies, community-based conservation groups, land manager, industry and NGO's to carry out conservation actions.
- d. Recommendations:
 - i. Convene a working group of individuals and Congressional staff to:
 - 1. Scope the titles and provisions of the Act
 - 2. Draft the Act
 - ii. Find and enlist bipartisan congressional proponents to introduce the Act.
 - 1. This will be brought before the WGA at their annual Summer Meeting.
- 3. For those of you interested, the Western Governor's Association is seeking comments on their Western Renewable Energy Zones and their Wildlife Corridors Initiative.
 - a. These documents can be viewed and downloaded at www.westgov.org.

Agenda Item #3: Approach/Development Sage-grouse Renewable Energy Guidelines – Group

- a. Shawn prepared a conceptual outline to develop guidelines with regard to renewable energy that had been previously e-mailed to the team members. A brief six-page synopsis was provided that summarized suggested guidance in other States and Provinces including monitoring equipment and project placement specific to wind energy facilities. Shawn read through the outline and comments were made throughout. (A copy of the outline is attached to these minutes.) The following are comments made during the discussion of the outline.
- b. Some suggestions were made by the team to provide further justification after the Overview regarding:
 - i. The Nevada Governors Executive Order to Preserve and Protect Greater Sage-grouse Habitat; and
 - ii. Western Governors Association Sage-grouse Resolution 08-12 that recognized the important of maintaining sustainable sagebrush ecosystems so that sage-grouse populations remain stable.
- c. The group discussed the need to prepare some guidelines for the future to address renewable energy projects as other states have done. Currently NDOW is commenting on projects on a case by case basis using other state's information and guidance or relying on BLM or USFWS guidance.
- d. Shawn and Elroy summarized the BLM Instructional Memorandum (IM) in Oregon and Washington with respect to anemometers;
- e. Guidelines specific to sage-grouse are in place in Alberta and Washington while other states such as California, Oregon and Wyoming have broad based wildlife guidelines for wind energy projects.

- f. Shawn stated that NDOW has a draft policy, but this is a procedural guidance document for employees and deals mainly with bats and raptors, and only briefly mentions sage-grouse indicating a setback of 5 miles from leks (USFWS guidelines).
- g. The Wyoming Department of Fish and Game has developed a white paper on wind energy and sage-grouse complete with an attachment that summarizes setback distances recommended to minimize the impacts of development on prairie grouse species.
- h. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has developed standardized guidance for renewable energy projects based on habitat values not just for sage-grouse, but for many other species of wildlife
- i. Elroy stated the BLM recently sent out an Instructional Memorandum (IM) dated December 19, 2008 that expires in 2010. This IM encourages the development of wind energy within acceptable areas, consistent with the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and the BLM Energy and Mineral Policy (August 2008).
 - i. There was little mention of wildlife and migratory birds in the IM, stating basically that the USFWS guidelines issued in 2003 can be utilized, but are “not mandatory requirements in BLM land use plan decisions”.
- j. Jason Benson with NV Energy stated that sage-grouse are recognized as an important species to consider when planning for renewable energy projects.
- k. Shawn stated that the original plan did not address renewable energy and needs to be revised. The newly developed guidelines should separate out the different types of renewable energy. Also mining was not proposed to be included in the guidelines, but maybe it should be considered.
- l. Doug suggested that the team develop ‘white papers’ to address different threats. We also need to determine where to put this information after it has been written.
- m. Mitigation measures need to be addressed.
- n. Core habitat was discussed and how we move forward to define it. Elroy stated that he will have a draft definition for core habitat at the next meeting.
- o. Mapping out seasonal habitat areas is important to help us determine the core habitat locations.
- p. All areas should be treated similarly when writing the guidelines. The Best Management Practices (BMP) will be used in most all of the locations. The group wanted to make sure that all treatment locations are treated in the same fashion using the best management practices, and that this should be stated in the guidelines. Also if an area is going to have a specific type of treatment that differs from what is stated in the guidelines that it should be documented and captured somewhere. .
- q. Robin stated it is important to include a comparison portion with regard to monitoring after an area receives treatment for weed control and other threats to habitat health.
- r. The issue of rapid response with regard to noxious weeds was discussed. Elroy stated he would put together the rapid response standards and protocols for the next meeting.
- s. Steve stated that he would like to see landscape level approach when developing BMP’s

After a lengthy discussion Shawn stated he would write some of the chapters of the guidelines and asked for some volunteers to assist. Those who agreed to help were Steve Abele, Rose Strickland, Pete Coates and Robin Powell.

Agenda Item #4: 5-year Sage-grouse Conservation Plan Performance Report

Shawn provided a draft outline showing the information that needs to be included in the 5-year assessment document by e-mail prior to the meeting. The following are the comments and discussion on the assessment.

- A. Rose spoke first stating that the 'Overview' should identify where we started from before the accomplishments are listed.
- B. Shawn explained that Larry Neel reviewed Chapters 4 and 5 of the First Edition of the Sage-grouse Plan to extract the objectives so that success and shortcomings could be evaluated. Chapter three also needs review to extract those conservation actions that were recommended and see what was accomplished.
- C. Elroy stated that he isn't sure how to capture the data on areas that are now regenerating from old fires and are now available to sage-grouse. He isn't sure how to map this information.
- D. Steve asked Elroy if a vegetative layer could be laid over the fires in the PMU's and then map those areas.
- E. Shawn stated his ultimate goal is to find out what did not work and why and how to move forward from here
- F. Sherm stated that from the library at USGS data has been gathered from monitoring land treatments in the past and present. We can learn what treatments work in sage-grouse ecosystems. New data can be collected and compared with the old and see what works and plan for the future. Sherm is looking for funding to continue and complete this project as it is an important habitat portion of the assessment.

Shawn will write most of the chapters and have it done by June. Also, the local working groups will be contacted for their input.

Agenda Item #5: Developing a Private Lands Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy – Group

Doug stated that we need to identify "on the ground" areas that are important for sage-grouse. Also, it will be difficult to bring landowners in again as we haven't got the funding in place and we still need to develop individual relationships. Duane Coombs and Steve Abele discussed certain protections, if any, on public lands allotments because they affect the productivity or action on the private lands. Doug stated further than the landowner needs to have some assurances or protection, such as against losing grazing allotments, which only applies if the bird is listed. If the landowner is interested in entering into a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) they need to understand they will be connected to the BLM and other government agencies.

Elroy stated he will provide a list at the next meeting as to what is contained in a land use plan, and these CCA's do not change the plans.

Steve was interested in pursuing this topic, but felt we needed an expert to define and describe more fully how a CCA works. Steve will ask Jody Brown from his office to attend our next meeting to provide some insight.

Agenda Item #7: Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled for April 23rd at the same time and location.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Dawn Carter
March 4, 2009