

Sage-Grouse Conservation Team

*Nevada Farm Bureau
2165 Green Vista Drive, Suite 205
Sparks, Nevada 89431
May 15, 2008*

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Those in attendance were:

John Axtell – BLM, Carson City
Jason Benson – Sierra Pacific Power Co.
Doug Busselman – Nevada Farm Bureau
Dawn Carter – NDOW
Duane Coombs – Smith Creek Ranch
Shawn Espinosa – NDOW
Melissa Farinha – USGS
Donald Klebenow – UNR, Retired
Elroy Masters – BLM, NV State Office
David McNinch – Wildlife Commission
Robin Powell – Audubon Society
Gil Yanuk – CCABMW

Those attending by teleconference:

Elko - Derek Holdstock
Battle Mtn - Rod Davis
Doug Furtado
John Coates

Agenda Item #1: Welcome – Introductions

Shawn Espinosa (NDOW) 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

The agenda was reviewed and was approved with no changes.

Agenda Item #3: Announcements – Espinosa

Shawn had several announcements and they are as follows:

- A. The Nevada Chapter of The Wildlife Society is re-invigorating itself and the first Annual Meeting held in a long time will be conducted at the Nevada Department of Wildlife tonight at 7:00 p.m. The agenda includes the installation of officers, formation of chapter committees, ideas for increasing membership, linkage to UNR undergraduate programs, identification of current wildlife issues in Nevada and discussion of the summer banquet and BBQ.

- B. A discussion of Ken Mayer's trip to Washington D.C. during the week of April 14, 2008.
 - a. Ken met with various legislators on the Senate and House side about Greater sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation and management in the west.

 - b. Ken's primary mission was to meet specifically with Deputy Secretary of Interior Lynn Scarlett to discuss our current sage-grouse efforts and what we in the west (WAFWA Directors) believe that the BLM can do now that would help us conserve and protect sage-grouse and their habitats at very little cost to the agency. The following issues were raised:
 - i. Implement an aggressive initial attack program to combat wildland fires (background information was provided on the Wildfire Support Group in Humboldt County).
 - ii. Establish that the conservation and restoration of western sagebrush ecosystems and Great Sage-grouse management is a priority for the BLM.
 - iii. Establish a policy and a procedure to "streamline" the NEPA process for BLM Districts in the western U.S. to facilitate wildfire restoration of sagebrush ecosystems and critical Greater Sage-grouse habitats. (Information was provided regarding disparate NEPA approaches among BLM Districts in Nevada.)
 - iv. Review all BLM policies for their potential negative effects on achieving conservation and restoration goals for western sagebrush ecosystems and critical Greater Sage-grouse habitats (information was provided regarding BAER team restoration recommendations that the Washington D.C. office denied to the detriment of the post-fire rehabilitation efforts in Nevada and Idaho).
 - v. Implement a "Core Conservation Strategy" concept to Greater Sage-grouse habitats in the Western U.S. (a letter from WAFWA to BLM Director Caswell was provided).

- c. The meeting with Deputy Secretary Scarlett was attended by Assistant Secretaries Allred and Laverty, Bryan Arroyo of the USFWS and Matt Hogan. The meeting was well received by Deputy Secretary Scarlett for a number of reasons.
 - i. First, she appreciated that we took the time to bring these issues to her attention personally in a positive way, provided specific examples to clarify the issues, and offered proposed solutions.
 - ii. While she said that they would work on all 5 areas, she immediately asked Assistant Secretaries Allred and Laverty to develop a plan on how to employ their existing tools to streamline NEPA and to get back to me and the WAFWA Directors in a couple of weeks on how they plan to implement their plan.
 - iii. Additionally, everyone at the meeting agreed that the number one priority was to protect sage-grouse habitat by limiting the size of future wildfires.

C. Ken was also invited by the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development to attend a series of meetings they had set up with a number of key senators and the BLM to discuss their program, which is designed to further the conservation and management of sagebrush ecosystems. At the BLM meeting, Assistant Secretary Allred told the group that, as a result of Ken's meeting with Deputy Secretary Scarlett, the BLM was moving forward with plans to work with each WAFWA Director to identify critical Greater Sage-grouse habitat in their state and then pre-stage initial attack fire suppression resources to cover those locations during this coming fire season. As a result, the protection of critical sage-grouse habitat will be the second priority of the BLM, after life and property.

A copy of Ken's report is available for review at the Department of Wildlife's Reno office or a copy can be mailed upon request and postage costs.

Agenda Item #4: Priority Sage-grouse Habitat Mapping – Masters/Espinosa

Shawn and Elroy attempted to use a compilation of R-value mapping as a standard starting point; however, there were too many discrepancies and differences in classification systems. So they chose to focus in on the active leks, use lek size (male attendance), and place a four mile buffer around these leks.

Once this was accomplished, the 1999-2007 fire layers were placed on the map to determine the remaining available sage-grouse habitat. This is the premise for the initial draft of a "priority" sage-grouse habitat map: however, additional work is necessary to ensure that other critical habitats, especially winter habitat, is accounted for.

One comment expressed was that the Technical Committee should set up “sideboards” to determine what a core area should look like. It was also suggested that early and late brood rearing areas be included as priority habitat sites.

Agenda Item #5: Statewide IA Team Update – Espinosa

The following is a listing of the items be worked on for the Service’s data call database.

- A. May 16, 2008, is the due date for Conservation Efforts Project Worksheets. To date Shawn has only received six worksheets.
- B. Population Change worksheets are also due tomorrow and only five of those have been received.
- C. The Forest Service is compiling their projects separately and will submit them by Friday (May 16, 2008).
- D. The NRCS will be entering their projects directly into the USFWS Conservation Efforts Database and then NDOW will merge these databases as we close in on the June 23rd deadline.
- E. The BLM is submitting their own comprehensive database.
- F. The National Technical Committee has revised the population information and it is currently out for a four-week peer review.
- G. Select independent scientific authors are writing chapters on sage-grouse ecology and habitat for a large volume to be published in Studies in Avian Biology. Some chapters are available for review by WAFWA and the Technical Committee representatives.

Shawn asked if there were any further questions on this topic. It was asked what about some communication with the USFWS as to what is going on with the data call. Shawn stated that Steve Abele will keep us informed with updates on the Service’s progress

Agenda Item #6: Bi-State Correspondence – Wilderness Designations - Group

The Bi-State Local Area Conservation Planning Team (LACPT) wrote a letter to the Governor’s Team expressing concern over wilderness designations. There have been meetings and public discussion on a pending lands bill, and there is language that designates wilderness areas on Public and National Forests in Lyon and possibly Mineral and Esmeralda Counties. No definite proposals have been submitted yet, but the Nevada Wilderness Project (NWP) has developed a map depicting 200,000 acres in Lyon and 400,000 acres in Mineral County that they will propose for wilderness

designation. (A copy of the entire letter is available for review at the NDOW Reno office.)

There was a lengthy discussion on wilderness designations those comments are summarized below.

- A. A meeting was held in Smith Valley with approximately 750 in attendance, many participants brought forth issues should these areas be designated as wilderness.
- B. Many sage-grouse habitat restoration projects will require mechanized equipment and these vehicles are not allowed in wilderness areas.
- C. Tracy Wolfe asked the Governor's team and the Bi-State group for assistance in bringing this issue to the attention of the Governor in a letter.
- D. Robin asked what was the state of urgency with a letter to the Governor?
- E. Gil stated that many letters both pro and con have been published.
- F. Many of these letters have been in favor of wilderness designation.
- G. The Team asked Shawn to take the lead in drafting a letter to the Governor and our Congressional Delegation indicating our concerns and involvement in the process.
- H. The general public may not understand wilderness area and its restrictions as well as its accessibility.
- I. At the Smith Valley meeting there was no educational information provided. So, an educational brochure of some kind should be developed for the general public.
- J. Senator Reid has stated that he will preserve the agricultural interests in the area.
- K. No one knows the degree of impact these proposals will have so only an approximation is available.
- L. Lyon County people have met and only 90,000 acres are involved and Mineral has the "lion's" share.
- M. Shawn stated there are pros and cons with wilderness areas. The mountain tops will be protected from wind energy development but it also limits the treatment options that may be necessary and most cost effective within sage-grouse habitats.

- N. This group has the opportunity to get involved in the land bills right now. Dave stated that land bills will not go away and more are forthcoming. The Commission is looking forward in becoming part of the process as bills are being developed.
- O. Elroy stated that other states that have designated wilderness areas will be contacted to gather information on the impact to wildlife and how they are managed.

Agenda Item #7: Renewable/Non-renewable Energy Guidelines for Sage-grouse

The following issues were discussed on this agenda item.

- A. Shawn stated that we really have no State of Nevada Recommended Guidelines for Renewable and Non-renewable Energy Development in Greater Sage-grouse Habitat.
- B. The BLM has some Best Management Practices (BMP) in place that can help with the sighting of monitoring equipment.
- C. The BLM in Oregon and Washington have issued an Instruction Memorandum (IM) for guidance regarding wind energy testing and monitoring proposals and the implementation of a Wind Energy Development Program (2005) on processing right-of-way applications for wind energy projects on public lands administered by the BLM located in sage-grouse habitats. The IM specifically addresses the BMP's for site monitoring and testing relating to the installation of meteorological (MET) towers.
- D. The Nevada Division of Minerals would like to direct your attention to the new Nevada Renewables GIS interactive web site. The site can be accessed from NDOM's home page – Quick Reference list
[www.minerals.state.nv.us.Renewable Energy Planning – Interactive Map.](http://www.minerals.state.nv.us/Renewable_Energy_Planning_-_Interactive_Map)
- E. This information is provided to assist researchers, developers, land use managers and other stakeholders with information on Nevada's renewable energy resource, potential, transmission, land ownership and land use constraints to facilitate the finding and utilization of alternative energy solutions to Nevada's energy needs.
 - i. The Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, Cartography Group have been the artists and the experts on this project. They have squeezed in hours to work on this project and brought special cartographers eye to the presentation.
 - ii. The web site is a work in progress. There are plans and suggestions for posting more datasets, including up-to-date power plant generation

numbers and mineral archive data. You will find information here which has not been readily available before, such as transmission lines from Sierra Pacific Resources and Military zones of possible interference where consultation is recommended to guide early development sighting.

- iii. Many of you are stakeholders, researchers and developers. We hope you will find this site helpful, useful, and inspiring. Your feedback is welcome. Please share this wealth of information with your colleagues.
- iv. Thank you to all helped bring this information to the public including the Commission on Mineral Resources who funded this project.
- v. *This information was provided by:*

*Christy L. Morris
Oil, Gas and Geothermal Program Manager
Nevada Division of Minerals*

Agenda Item #8: Review Bin Items/Adjourn

The next meeting was scheduled for July 17th (the meeting was subsequently moved to August 20th). There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully Submitted
Dawn Carter