

Sage-Grouse Conservation Team

*Nevada Farm Bureau
2165 Green Vista Drive, Suite 205
Sparks, Nevada 89431
October 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
Ali Chaney – NNHP
Shawn Espinosa – NDOW
Jim Harvey - USFS
Jamie Jasmine – NRCS
Hugh Judd – Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife
Elroy Masters – BLM, NV State Office
Tina Nappe – Self
Robin Powell – Audubon Society
Jim Sedinger – UNR
Donna Stammers – US Geothermal
Rose Strickland – Sierra Club
Rita Suminski – BLM, Carson City

Those attending by videoconference:

Elko – Larry Gilbertson
Battle Mountain – Rod Davis and Mike Stamm

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

Doug asked to include a discussion about the proposed listing at this point in the agenda. Doug is concerned that Population Management Unit Plans are not being taken into consideration during this process, and would like to ask the USFWS, USFS and BLM for their opinions. Steve Abele stated that current efforts including ongoing projects should be continued during this time until a decision is handed down. After the decision there is a 12-month comment period where recovery plans could be prepared.

Shawn asked what an actual listing would mean for federal agencies such as the BLM and the USFS. Jim Howard stated that the USFS could prepare amendments to their forest plan; however, there are amendments on hold for this year awaiting a decision from the court.

Elroy stated that the BLM will need to revisit all planning documents should sage-grouse be listed. It is felt that the Mono Basin population will most likely be listed. Also with a new Administration coming into office there is some uncertainty if this will have an effect on the proposed listing.

Shawn stated the USFWS has the ability to list the bird in significant portions of its range rather than rangewide. However, this option has not been tested in a court of law.

Shawn stated that at the next meeting we will have an agenda item concerning the listing decision.

Agenda Item #3: Announcements – Espinosa

Shawn gave the following announcements.

- a. Recently, a document called “*The Shrinking Sagebrush Sea*” written by Wild Earth Guardians, has been the subject of several press releases. This document can be found on the following website: <http://www.sagebrushsea.org/> . Overall, this document did a decent job describing the major threats to sage-grouse today although it was somewhat of a rehash of the Conservation Assessment.
- b. Sage-grouse captures were recently conducted in the following areas:
 - i. Virginia Range – 9 hens and 4 males
 - ii. Steptoe Valley (WMA) – 10 (radio collared 6)
 - iii. Eureka (Falcon to Gonder Transmission Line Study) – 26 birds trapped including 16 adult hens, 2 adult males and 14 chicks, 21 of the 26 birds caught were fitted with new radio collars
- c. The Nevada Department of Wildlife continues to work on potential mitigation packages for the proponents of the White Pine Energy Center and Southwest

Intertie Project. Mitigation for other energy related projects is also being discussed.

- d. Studies in Avian Biology (SAB) Volume entitled “*Ecology and Conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse: A Landscape Species and Its Habitats*” is progressing. There are 28 chapters with varying levels of completion.

Number of Chapters	Status of Manuscript
Accepted, sent to SAB	6
Technical edit and final revision	4
In revision following review	2
In review	4
In draft	8
In preparation	4
Total	28

After Shawn’s announcements, Tina asked about the Department acquiring some land near Winnemucca Ranch. There is immediate concern about wind energy proposed for mountain tops surrounding Winnemucca Ranch including Tule Ridge and Vinegar Peak, Shawn stated. Shawn said that NDOW is not prepared for any purchase of this land and it would take many years to make any acquisitions happen. Also, the recent wildfires have left the sagebrush spotty and riparian areas are damaged as well.

Agenda Item #4: Wilderness Coordination Letter – Espinosa

Shawn presented the draft letter to be directed to our Congressional Delegation (a copy of the draft letter can be provided upon request) regarding wilderness designated land proposals, etc. The letter was e-mailed to the team members prior to this meeting and the only comments received were from Leta Collord. The team discussed the letter and several suggested changes were given. It was decided that Shawn will revise the draft using the Team’s input and provide an updated letter at the next meeting.

Agenda Item #5: Governor’s Executive Order for Sage-grouse – Group

Each Team member was provided with an e-mail copy of the executive order prior to the meeting. Elroy stated that he was unsure how this would affect the BLM’s Land Use Plans. It was felt that this order was developed to get coordination with the energy developers on what proposals they have planned and where. Elroy also stated that this order will be discussed at the Renewable Energy Transmission Access Advisory Committee meeting involving transmission lines. Some states have enacted laws to protect sensitive habitat, whereas Nevada is fairly “lax” on these types of laws.

Agenda Item #6: Roberts Mountains Sage-grouse Habitat Enhancement – Davis/Stamm

Rod Davis and Mike Stamm reported on the Pinyon/Juniper (PJ) removal project that was conducted this past summer and early fall ending October 31st. The area was not suitable for chaining, so chain saws were used which is easier on the land and vegetation. Rod also stated that by removing small amounts of PJ we have set encroachment back by approximately 50-100 years. So far 500+ acres have been cleared, however we are not yet “winning the war”. Rod hopes to expand the project next year.

The majority of the crew who performed the project was Native Americans from the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. Both Rod and Mike were quite impressed with the young men and women who did the removal. They travelled long distances to get to the project site, worked 10-hour days, and some showed leadership qualities, but all came away with some education and a good sense of responsibility for a job well done.

The costs for this project were approximately \$200 per acre which included; crew wages, gas mileage and per diem. The BLM came up with the initial funding and was supplemented with funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nevada Department of Wildlife and Nevada Bighorns Unlimited.

The Vinini Creek project area has been added to the treatment area and is slated for treatment next year. The existing Environmental Assessment will cover the additional project area.

Agenda Item #8: Renewable/Non-renewable Energy Guidelines for Sage-grouse

Shawn stated that NDOW’s Diversity Division is currently working on wind energy guidelines for bats and raptors, so he and Elroy will discuss including sage-grouse into this effort.

Idaho’s guidelines will be available sooner than expected, and it is more extensive than Oregon’s. Washington is preparing an Instructional Memorandum (IM) showing important areas to protect habitat for all wildlife species. This IM is to be used for an “on the ground” guide on how to proceed. The following indicates progress of various BLM districts with regard to developing or amending their land use plans (resource management plans):

- Winnemucca - will have a new draft in January;
- Battle Mountain - in the preparation stage;
- Carson City - plans are 30 years old and a revision is expected in 2011;
- Susanville - plan is completed

The team felt that mitigation issues and opportunities need to be discussed within this group or another larger broad based one. Fragmentation of habitat is occurring for all

species of wildlife by energy developers, urban sprawl etc. The involvement of other groups was discussed.

Elroy asked an open question on how mitigation is enforced. Shawn stated that NDOW has a Commission Policy (P-62) directing mitigation requests; however there are few if any state laws that require mitigation for projects that negatively impact wildlife habitat. Elroy stated he would have some mitigation guidelines from Washington at the next meeting.

Agenda Item # Review Bin Items/Adjourn

The group asked Shawn to write a draft letter to the Sheldon (Lakeview office) pointing out the importance of sage-grouse. This letter should come from the Team secretary rather than NDOW. John Axtell stated that in the letter it should ask how they are implementing the plan written for the Sheldon. Shawn will draft a letter for the teams to review at the next meeting.

The next meeting was scheduled for December 18th at this same location. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully Submitted
Dawn Carter