

# *Sage-Grouse Conservation Team*

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

*December 18, 2008  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.*

## **MINUTES**

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### **Those in attendance were:**

Steve Abele - USFWS  
Doug Busselman – Nevada Farm Bureau  
Dawn Carter – NDOW  
Ali Chaney – NNH  
Shawn Espinosa – NDOW  
Jim Harvey - USFS  
Hugh Judd – Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife  
Don Klebenow – UNR Retiree  
Elroy Masters – BLM, NV State Office  
Dave McNinch – Bd. Of Wildlife Commissioners  
Larry Neel - NDOW  
Jim Sedinger – UNR  
Rose Strickland – Sierra Club  
Rita Suminski – BLM, Carson City  
Lee Turner – NV Energy

### **Those attending by videoconference:**

**Elko –** Leta Collord

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### **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**

Shawn asked for any changes to the agenda or added items.

Rose asked who is watching the energy developers and keeping track of the proposals, etc. Shawn stated that the Wildlife Diversity Division is currently working on guidelines for wind energy and that Game Division along with the USGS is ramping up efforts to conduct intensive monitoring of sage-grouse in the Virginia Mountains in response to urban/suburban development and a proposed energy project. Shawn further stated that the agency currently works on responding on a case by case basis to energy development where it impacts sage grouse and their habitat as well as other species.

Ali asked how we respond. Shawn stated that correspondence is most often by letter, but could be by phone or e-mail in very preliminary discussions and the GIS section of the Wildlife Diversity Division provides specific locations where a certain species is occurring (such as a bat hibernacula, sage-grouse lek, crucial mule deer winter range etc.) on a project by project basis. Ali stated that the Audubon Society could assist in providing information on raptors, etc.

A question was asked if the provisions we have in place have merit. Rose stated that a website would be helpful as a place to go to answer frequently asked questions. Guidelines are available on-line and wind energy potential maps are also available.. It was suggested that a spreadsheet showing rights of ways and potential project locations in Nevada might be useful.

Elroy stated there are no uniform, standardized guidelines for met towers yet, but would possibly be ready by January. However everything is dependent on funding. We will be using Oregon and Washington State's BLM guidelines as a general starting point.

The team decided to table this discussion and place it on the next meeting's agenda.

## **Agenda Item #3: Listing Decision Delayed – USFWS**

Steve Abele began this discussion stating that even though most of the analyses has been completed to develop a finding, the actual decision and publication of notice was delayed in part because of politics and also because of certain stipulations in place associated with the original judgment. The USFWS has an agreement with the Court for a late-May decision; however, Steve indicated if this doesn't happen, a decision and federal register publication may not occur until July or possibly even later.

#### **Agenda Item #4: Options and Directions for the Future – Group**

The group identified a few items they could plan for in the future and several comments were discussed.

- 1) Update the existing plan.
- 2) Passive management actions
- 3) Energy guidelines

Steve asked if the Team had already prepared a priority list of projects or tasks. He suggested that the group should define goals on a species by species basis. Also identify the tasks necessary to achieve those goals and then develop a prioritized list. When money becomes available, a priority list is ready to go.

Shawn responded stating that we started implementing the plan on a project by project basis as funding became available. A priority list was developed by the Implementation Subcommittee from the initial review of project proposals from local working groups.. Many of those projects were completed; however, some proposals had merit, but were not completed and needed to be refined and revised for further consideration.

Jim stated that local working groups could obtain their own funding and work on whatever projects they wanted to.

Steve stated that he would bring the process that the USFWS uses to prioritize projects to the next meeting.

Lee Turner suggested prioritizing habitat areas rather than projects. Shawn stated that at the PMU level, habitats were assigned certain R-value classifications. This task was completed for most working groups, but a lot has changed since these maps were completed. No statewide, standardized R-value map was completed. Elroy stated that a regional assessment should be done to determine which habitat areas will receive treatment.

The group discussed using habitat mapping as a specific project, and write up a prioritized list of tasks to achieve that goal.

A discussion of addressing private lands and their role in providing habitat for sage-grouse populations took place. Oftentimes agreements and assurances with regard to the private landowner is a difficult process. Shawn stated that when discussions have been held with landowners there is an incomplete understanding as to what species are going to be affected by certain actions. We need to find out what to ask of the landowner, and perhaps an “on the ground” discussion could identify the species which could benefit. . A lengthy discussion about landowners, Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCA), easements, grazing changes, etc. ensued with no determinations made.

Rose re-iterated her initial question asking if we will be updating our plan or not? Doug asked if the same “rules” apply anymore as opposed to when the plans were created? Two years were spent to develop local and statewide plans expecting implementation of projects to begin.. Volunteers are waiting for something they can get their “teeth” into.

The group discussed that these meetings need to be more about basic management activities, and identify specific projects to be accomplished this year. Currently our plan does not cover the negative impacts of energy development or even monitoring with regard to livestock grazing.

There was much concern expressed about the new threats to sage grouse habitat. The plan needs to be re-evaluated to include losses because of fire, the status of brood rearing and winter habitat, and energy developments as some of the newest threats.

Shawn committed to developing some guidelines for renewable energy development and sage grouse.

#### **Agenda Item #5: Sagebrush Management Indicators – Implications for Sage-grouse – Neel, Sedinger**

A Sagebrush Technical Advisory Team was recently convened to identify indicators of sagebrush ecosystem health. Sagebrush habitat quality can be measured by certain obligate species and how they respond to changes on the landscape. The team is attempting to work to improve the habitat in areas where monitoring is already being done. The team will also develop a Desired Future Condition statement.

Elroy stated that the BLM will have six indicators to track habitat and it will be nationwide. There may also be some guidelines developed. Some remote sensing will also be included. Elroy will provide the team a copy of the document when it is available.

Larry Neel stated that the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan was evaluated, (by himself and Dennis Murphy) and three targets were identified, and they are: Sagebrush, Mojave Biome and Riparian/Springs areas. So far, performance indicators have been provided for riparian and spring systems.

Jim has developed a conceptual monitoring protocol based on occupancy sampling. Jim also stated that this protocol answers what why we want a monitoring program. A suggestion was made that the team should work with monitoring experts to educate us on an effective program that works for Nevada.

The following information was provided about the Wildlife Action Plan:

- In order for an agency to receive any federal funding a Wildlife Action Plan must be written and address eight specific elements as identified by the USFWS.
- The Department has been operating under this plan since 2005. The plan will be revisited every ten years.
- Currently an Adaptive Management Strategy needs to be written so that we can measure our improvements.

**Agenda Item #6: 2008 Sage-grouse Wing Data – Espinosa**

This item was tabled and will be on the next meeting agenda.

**Agenda Item #7: Adjourn**

Shawn stated the letter concerning wild horses and burros on the Sheldon will be completed next week, as comments have already been received and incorporated.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 19<sup>th</sup> at the same time and location.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

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Respectfully Submitted  
Dawn Carter  
March 11, 2009