

Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Advisory Council

NOTES

Meeting 6: Mitigation
Location: Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave., Helena
Dates: August 13-14, 2013

August 13 Information exchange

Council representatives: Pat Connell, Janet Ellis, Gary Forrester, Jay Gore, Robert Lee, Brad Hamlett, Bill McChesney, Carl Wambolt, Paul Callahan, Curtis Monteau, Mike Volesky

Agency/invited partners:

USFWS: Jodi Bush, Brent Esmoil, Jeff Berglund;

Bureau of Land Management: Sandra Brooks, John Carlson

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation: Shawn Thomas, Kevin Chappel

US Forest Service: Mary Manning

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Ken McDonald, Rick Northrup, Catherine Wightman

Public: Bob Green, Cloud Peak Energy; Rusty Shaw, Denbury Resources, Inc.; Bill Van Pelt, WAFWA; David Patrick and Nola Freestone, Eco-Asset Management; Nick Gevock, MWF; Sam Milodragovich, Northwestern Energy; Patrick Farmer, Westech; Dave Galt, MPA; Leo Berry – Northwestern Properties; Richard Brown and Jay Cruz, Wyo-Ben, Inc.;

Review from previous meeting

No draft documents to hand out. "Writing Team" will convene on September 3rd to mock up the first draft of recommendations for Council and public review. Recommendations from July 30-31 will be incorporated in to that process.

USFWS Mitigation Policy

Jeff Berglund

Jeff Berglund discussed USFWS mitigation policy and initial considerations

Handout: 1981 Mitigation Policy briefing

USFWS Sage-grouse mitigation

Shauna Ginger (remote)

Shauna Ginger, Ecological Services Office in Oregon, discussed how the USFWS uses conservation banking as a tool for listed species and how it might be applicable for sage-grouse

Presentation: Ginger_13Aug

BLM Mitigation Guidelines

Sandy Brooks, John Carlson

John Carlson discussed 2013 BLM mitigation guidelines.

Presentation: Carlson_13Aug

Compensatory mitigation banking

David Patrick, Eco-Assets

David Patrick discussed conservation banking and how Montana might approach a conservation bank for sage-grouse

Presentation: Patrick_13Aug

Examples of mitigation from WY, Industry, Consulting

Catherine Wightman noted representatives from Wyoming Game and Fish Department would be attending the September 4-5 meeting and can discuss their approach to mitigation at that time. The understanding at this time is that Wyoming is in the early stages of discussing a mitigation banking program.

Handout: Incentives and Mitigation from Wyoming

Bob Green, Cloud Peak Energy, discussed the coal industry's approach to sagebrush reclamation and other mitigation activities.

Presentation: Green_13Aug

Richard Brown and Jay Cruz, WYO-Ben, discussed actions the Bentonite mining industry is taking to reclaim sagebrush habitat.

Presentation: Brown_13Aug

Lesser Prairie Chicken business plan

Bill Van Pelt, WAFWA Grassland Coordinator

Bill Van Pelt presented the Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Plan, conservation targets, and how the plan can be used as a regulatory mechanism for conservation of the species if industry and landowners enroll in it.

Presentation: Van Pelt_13Aug

Discussion: draft recommendations for mitigation

There was interest in developing a mitigation strategy that provided a menu of options. USFWS indicated that having multiple tools is good but it is very important to have a focused strategy for implementing mitigation.

There was discussion about adopting the sequencing of avoid, minimize, mitigate.

There was also discussion about the process for identifying core areas in WY vs. MT and some interest to revisit MT's core areas to address different existing situations among core areas.

No formal recommendations or motions were made.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dave Galt, MPA – Cedar Creek Anticline: knife is cutting both ways - has strong, stable sage-grouse populations (Rick Northrup indicated that at the time they did core areas, Cedar Creek had high density plus it provides connectivity to Dakotas) and has 32 wells/section; there are recommendations that we shouldn't put energy in to areas like Cedar Creek; WY birds take a vacation, they don't really go away, they just go someplace else.

Leo Berry, Attorney in Helena, representing Northwestern Properties – set up a trust fund to mitigate impacts to fisheries, power project, trout unlimited involved; current development – certain set of issues, other projects in process – mitigation process for mine, other projects being developed, other projects that may or may not be developed; Educate where development might take place – could have unintended consequences; Council needs more advice from industry about what recommendations should look like.

Adjourn

Aug 14 Discussion

Council representatives: Pat Connell, Janet Ellis, Jay Gore, Robert Lee, Brad Hamlett, Bill McChesney, Carl Wambolt, Paul Callahan, Curtis Monteau, Mike Volesky

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Bureau of Land Management: Sandra Brooks, John Carlson

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation: Shawn Thomas, Kevin Chappel

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Ken McDonald, Rick Northrup, Catherine Wightman

Public: Bob Green, Cloud Peak Energy; Rusty Shaw, Denbury Resources, Inc.; Bill Van Pelt, WAFWA; Nola Freestone, Eco-Asset Management; Gary Wiens, MT Utility Co-ops; Eric Detmer, Cloud Peak Energy; Richard Brown, WYO-Ben, Inc.

Discussion: draft recommendations for mitigation

Catherine Wightman provided a draft framework for Council discussion. Revisions were made to framework. A draft will be including in the working recommendations package.

There was considerable discussion about designating 'special management core areas' to accommodate industry needs; however there was no final recommendation.

Discussion: predation recommendations

Handout: Greater Sage-grouse and Predator Management in Montana (FWP)

MOTION by P. Connell - use language from Utah plan regarding predator management and add language from FWP document for preliminary draft document

Seconded by Ellis

VOTE - unanimous

Adjourn