# Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Advisory Council

## **NOTES**

Meeting 7: Adaptive Management, Implementation, Compliance Monitoring, Reporting

Location: Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave., Helena

Dates: September 4-5, 2013

# Sept 4 Implementation and Adaptive Management

Council representatives: Pat Connell, Janet Ellis, Gary Forrester, Jay Gore, Robert Lee,

Brad Hamlett, Bill McChesney, Carl Wambolt, Paul Callahan, Curtis Monteau, Ray Shaw, Glenn

Marx, Tim Baker

Agency/invited partners:

USFWS: Jodi Bush, Brent Esmoil, Jeff Berglund;

Bureau of Land Management: Sandra Brooks, John Carlson, Dale Tribby Department of Natural Resources and Conservation: Shawn Thomas

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

Public: Bob Green, Cloud Peak Energy; Mark Lambrecht, TSRIA; Melissa Lewis, OneOK; Graham Neale, GANDA; Matt Dillon, American Colloid Co.; Nola Freestone, Eco-Asset Management; Tyler Tetrault, BPM; Van Jamison, Gaelectric, LCC; John Youngberg, Montana Farm Bureau; Hayes Goosey, Montana State University; Rich Southwick, GNP; Rusty Shaw, Denbury Resources; Sam Milodragovich, Northwestern Energy; Gary Weins, Montana Electric Co-ops;

#### DDCT demonstration

## Nicholas Graf, WyGISC

Nicolas described the mechanics of implementing the DDCT in Wyoming, including example projects. <a href="Presentation">Presentation</a>: Graf\_04September2013

## Implementation of WY's core area policy

Mary Flanderka, WGFD

Mary discussed how the core area policy is implemented in Wyoming, and how new issues and exceptions to the policy are addressed.

Presentation: Flanderka\_04September2013

#### FWP technology & capacity

#### Adam Messer& Dawn Anderson

- Data services within FWP
- Very impressed with WGFD; efficiencies to be gained
- Right now have staff of 5 total for FWP
- Technology is not at same base infrastructure; will take some additional time and work to make something like this happen in MT; basic fundamental differences between 2 states;
- Don't have online mapping capability; e.g., outside users log in to an internal system and make changes, can't do

Funding strategy Glenn Marx, MALT

Glenn discussed a conceptual proposal designed to help prevent future ESA listings and the need for urgent, emergency creation of advisory councils.

# **Genetic Connectivity**

## **Todd Cross & Mike Schwartz, UM Missoula**

Mike and Todd discussed their research looking at genetic connectivity among sage-grouse populations in Montana and rangewide.

<u>Presentation</u>: Schwartz and Cross\_04September2013

Paul presented a schedule for preparing a draft strategy.

MOTION – Marx to accept schedule on screen;

Shaw –seconded

Vote – unanimous

Discussion: MT core areas, special management areas

No formal recommendations made.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

John Youngberg, Montana Farm Bureau, liked de minimus activities in WY, grazing activities; would be supportive of those; needs to be some recognition of predation, not saying primary cause, needs to be recognized in plan and localized efforts; connectivity – there has to be flexibility, work on data, get it finalized before something goes in to plan regarding connectivity, needs to be certainty to move forward with plans, moving target for connectivity difficult for industry; what happens with listing is cogent discussion, Ashe said 90% certain they will be listed despite what states are doing; BLM has already cut grazing on public lands

Gary Weins, Montana Electric Co-ops, updating on where they are at; collectively 56,000 miles of power lines; 2 weeks ago Co-ops met in Billings and reviewed Council matrix; good understanding of how plan works for WY; drafting committee amenable to their proposal; trying to be proactive, significant restrictions – their proposal 4 mile boundary would be trigger for using tool but not restrict development, also don't think voltage is important, location more important; support de minimum farm lines etc.; bury lines could have significant costs; agree to perch preventers; working with draft committee; MDU thought it looked pretty good;

Ben Deeble – working on sage-grouse for 15 years, especially SW and central MT; 32 meetings to put together original plan; help with monitoring and feather samples for genetic sampling; president of Big Sky Upland Game Bird Council; 4 things that could be greatest contribution 1) convey real commitment to protecting habitat in core areas, especially state lands, DNRC lands – prohibit sagebrush burning, prohibit wind turbines, conventional occupancy; marking fences, modification of livestock watering tanks, especially those that contribute to WNV; suggesting a workshop to address WNV; 2) identify cheatgrass as noxious weed in MT; 3) a lot of leks on private lands, could be helpful for state to begin negotiating conservation easements, leases, land purchases; 4) sage-grouse harvest in MT needs to be reformed, thinks Commission should step in more aggressively, a more conservative harvest, bag limit, regional closures, MT is earliest, longest, least flexible season, potential to harvest most birds; harvest much more likely to be additive; may provide some assurance to USFWS that sage-grouse are not in need of listing; presentation put together by San Stiver; personal and professional belief that this needs to change;

Dan Bailey, Pheasants Forever – history of working with sage-grouse, partner with IWJV to sponsor SGI; do have some of the biologists positions throughout west; long history of working with Farm Bill; strong history of working with private landowners, PF is interested is interested and here to support;

Sam Milodragovich, Northwestern Energy – update, APLIC developing best-management practices, meeting Sept 11 and 12 in Denver, trouble getting agencies there; sometime in Oct will have something for group;

Matt Dillon, American Colloid Co. – maps for Bentonite mining; activity is in current core areas; Carbon and Carter Counties, plus 2 in Phillips; overlaid on breeding density maps; also bentonite strata; some % of disturbance occurring; areas in south established mining, pretty well honed in, will continue to go on; polygons in Phillips Co. are general because of proprietary data but mining could occur in future;

## Sept 5 Compliance Monitoring and Reporting

Council representatives: Pat Connell, Janet Ellis, Gary Forrester, Jay Gore, Robert Lee,

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Marx, Tim Baker

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Department of Natural Resources and Conservation: Shawn Thomas

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

Public: Laura Blake, ArchCoal; Rich Southwick GNP; Mara Johnson, World Wildlife Fund; Patrick Farmer, Westech; Nola Freestone, Eco-Assets; Gary Wiens, Montana Electric Co-ops; Rusty Shaw, Denbury

Resources; Tyler Tetrault, BPM; Richard Brown, Wyo-Ben, Inc.

West Nile Virus Dr. Greg Johnson, MSU

Dr. Johnson discussed trends in West Nile virus outbreaks and correlations with mosquito abundance. <a href="Presentation">Presentation</a>: Johnson\_05September2013

## Miles City Field Office Planning

Dale Tribby, BLM

Dale discussed BLM planning in the Miles City Field Office and perspectives on sage-grouse populations in Cedar Creek area and Carter County.

#### Discussion

Discussion revolved around how to define connectivity areas and what recommendations might be appropriate for connectivity areas and general sage-grouse habitat. Council also discussed the concept of Special Management Core Areas as an option for addressing industry concerns in core areas. No formal decisions were made.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Gary Weins, Montana Electric Co-ops – concerns about restrictions in non-core area; proposal submitted to Council from Co-ops

Rusty Shaw, Denbury Resources – Data in Cedar Creek disturbance, pulled together for Janet; highest % disturbance in unit is 17%; DDCT would call each unit 100% disturbed; total disturbance in core 8.9%, BLM restoration 7.1% and source population area 1.5% currently but this is where Denbury wants to go now; WY plan – industrialized areas excluded; unit allows you to have access to entire resource below it; unitized; allows you to encompass a larger landscape; showed maps of development & disturbance; source population area better for CO2 exploration, expected around 2019 timeframe, start permitting, NEPA process in next couple of years;

Dan Bailey, Pheasants Forever – biologists work with landowners; council look at how to get more people on the ground working with private landowners; there are existing incentive programs; need to do a better job of letting them know what is going on;

USFWS comments Jodi Bush

USFWS role is as advisors; sitting at table doesn't constitute an agreement with where you are headed, it is your process, you have direction from Governor, interested in what you are doing but not how you get there; interest is conservation of species; hearing bits and pieces that sound promising but it's the whole process that they are interested in;

#### Mitigation discussion

Council discussed mitigation and how much detail to include in the first draft. No official decisions were made.

# **Additional topics**

Council discussed additional topics, such as letters from public and predators but no official decisions were made.

# **Public Meetings and Process**

Council members voice support for identifying dates, times and locations for the upcoming public meetings ASAP. They tended to favor more of a hearing-type format. Details will be finalized in coming weeks.