

BMT Annual Meeting

Meeting: Annual meeting to evaluate & develop annual work plan for BMT

Participants: Hal Laskowski, Tom Worthington, Jennifer Casey, Sara Williams, Rick Schauffler, Sue McMahon, Sandy Spencer, Soch Lor, Jan Taylor, Karen Viste Sparkman, Nita Fuller, Lindsey Landowski, Tony Leger, Pat Heglund, Janet Kennedy, Dan Wood, Jessica Lee, Leah Ceperley, Pauline Drobney, Sue Adamowicz, Todd Sutherland, Melinda Knutson

Visitors: Marvin Moriarty, Wendi Weber, Lamar Gore

Dates of Meeting: 2-3 April 2008

Meeting Location: Hadley, MA

Action Items	
Responsible person:	Task:
	COMMUNICATION
BMT	Put all the info from meeting together & share with the field – succinct
BMT	Compile feedback from the field – respond to the issues – send out to field
BMT	Continue BMT newsletters – use catchy phrase in subject heading to encourage people to read.
BMT	Provide updates on BMT activities on R5 Biology conf. calls & R3 Network conf. calls.
Todd	Obtain direct access to BMT intranet site and pursue an internet site so that our partners can access documents, & resources. Follow up with Adamcik & Granillo regarding the national biology website.
Pat, Jan, Hal	Somehow clarify process for requesting assistance from BMT for refuges (functional directory, fact sheet, ??) Include info within a revised Functional Directory sent to all refuges.
	RMADS/RLGIS
Rick & Todd	Provide guidance to Nita about positive and negatives of RLGIS. Include proponents of RLGIS. Need to plan a meeting with R3 Chief & GIS Specialists to plan what to do about the June meeting.
	ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT
Melinda	Finalize call for proposals for Structured Decision-Making (SDM) / Adaptive Management (AM) consultations (workshops), post forms & guidance on BMT website. Send notice out with next BMT newsletter. Identify to refuges that they can submit proposals at any time. However, successful proposals will only be selected every 4 months, or when staff have sufficient time to facilitate a new AM Consultation.
	TRAINING
Todd, Melinda, Soch	Schedule online trainings for marsh bird, land bird, & water level protocols/databases.
	MISCELLANEOUS
Pat & Tom	Explore CESU contract?? Maintain connection with USGS, look into CESU & indefinite quantities contract,

Agenda

Day 1 – April 2, 2008

8:00 – 8:30 BMT Program Updates – Todd

- 8:30 – 9:15 BMT Vision – Hal/Tony/Pat (Waterbird SDM, Flyway SHC effort)
- 9:15 – 9:30 BMT Vision – Melinda (AM consultations)
- 9:30 – 10:00 Discussion/questions regarding BMT Vision
- 10:15 – 11:45 LMRD Update/Integration with RRB/BMT efforts
- 11:45 – 1:00 LUNCH
- 1:00 – 1:30 Discuss presentation for Service Directorate
- 1:30 – 2:00 Refuge Supervisor & Field biologist feedback/guidance to BMT
- 2:00 – 3:00 Discussion regarding feedback from supervisors/field
How should BMT evaluate and prioritize project requests?
- 3:15 – 4:00 RMADs update/demo – Jennifer/Todd
- 4:00 – 5:00 Discussion/questions regarding RMADs
- 5:00 – 5:15 Day 1 summary, discuss meeting agenda for Day 2, other items.....

Day 2 – April 3, 2008

- 8:00 – 8:30 Introduce proposed new BMT projects and current draft work plan. How well does the current draft plan align with feedback from Day 1 discussions?
- 8:30 – 9:00 Discussion/questions regarding proposed BMT projects and draft work plan
- 9:00 – 9:30 Prioritize new/existing BMT projects to develop final work plan
- 9:30 – 10:30 Capacity to accomplish the work plan
- 10:45 – 11:10 RCRP discussion; Status of past workshop efforts, Future proposals, Identifying future needs.....
- 11:10 – 11:40 Re-visit the BMT vision, other items, meeting summary and close

Minutes:

1. Todd & Hal presented a status report on the current BMT projects. A Fact Sheet summarizes this information.
 - a. A discussion session followed. Some key thoughts:
 - b. Refuges feel that most things the BMT staff are doing are useful & important.
 - c. There is still a lack of understanding in the field about what it is that the BMT does. Despite the quarterly BMT Bulletins, people are so time-limited that sometimes the Bulletins go unread. However, they still want us to produce & distribute the Bulletins, maybe use a catchy subject line to get people to read it. Communication seems to be a key area where improvement could occur. Jan mentioned that the BMT should give an update at the quarterly R5 Biology conf. calls. Something similar could be done on the R3 Network calls.
 - d. Add capacity in the field to allow Refuges to do Adaptive Management on their own.
 - e. Could NCTC do some of the adaptive management workshops?
 - f. Look for other sources of funding – CCS cost challenge projects?
 - g. What is the role of the BMT in the Refuge Cooperative Research Program (RCRP) with USGS?
2. Melinda described the AM Consultancy.
 - a. There was no major opposition to the process; a few questions were answered.
 - b. Melinda plans to work with Donna Brewer at NCTC to create a handbook for conducting SDM/AM workshops and follow-up.
3. Sue Adamowicz & Pauline Drobney presented a summary of the LMRD program in each Region, with handouts. Discussion followed:

- a. Is there a way for the BMT to support the LMRD's?
 - b. To clarify roles between LMRD & BMT – create a Fact Sheet.
 - c. Create/revise a functional directory – who does what in the RO - for each Region.
4. Feedback about BMT from Refuge Supervisors:
- a. Tom Worthington (R3):
 - i. Project Leaders enjoy participation in RCRP projects – good to have contact with USGS
 - ii. Confused about BMT / SHC / etc. etc.
 - iii. Admin support for Pat & BMT an issue for one of the supervisors.
 - iv. The Refuge Supervisors are more supportive of the BMT now than initially, although they are not directly involved in projects.
 - b. Sue McMahon (R5):
 - i. Managers support of BMT & multi-refuge projects, although a little arm-twisting was needed initially.
 - ii. Managers aren't complaining, although 'they consider the BMT one of Tony's priority projects'..
 - iii. Supervisors are too busy to deal with other than putting out fires. Lot of work went into workforce planning last couple years.
 - iv. Outreach – newsletters good. How can we get people excited about the working going on?
5. Feedback about BMT from Refuge Biologists:
- a. Biologists from both Regions surveyed most refuges regarding their assessment of the BMT activities. The comments are summarized in several documents (see attached). Here are highlights:
 - b. Refuges still confused about what BMT does, how to request services, etc. Need guidance about who to go to in the RO for specific issues.
 - c. Refuge Supervisors need to participate more in conf. calls so they understand what's going on & can be more supportive.
 - d. As much as possible, use protocols & databases that already exist: FIREMON, NPS protocols.
 - e. Region 3:
 - i. General approval of BMT activities.
 - ii. Improvements could be made in communication, empowering Refuge Biologists to take leadership on adaptive management projects, & follow up with previous workshops.
 - iii. Would like to see a regional land cover assessment
 - iv. Want to see BMT challenge 'traditional' but questionable refuge management practices: impoundments.
 - f. Region 5:
 - i. General approval of BMT activities.
 - ii. Better communication, outreach, & more training with databases & protocols are needed.
 - iii. There are additional needs for standardized surveys & protocols & training in their use is needed.
 - iv. Concerns about the time required for the adaptive management projects.
 - v. Would like one-on-one consultation on refuge-specific issues. More statistical consultation.

- vi. BMT should help existing work groups.
 - vii. BMT should help refuges publish their data.
 - viii. BMT should generate Regional temporal and spatial data to help refuges understand how they fit into Regional & national priorities.
6. Hal & Melinda presented a draft of the presentation that will be given to the FWS Directorate about the BMT next week. Suggestions were made regarding how to shorten, de-clutter, etc. Hal & Melinda will revise accordingly. (This presentation was given on 10 April; the BMT had an hour on the agenda. Presentation went well, with about 25 minutes of question & answers.)
 7. Jennifer & Todd provided an overview of RMADS/RLGIS and the complicating issues. A very entertaining skit was used to describe the various viewpoints on the topic. Fundamentally, RMADS is a centralized database and the data can be merged with a GIS, if the field station chooses to do so. RLGIS is a desktop, decentralized GIS system right now. Centralization is possible in the future, but technical & financial issues present significant obstacles right now. Both systems can hold management action information; RLGIS also holds mapped information. Biological information will be held in various other databases, as needed.
 - a. Nita & Tony need to decide whether or not to support embracing RLGIS as a national GIS format for holding refuge data at the Chief's meeting in June.
 - b. Key question – what do the Regional Chiefs really need information about? What is the NWRS vision for biological data management on refuges, and how should the various data be linked together to aid refuge analysis for use in decision-making? This will determine the relative value of a centralized vs. decentralized system. Nita wants the refuges to query the system so they can look across refuges, partners, and assess landscape scale info. Both Nita & Tony want the refuge system & individual refuges to be recognized as experts in wildlife management. We need to explain how we fit into the ecoregion, how the management actions we take will benefit the resource.
 - c. Todd & Rick Schaufler will arrange a meeting with Nita to review RLGIS prior to the June Chiefs meeting. Others may also be invited.
 8. Proposals:
 - a. Administrative support – Nita, Tom & Pat are working on a plan to resolve the administrative needs for both BMT & Regional Biologists.
 - b. Hire modeler: Hal presented a proposal to hire a modeler to assist refuges in both Regions with structured decision making and adaptive management. Discussion ensued. Cannot justify right now, given recent budget difficulties.
 - c. Refuges would like to see a statistician hired. Pat & Jan have contracts in place to provide refuges with statistical consultation; they encouraged refuges to take advantage of these contracts before we can justify hiring someone.
 - d. Possibly use SCEP program to bring in modeling/statistical skills that are currently needed.
 9. Discussion of budget items & work plan projects.
 - a. No projects were deemed low priority. Items that were deemed high priority by biologists in attendance: items 1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 31, 35, on the budget list (see attached list).
 - b. BMT website key to communications. Todd will explore direct access and maintenance of BMT intra and internet sites. RRB's & LMRD's would also like web sites. Todd recommends we start small, with BMT, and grow rather than taking on too big a task all at once.
 - c. Finish current RCRP projects; don't worry about new ones. See that current projects get published.
 - d. Explore Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESU) as a way to contract with universities at low overhead rates.
 - e. Process discussed for new SDM/AM workshops. Melinda will revise the current forms & guidance accordingly. There will be a rolling or open call for workshop proposals, with reviews &

ranking of proposals at least quarterly; reminders will be sent to the field annually. Thus, there will be no deadlines for proposal submissions.

- f. Someone suggested 'Refuge Biology Support Team' as an umbrella for the RRB/LMRD/BMT staff.