From:	Grim, Mary
To:	Lohoefener, Ren
Cc:	Noreen Walsh
Subject:	Re: NRST findings re NV
Date:	Monday, March 16, 2015 10:01:35 AM
Attachments:	NRST presentation to RFWO brief 3-11-15.docx

See attached.

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On Mon, Mar 16, 2015 at 8:53 AM, Lohoefener, Ren <ren_lohoefener@fws.gov> wrote:

> Mary
>
> I can't find the briefing paper electronically. If you have it, please forward a copy to Noreen, thanks.
>
> Ren

March 11, 2015

INTERNAL AGENY INFORMATION MEMORANDUM:
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION OUTSIDE OF USFWS

TO: Mike Fris, Assistant Regional Director, Pacific Southwest Region

FROM: Ted Koch, Field Supervisor, Reno Fish & Wildlife Office

SUBJECT: Preliminary Findings from National Riparian Service Team's Assessment of BLM Nevada Stakeholders

I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2014, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Nevada State Director requested the National Riparian Service Team (NRST) assess the social, environmental, and economic context in which BLM operates in northern Nevada, and identify opportunities for more sustainable rangeland management. On February 26 and 27, 2015, after meeting with over 175 people, the NRST shared their preliminary findings with the BLM State Director and then the Reno Fish & Wildlife Office (RFWO). The NRST expects to produce a written report for public distribution by the end of March; here we summarize some of the information shared with our office.

II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The NRST found stakeholder concerns on the following "themes" in relative priority order: riparian health, livestock grazing, drought, wild horse and burros, private lands and water, sage-grouse, mining and energy, and invasive species and fire. Discussions specific to BLM centered on: tactics (enforcement versus cooperation), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) workload, lack of leadership, high staff turnover, poor external relations, and that collaboration was often (but not always) viewed as not being part of BLM culture.

Specifically, the report found the following: Regarding riparian health, livestock grazing, and drought management, examples of management resulting in desirable change are rare. BLM is challenged in adequately administering grazing permits, and creates bureaucracy that is in turn inconsistently administered. BLM allegedly favors reductions in or elimination of livestock on allotment over more flexibility in how they are grazed. BLM requests for "voluntary" reductions in livestock due to drought seem coercive.

Stakeholders pointed to the Argenta Allotment in north-central Nevada, as emblematic of their concerns. Last summer, the BLM's ordered cattle be removed from nine areas within the 330,000-acre allotment. This prompted protests, including horseback rides across northern Nevada to Carson City, and to Washington, D.C. This occurred just months after the BLM's armed stand-off with Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy in southern Nevada. Responses of livestock grazing permittees to implementation of upcoming land use plan revisions designed to conserve sage grouse could include further unrest.

Regarding wild horse and burros, the NRST observed that the population trajectory (which BLM acknowledges doubles every 4-5 years) and inadequate resources (BLM states that holding costs consume more than 50% of the national program budget, and facilities are 95% full) contribute to

a fear that Nevada is facing, according to the NRST's preliminary findings, "…a perfect storm of issues and threatened ecological collapse, given existing drought and high levels of wild horse and burro populations." [It is unclear to the RFWO what would be the specific manifestation of this claim] The NRST found some potential for common ground with some horse advocates and other stakeholders.

Stakeholders lamented that BLM creates disincentives to cooperate because BLM wants water rights holders to transfer a portion of their right to BLM for wildlife, wild horses, or both. Regarding sage-grouse, stakeholders questioned whether the BLM has the capacity to implement necessary actions. Comments regarding mining and energy affirmed that impacts are concentrated on a small percentage of the overall landscape, while contributing to the economy and affording opportunities for mitigation. Invasive species and fire were seen as the two major threats to sagebrush ecosystems and sage-grouse, frequently causing "irreversible" changes.

Regarding the function of the BLM in Nevada they reported there was widespread awareness of conflict within the BLM state leadership team, alleged inconsistent implementation of state-wide policies, and a perception of a lack of collaboration.

III. POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

The BLM Nevada State Director has previously acknowledged to the RFWO concern regarding many of these issues and how they may affect successful implementation of BLM's revised land management plans for sage grouse. Having specifically sought the services of the NRST, the State Director appears eager to benefit from their recommendations, and has acknowledged that additional staffing and collaboration with others including the Service are keys to success.

Presenting a conceptual model that described most relationships as operating along a continuum:

Conflict → Crisis → Coexistence → Collaborate → Cooperate

the NRST characterized the current state of BLM's stakeholder relationships as somewhere between conflict and crisis. The NRST observed that stakeholders appear uncertain how to move successfully towards cooperation.

IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The BLM Nevada State Director has accepted the NRST's recommendations to conduct facilitated discussions starting this week on the Argenta Allotment, involving key players, with the goal of developing a common understanding of riparian/rangeland health, current and desired future conditions, and management options.

In coming months the NRST expects to conduct community workshops to build a common understanding of riparian health and management approaches, and innovative ways to incentivize good management, particularly in sage-grouse habitat. The Service should actively engage in these workshops.

The NRST affirmed that the decision-making authority needed to effectively manage wild horse and burros resides at a national level, and advised the BLM Nevada State Director that solutions be pursued at that level before attempting to engage local stakeholders in control efforts – noting stakeholders are skeptical of the agency's political will to implement necessary management.

The RFWO has offered and is already demonstrating our support for addressing these issues.