From: Ted Koch
To: Ren Lohoefener; Noreen Walsh
Subject: RE: Ideas for the Nevada delegation sage grouse briefing
Date: Friday, July 19, 2013 5:40:00 PM

Ren and Noreen-

My thoughts are included after yours, Ren, in blue text. I'm sorry it's so long. Hopefully you have some free time this weekend to read it! ☺

Thanks,

Ted

Ted Koch
Nevada State Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1340 Financial Boulevard
Reno, Nevada 89502
775-861-6300

From: Lohoefener, Ren [mailto:ren_lohoefener@fws.gov]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 10:44 AM
To: Noreen Walsh; Koch, Ted
Subject: Ideas for the Nevada delegation sage grouse briefing

Noreen and Ted - here are some preliminary thoughts on how we might handle the briefing, keeping in mind the range of issues is broad but time will be limited. Also, I learned this morning that BLM WO plans to attend the briefing.

1) *A brief history of the sage-grouse listing decision (i.e. Center for Biological Diversity legal settlement with USFWS requiring final decision on 757 species.)* **Ren could do this - 10 minutes**
Pare this down to 5 minutes? Not sure how important this is.
2) *Timeline of expected events/decisions/deadlines between now and 2015 and what the Nevada Governor's office needs to complete before then. Applies to both FWS & BLM.*
Noreen (or whomever Noreen delegates to, Noreen used as shorthand hereafter) might do the timeline part - Ted does the Nevada part. 15 minutes
Timeline should be brief?
The Nevada Governor's Office work is straight forward: (1) complete an avoidance, minimization and mitigation plan that achieves the Governor's 2012 Sage Grouse Advisory Committee recommendation for "no net loss" of sage grouse habitat from development, and (2) work with partners to stop the dominance of cheatgrass.
Mitigation from development could, in the near-term, fund efforts to stop cheatgrass dominance, but to truly succeed we will need a long-term ecosystem-scale restoration project at the level of the Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Pacific Northwest Forest Plan over the next 20 years, perhaps.
The Nevada Governor's Office and Legislature deserve credit for creating the Sagebrush Ecosystem

Council and Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team because they have organized their diverse resources from several state agencies into one office to directly address sagebrush ecosystem conservation. Frankly, I think the federal agencies should do the same and match up with Nevada to better focus on the issue.

3) *A brief overview of the major threats to sage-grouse in Nevada (i.e. Wildfire, Invasive Species/Pinyon-Juniper Encroachment and Lack of Regulatory Mechanisms). Congressman Amodei will want to focus on wildfire mitigation, fuels management and restoration since wildfire is the primary threat to sage grouse in Nevada.* **Ted does this - 15 minutes**

(I'm not sure who wrote these topics but…) I disagree that wildfire is the primary threat to sage grouse in Nevada, or the Great Basin. If there's one single threat, it's cheatgrass because it's chewing up the most acres of grouse habitat and we don't know how to stop it. More comprehensively, the primary threat is invasive species and wildfire. I can show a map of the recent Bison Fire in Nevada as a good example of the potentially positive benefits of fire for sage grouse - but for the risk of cheatgrass invasion.

The main point I would make here is first that the COT report says the main goal is to stop the decline; we know that won't happen tomorrow, and that's okay in Nevada with over 15 million acres of habitat left. But we need assurance that the decline will stop by the day after tomorrow. For threats other than invasive species and fire, such as development, loss of wet meadows, or PJ encroachment, we know how to stop those; we just have to choose to act (e.g., regulatory mechanisms, proactive restoration). But for cheatgrass in the Great Basin, <u>we still don't know how to stop it</u>. And climate change appears to make it worse.

We have about 10 separate tools that work well independently on a small scale to prevent, suppress, and restore areas with cheatgrass, but we don't yet know how to deploy them strategically, across the landscape, and over time to stop the decline. The good news is that on the day of this meeting (7/31) my staff and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team are convening the Nevada Cheatgrass Action Team in Reno, with support from WAFWA and Ken Mayer's invasive species and wildfire team, to work with 3 private landowners in Nevada and those scientists who are experts with the 10 tools, to begin strategic deployments of the tools on the 3 land ownerships, followed by monitoring and adaptive management. We'll seek to transfer that technology to federal lands and other Great Basin states as quickly as possible.

4) *An in-depth overview of the FWS' criteria that must be met to avoid an Endangered or Threatened listing in 2015. The specific criteria are still unclear.* **Ren does this 10 minutes**

Main criteria: stop the decline. If desired, I can help put a voice to the need to stop the decline of 2-3% per year we're currently observing range-wide by reporting that throughout the west invasive species replace native vegetation at the rate of 4,000 acres/day. Also, in Nevada in 2012 we burned 820 acres per day of just sage grouse habitat, and much of that will probably return as cheatgrass. Finally, scientists estimate that 40% of existing sagebrush habitat in the Great Basin today may be converted to invasive annual grasses over the next 30 years. I could go on…

5) *What actions are the FWS & BLM taking to avoid a 2015 listing? In light of recent wildfire events (Carpenter 1 fire), how is the FWS & BLM protecting these general habitat and priority habitat areas? Have the President's recently released Solar Energy Zones conducted EA's of how they are affecting habitat areas?* **Noreen, Ted, and probably BLM 20 minutes**

The Carpenter 1 fire is outside the range of sage grouse, and Solar Energy Zones do not affect sage grouse habitat to my knowledge. As mentioned above, we could talk about the Bison Fire's effects on grouse habitat. Perhaps this is one for the BLM to handle?

6) *How will the Bi-State population listing decision affect the 2015 Greater Sage-grouse*

listing decision? Our office has been informed by FWS that the FWS Regional Office will be proposing a "threatened" species listing for the bi-state population this fall. **Ren does this - 5 minutes**

You have all of this one.

7) *What options are open to the delegation to assist in preventing a threatened or endangered listing in 2015?* **Noreen and Ted - 20 minutes**

Support efforts to stop the increasing dominance of cheatgrass through the strategic deployment of existing tools across the landscape and over time. We can definitely do this, but it needs a lot of direction and support for a long time! Also, support streamlining regulatory compliance processes such as NEPA and NHPA where the project purpose is to remove threats to ESA candidate or listed species. Finally, support development and operation of an interagency office focused on long-term sagebrush ecosystem conservation that is co-located with the state of Nevada's Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, and invite other Great Basin states to participate.

I recently briefed Congressman Horsford on sage grouse, and talked about invasive species and fire. His first question to me was, "Who's job is it to address this issue." I was caught for a moment, and then said, "Nobody's." I think that's the point to make – **until it's someone's assigned responsibility to address invasive species and wildfire in the Great Basin, we won't get the job done**. I and others are providing as much leadership as we can, but it's clearly not enough.

This strategy uses 95 minutes, so the timeline is too long if we are going to entertain questions and interjects and stay in the 2 hour briefing period. Thoughts? Ren

If you want me to say anything I've written, I can say all of it pretty quickly. I think the discussion and questions part is where the best exchanges tend to occur, so I would strive to minimize my talking.