From: Larry Crist
To: Greg Sheehan
Cc: Rory Reynolds; Mike Fowlks; Mike Canning; John Harja
Subject: FW: GRSG: final grazing memo and internal Q&A
Date: Friday, March 27, 2015 1:37:19 PM
Attachments: Grazing memo QA Final 022015 (2).docx

Greg,

I apologize for any redundancy but wanted to make sure you had seen a recent internal memo that clarifies the Service's position on grazing and sage grouse. Below is a URL for the final, signed and dated range wide grazing memo issued recently by the Assistant Regional Directors for Ecological Services. Please feel free to share with any partners that you wish and to contact me if you have any questions

http://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/documents/Landowners/20150205_FWS_%20Sage%20grouse%20Ranching%20ARD%20Review_%20Sign%20Final.pdf

Larry Crist
Utah Field Supervisor
USFWS, Ecological Services
Office: 801-975-3330 X126
Fax: 801-975-3331

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation
Rangewide Grazing Guidance Memo discussion
Draft, 02/20/15

Recently, the ARDS-ES in sage-grouse regions finalized and distributed to Service sage-grouse project leaders and personnel a Rangewide Guidance Memo that outlined the Service's position on livestock grazing and working with rangeland owners to conserve sage-grouse.

While the purpose of the memo is to provide specific guidance to Service personnel as they work with rangeland landowners, the memo is likely to receive attention from external stakeholders ranging from livestock producers to organizations advocating for cessation of livestock grazing on the federal estate in sage-grouse range.

The following questions and answers are for use by Service personnel speaking publically about this memo. By embracing a common set of public information on this topic, the Service can deliver a clear, consistent message about our position on grazing and sage-grouse conservation.

What is the purpose of the grazing memo?
The purpose of the memo is to communicate - in accessible, unambiguous fashion – that the Service wants to work with livestock producers to help them understand the value of maintaining the habitat conditions that sage-grouse need - both for the long-term conservation of wildlife and for the improved range conditions that will benefit their cattle operations.

Who wrote it?
The memo was written by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Field Office and was refined to provide guidance across the three regions.

How is it being used?
The memo is being used to provide guidance to all Service field personnel (Regions 1, 6, and 8) working with rangeland owners on sage-grouse conservation efforts to ensure we are working in an informed, constructive and consistent manner with these partners to find durable solutions to conservation questions related to livestock grazing and sage-grouse protection.

It also provides specific guidance to Service staff who develop and implement Candidate Conservation Agreements/with Assurances (CCAs/CCAAs), Partners for Fish and Wildlife program projects, and perform other activities such as provision of technical assistance.

What is the Service's position on grazing with regard to sage-grouse conservation?

- The Service wants to work collaboratively with ranchers to benefit their ranching operations and wildlife.
- Livestock grazing can have either positive or negative effects on sage-grouse habitat depending on a host of variables including site potential, climatic conditions along with historic and current stocking rates.

- There is no black or white in this area. Interpreting rangeland conditions, rangeland potential, and stocking rates is tremendously complex.
- Deciding where and how to apply different types of management under varied local ecological conditions is also very complex.

What are the Service's concerns relating to overgrazing?

- Generally speaking, overgrazing degrades habitat conditions needed by sage-grouse.
- Overgrazing can decrease food and cover by modifying vegetation structure and plant composition, exacerbate sage-grouse nest predation and nest abandonment, increase the spread of nonnative plant species and aggravate fire conditions.

What are some of the benefits of properly managed grazing?

- Properly managed grazing can create or sustain conditions sage-grouse need during their life-cycle.
- Properly managed grazing can increase the diversity of vegetative cover by reducing excessive shrub cover, promoting growth of grasses and forbs, and improving conditions of some desirable woody species.
- Grazing can also remove excessive levels of fine fuels and reduce some fire risk.

Why is it important that ranchers understand the benefits of proper grazing management?

- It is good for conservation across the range of sage-grouse to have healthy, economically stable private rangelands.
- Functioning livestock ranches often provide wildlife habitat for sage-grouse and many other species while helping to maintain many basic ecological processes on these landscapes.
- Private ranchlands commonly include wetlands and drainages with wetter, richer soils that sage-grouse need during the brooding season.
- Conditions that support sage-grouse also provide better forage for livestock, which improves ranchers' bottom line.

Why is it important to support sustainable livestock production operations?

- Livestock ranching is an important cultural tradition and a significant economic driver across much of the West.
- Economically viable ranches help maintain large, contiguous tracts of sagebrush.
- When ranches are sold or subdivided, loss of sagebrush to development or degradation of sagebrush by non-agricultural uses often ensues.
- Healthy rural communities provide local services, expertise and infrastructure to help address important conservation challenges that the Service cannot manage on its own such as suppressing undesirable wildfire, treating exotic species invasions, and monitoring local field conditions.
- Struggling communities may be distracted by challenges and discouraged from investing time and energy in conservation.

Why is the Service so interested in working with ranchers?

- The Service's job – whether for sage-grouse or any other fish, wildlife, and plant species – is to work with others to find the most effective ways to protect the nation's natural heritage.
- We will always advocate a collaborative approach that helps address threats to a species, in this case sage-grouse, now and into the future.
- If we continue to work collaboratively with ranchers, we believe we have a good chance at stabilizing and maintaining viable populations of sage-grouse through much of their historic range in a way that is sensitive to local community goals.

Where should staff direct media calls regarding this memo?

Please direct media questions to the sage-grouse Public Affairs Specialists

- Theo Stein, 303-236-4336, theo_stein@fws.gov
- Anna Harris, 503-231-6208, anna_harris@fws.gov
- Dan Hottle, 775-861-6336, dan_hottle@fws.gov