From: Noreen Walsh
To: Matt Kales
Subject: RE: GRSG: external communications re: FWS stronghold memo
Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2014 3:56:07 PM

Dan understands the letter of a different nature but we can talk.

Where is the link to the maps if I send a note?

Noreen Walsh
Regional Director
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From: Matt Kales [mailto:matt_kales@fws.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, November 18, 2014 2:24 PM
To: Noreen Walsh
Subject: GRSG: external communications re: FWS stronghold memo

Hi,

I had a good talk with Pat and Lief just now. They advised the State of WY's pending letter to FWS re: our stronghold memo has evolved and that WY, likely with BLM WY assistance, will draft a template letter, on to which other SG states will sign and that WGA will transmit (whether to you, Dan or DOI is unclear). Clearly, this potential development is unfortunate and misses the intent of our effort to identify and communicate to BLM those places on the map we believe require optimum conservation to promote species persistence. While we can't stop folks from writing letters, we can redouble our efforts to communicate externally about our intent and try and correct some of the misinformation ("e.g., land grab speculation) fueling state concerns. One way to do so is for you to write an e-mail message to the SGTF that:

- Acknowledges that there may be some misunderstanding about our memo and its intent;
- Uses the 2nd half of our related TPs to reiterate our intent (and clarify what the map memo is/isn't);
- Provides access to the shape files via FTP or simple URL for all to see.
    - Offers follow up dialogue between technical staff to further explain/clarify our intent.

I see relatively low risk with this approach, whereas I see higher risk with letting others tell our story on this issue and think if we can move swiftly and per the above we can temper the impact of a WGA letter by reminding all involved we conducted this exercise in response to a request from BLM,

not to identify places where we want to create new national monuments.

Thanks for considering this. I pasted the relevant TPs below and can draft a message for you if that's how you want to proceed. MK

- Throughout the federal planning process, we have worked closely with BLM and Forest Service at all levels of our respective organizations to evaluate how well their draft management plans addressed threats identified in the COT report. In March, 2014 we provided our federal partners with a comprehensive summary of our outstanding concerns. In particular, we advised the plans should, to the maximum extent, be consistent and work in concert to create a comprehensive, rangewide conservation strategy that adequately protects greater sage-grouse.
- That feedback resulted in the development of the National Policy Team guidance, which is intended to further help the BLM and Forest Service develop consistent and effective land use plans. BLM and the Forest Service adopted the NPT guidance in May, 2014.
- Since then, we have continued to work closely with BLM and Forest Service as they finalize their proposed plans.
- As we await final land use allocation and other important planning decisions from BLM and Forest Service, we have provided our federal partners an additional product:
    - A series of landscape-scale maps identifying highly important areas for sage-grouse conservation. Within these areas, we suggested that BLM and Forest Service ensure the areas are well conserved and we noted that one threat not otherwise addressed at all via the planning process is that of locatable minerals (e.g., gold, uranium). We suggested the land management agencies consider withdrawal to mineral entry in these areas. These maps, which are not intended to supersede or otherwise alter the PACS or to diminish the conservation priority of the PACs as a whole, simply highlight those places on the landscape that contain the following criteria:
        - Existing high-quality sagebrush habitat for sage-grouse;
        - Highest breeding densities of sage-grouse;
        - Areas identified in the literature as essential to conservation and persistence of the species
        - (Knick and Hanser 2011); and,
        - A preponderance of current federal ownership, and in some cases, adjacent protected areas that serve to anchor the conservation importance of the landscape.
- Our intent in providing our federal partners with this additive product is to continue to refine and focus the ongoing conversation about sage-grouse conservation planning on the federal estate on those places and issues where we believe strong, durable protections for the bird and the places it lives will make a significant contribution to the long-term persistence of the species. We feel it is important for the Service to provide this advice now, as our federal partners work to finalize their plans and culminate the multi-year federal planning process.
- It is important to note that the landscape-scale maps we provided the federal partners do not represent "new" recommendations; the conservation community has for more than a decade indicated these areas are "strongholds" for sage-grouse and critical to the long term persistence of the species. The Service is highlighting these areas and opportunities for meaningful and durable conservation because the scientific

literature assigns so much value to these places and because we have identified an opportunity for the federal land managers to enhance their approach to conservation and safeguard these places.

- 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 conservative approach that helps ensures threats to a species, in this case sage-grouse, are fully addressed, now and into the future. Given the complexities and unknowns surrounding sage-grouse, which include climate change, fire, and other variables we are hard-pressed to control, we are recommending our federal partners embrace a conservative approach to managing these highly important landscape and remove any potential for development and additional disturbance, whether that potential is imminent or distant, and add a significant degree of certainty to the protections afforded these landscapes into the future.

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