From: Thabault, Michael
To: Noreen Walsh
Subject: Re: per our conversation
Date: Saturday, May 17, 2014 7:23:02 AM
Attachments: 20140522_RDmtg_Agenda.docx
20140522_RDmtg_BriefingPaper.docx
20140522_RDmtg_BriefSched.docx
20140522_RDmtg_RDquery.docx

Realized I might be able to do something from home. I took the parenthetical off the file name and re-saved. Does this do it?

M

Michael Thabault
Assistant Regional Director
Ecological Services
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain Prairie Region
303-236-4210
michael_thabault@fws.gov

On Sat, May 17, 2014 at 6:46 AM, Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov> wrote:

> Sorry, but I can't seem to view these on my IPAD. Are they in some special format?
>
> Noreen Walsh
> Regional Director
> Mountain-Prairie Region
> U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
>
> > On May 16, 2014, at 4:32 PM, "Thabault, Michael" <michael_thabault@fws.gov> wrote:
> > >
> > > Michael Thabault
> > > Assistant Regional Director
> > > Ecological Services
> > > U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
> > > Mountain Prairie Region
> > > 303-236-4210
> > > michael_thabault@fws.gov
> > > <20140522_RDmtg_Agenda (4).docx>
> > > <20140522_RDmtg_BriefingPaper (1).docx>
> > > <20140522_RDmtg_BriefSched (1).docx>
> > > <20140522_RDmtg_RDquery (2).docx>

Goal

The purpose of this meeting is to identify the process by which we will complete the 2015 Greater Sage-Grouse Status Review.

We will discuss expectations of Regional Directors and Assistant Regional Directors with regard to management structure and communication. We will also consider the best tools to employ for the review of the greater sage-grouse.

Location

Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites, Denver Airport
6900 Tower Rd, Denver, CO 80249

Invitees

Region 1	
RO	Robyn Thorson, Richard Hannan, Terry Rabot
Region 6	
RO	Noreen Walsh, Mike Thabault, Kate Norman
Region 8	
RO	Ren Loehefener, Mike Fris

Agenda

Thursday, May 22, 2014		
Time	**Item**	**Lead**
10:00 am	Welcome	Mike Thabault
10:30 am	Vision • Current vision (work from Summer 2013, Spring 2014) • What is the RD perspective? – please see questions	Discussion
11:00 am	**BREAK (15 min)**	
11:15 am	Expectations • Management (Core Team?) • Communication (How Often, Which Topics, Format) – please see potential briefings list	Discussion
12:00 pm	**LUNCH (1 hour)**	
1:00 pm	Tools Introduction	Mike Thabault
	Tools • 2005 Work • 2010 Work • Bi-State Work • 2015 Proposed Work – please see briefing paper o Building on previous work	Kevin Doherty, Pat Deibert
2:30 pm	**BREAK (15 min)**	

Thursday, May 22, 2014		
Time	Item	Lead

2:45 pm	Tools continued…
	• 2015 Proposed Work (cont.)
	  o Products we intend to supply
	  ▪ What would these products provide?
	  ▪ What won't they provide?	

3:30 pm	Next Steps	Mike Thabault
4:00 pm	**ADJOURN**	Mike Thabault

Tasks

Responsible Party	Item	Due

Materials

May 22, 2014 Meeting
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/Forms/522.aspx

Agenda
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/20140522_RDmtg_Agenda.docx

Questions
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/20140522_RDmtg_RDquery.docx

Possible Briefing Schedule
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/20140522_RDmtg_BriefSched.docx

2015 Approach Overview
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/20140522_RDmtg_BriefingPaper.docx

Presentation
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/20140522_RDmtg_ToolsPres.pptx

Background

2005 Greater Sage-Grouse Status Review
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/cit/USFWS_20050112_SgESAfinding.pdf

2010 Greater Sage-Grouse Status Review
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/cit/USFWS_20100323_SgESAfinding.pdf

2013 Bi-State, Proposed Threatened Status with Special Rule
https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/cit/USFWS_20131028_BiStateProposeT.pdf

Lessons Learned

The Service has completed review of the greater sage-grouse multiple times. Each effort has incorporated new information and new tools into the status review process.

Tool	2005	2010	Bi-State	2015 *Suggested*
Expert Panel	✓			✓
Expert elicitation	✓	✓	✓	✓
List of Threats	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prioritization of Threats	✓	✓	✓	✓
GIS (basic)		✓	✓	✓
GIS (advanced)			✓	✓
Integrated Framework				✓
Formal Modeling to predict future				✓

2005

- Informed by expert panel (experts in sage-grouse, sagebrush, and management)
- Panel helped identify and rank the primary risks to the species.
- No formal modeling
- Finding based on an informal analysis of threats as informed by literature review and the expert panel
- We were challenged on our finding; the finding was remanded to us in 2007.

2010

- No expert panel, but input solicited from experts
- Primary threats to sage-grouse identified in the 2010 finding were the same as those identified in the 2005 finding
- No formal modeling
- Discussed GIS analyses to determine the extent of threats across the sage-grouse landscapes, identify existing areas of fragmentation.
- GIS analysis informed the potential for future fragmentation; however, no formal GIS modeling occurred
- Population persistence was formally modelled in a peer-reviewed, published study by Garton et al. (2011); informed understanding of future threats impact on population persistence
- This did not constitute a final agency action; therefore the substance of the finding could not be challenged in court.

Bi-State

- Species Status Assessment employed
- New information on threats built upon 2010 range-wide finding
- No formal modeling
- Projection of key threats; projection of associated conservation actions – used to assess abundance and distribution of sage-grouse in the DPS.

- This is not a final agency action; therefore we have not faced any challenges in court.

2015 Status Review Approach

Each status review has built upon previous work. New tools and continuing research results will allow will allow us to further refine the rudimentary threat projections and population persistence and abundance "analyses" conducted in 2005 and 2010.

Objectives

In the summer of 2013, a small group of sage-grouse biologists and managers began brainstorming objectives for the 2015 status review; in the spring of 2014 we refined our objectives to include:

- Transparent process
- Maximize scientific soundness
- Maximize legal defensibility
- Provide clear rationale for decision making
- Maintain relationships with Federal, State, and Tribal Partners

And throughout this process, we recognize the need to effectively utilize Service resources.

Recognizing the interest in this process, the extensive amount of data available, and the complexity of this review, we have attempted to construct a process that is efficient, robust, and builds upon previous work.

Process

The actual scientific process will be similar to the 2005 and 2010 finding analyses, but with more refined tools. These new tools will allow for a more rigorous and transparent analyses which were not available for past efforts.

- The 2015 status review will use the new process for conducting status reviews (4 phases), as it was for the Bi-state DPS.
- The logical rigor developed from the past two listing decisions was sound and provides the foundation on which to begin our 2015 status assessment.
- We propose to strengthen the logical rigor from the past decisions by increasing the analytical rigor on how the information is processed and analyzed.
- We can anticipate which information will likely be most influential in the USFWS decision making process (but will not preclude examining all potential threat information).
- We do not anticipate that every threat to sage-grouse populations needs to go through a formal scientific modeling procedure, as many threats could be addressed by a simple literature review (e.g. effects of hunting on sage-grouse populations).
- We anticipate the need to strengthen our analytical framework for threats we know will be critical in determining a threatened, endangered, or not warranted status. The 2010 finding was well constructed, but lacked rigor. If it had been a final action, it is uncertain how robust it would have been against potential litigation.

Analytical Framework for 2015

The analytical framework for the 2015 status assessment has 3 primary components:

1. What to model,
2. How to model it, and
3. Defining the metrics needed for the status assessment (Figure 1)

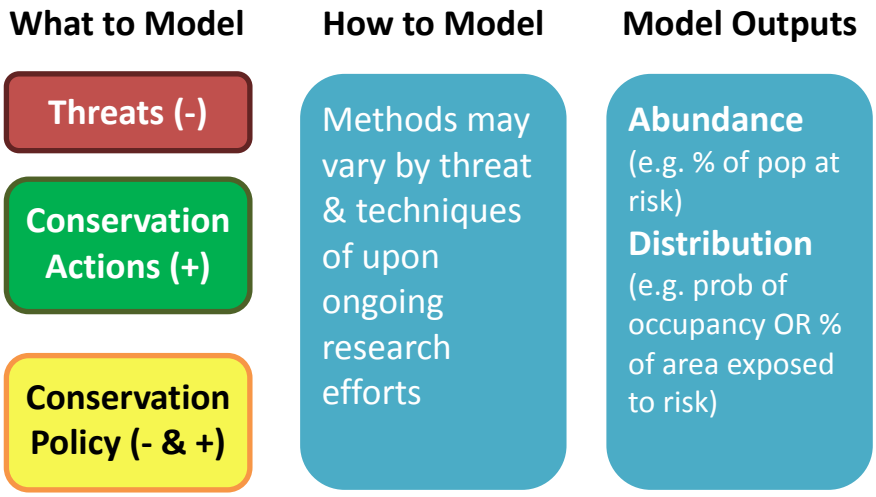

Figure 1: The decision framework for the Greater Sage-grouse (GSG) status assessment can really be simplified into 3 component decision pieces, what to model, how to model it, and what metrics best allow the USFWS to assess the status of GSG. The USFWS needs to decide and be clear on what we need modeled and the metrics that are most important to assessing status such as the abundance and distribution of the species. We also believe working with experts to determine how to model will increase the analytical rigor.

We believe a small number of threats will be the drivers of sage-grouse persistence based upon our previous two status assessments and the extensive literature base that exists for sage-grouse. We therefore believe we have a strong foundation to determine what the USFWS needs to model. Through the extensive literature on the conservation of small populations and the new USFWS species status assessment process, we also believe we have a solid basis for defining which measures of species persistence are most important. Through a facilitated process, the Core Team defined the measures of abundance and distribution to be the most important metrics in assessing population persistence. This is because they have the strongest quantitative links to resiliency and redundancy of populations, thus long term persistence.

Defining the Framework

Having determined the most appropriate measures, we still lack a clearly defined analytical framework to quantitatively understand how the major threats to sage-grouse affect the abundance and distribution of the bird now and into the foreseeable future.

We believe the USFWS would benefit from quantifiable modeled impacts to sage-grouse abundance and distribution for each factor included in our analytical framework. Because of the diversity of modeling techniques and possible paradigms to analyze these data, we believe stronger methodological integration will be achieved through a robust discussion by experts in the field of sage-grouse biology, risk modeling, and quantitative ecologist. Stronger methodological integration and analytical rigor is the primary purpose for convening an expert meeting (Figure 2).

Threats, Conservation Actions, and Conservation Policy

For each factor we will also need quantification of how that threat is ameliorated by conservation actions (e.g. conservation easements) and conservation policy (e.g. BLM land use plans or WY core area strategy). A large database of conservation actions are currently being assembled through the Conservation Effects Database and will serve as a primary input in characterizing threat amelioration by conservation actions. However we anticipate the extent to which conservation policy decisions do or do not ameliorate threats will not be as clear. We also see a strong role for USGS facilitation to help structure a decision making process to bring transparency and rigor.

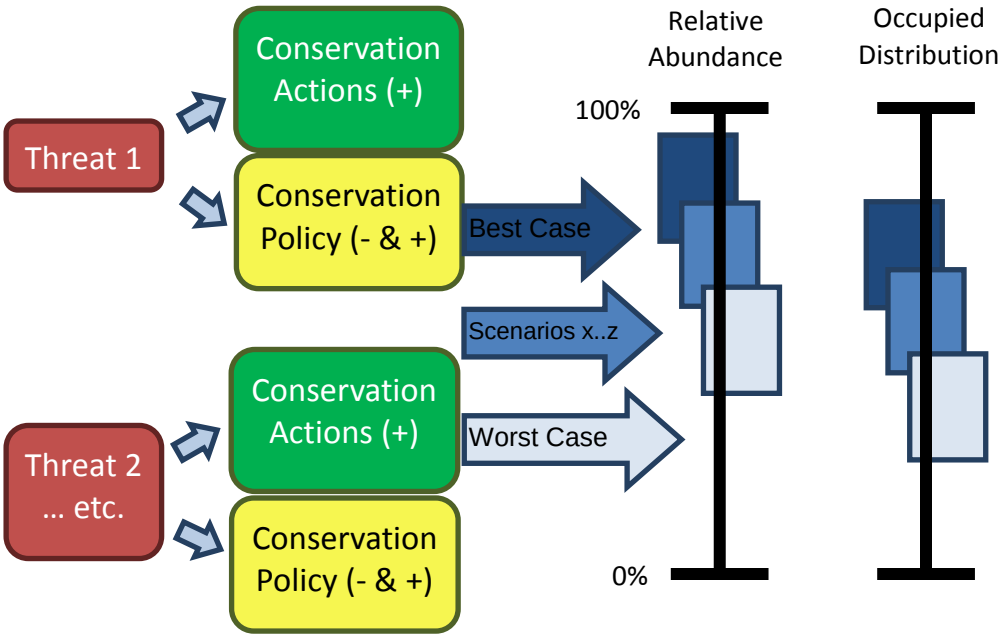

Figure 2: Integration of how the various threats to sage-grouse cumulatively affect the abundance and distribution of greater sage-grouse now and into the future is a complicated problem. We believe that by working directly with leading experts, the analytical rigor, transparency, and defensibility of our status assessment will be drastically increased.

Need for Expertise

Building the analytical framework to integrate how various scenarios for each of the modeled threats cumulatively impact sage-grouse abundance and distribution is not an easy task. We strongly believe the analytical rigor will be stronger, more transparent, and ultimately defensible by reaching out to experts in quantitative ecology and threat modeling. The USFWS is not delegating its decision authority in this process. Indeed, the USFWS has a primary role in this process by defining what needs to be modeled, the desired output formats, and by participating and conducting some of the threat assessments. Further, we cannot envision a way to assess conservation policy without strong input from the USFWS personnel who have been involved in these issues at both national and field levels. Lastly, the ultimate decision on the interpretation of the scenarios (Figure 2) and whether they warrant a threatened, endangered, or not warranted decision will be made by the USFWS.

Potential Regional Director Briefings

This is one possible approach for managing the 2015 Status Review. Briefings may vary depending on the plan for completing the status review.

Timing	Briefing	Notes	Purpose
May 2014	Model Approach	~20 minutes, Pat explain roadblocks in 1-2 slides, USGS giving background of modeling, summary of 3 day, Kevin specifics of how this relates to Sage-Grouse	Approval
June 2014	Discreteness (DPS) Framework	Explanation of how certain areas (scales) might be identified for consideration. Areas identified based on discreteness.	Approval
June 2014	Threats concentration (SPR) Framework	Explanation of how certain areas (scales) might be identified for consideration. Areas identified based on threats concentration or potential for significance.	Approval
June/July 2014	Potential areas of interest – mapped areas	Both discrete areas and areas where threats may be concentrated presented geographically for RD consideration.	Approval
June/July 2014	Data Call	Brief prior to WAFWA meeting so we can use WAFWA to share information with partners.	Approval
July 2014	Draft Model	If we move forward with modeling approach; a draft model will be shared with the RDs prior to sharing with experts for expert review.	Update
July 2014	Expert Elicitation	This information might be shared through ARDs rather than a formal briefing	Update
October 2014	Conservation Efforts Database, Data Call Update	An update on the status of the data call.	Update
January 2015	--Technical Team, review of data call/Conservation Efforts Database; Document how this data was used/evaluated –		
February 2015	Discuss Status Determination Workshop	Finalize list of decision makers involved in workshop; clarify expectations for the workshop.	Approval
March 2015	--Core Team SDM pre-workshop of the status, look at the whole, March 2015–		
April 2014	Decision Making Workshop (SPR, DPS, Status)	A workshop including all decision makers. The result would be a determination for the status of the species, DPS, and SPR.	Status Determination

Questions

In preparation for the greater sage-grouse 2015 status review, the Assistant Regional Directors and the Core Team have tried to anticipate some of the Regional Directors' needs. We would like to take this opportunity to hear directly from the Regional Directors on the topics below.

These are for your consideration; we are not requesting any written response.

Overarching

1. **What do you see as your (Regional Director) role in the 2015 greater sage-grouse status review?**
2. **What do you (as Regional Director) need in order to complete the status review successfully?**
    a. What are the most important aspects of this process from your perspective?
    b. What are the key elements of this process that are important to you?
    c. What do you foresee as possible pitfalls in the process for completing the status review?
    d. What is the single largest concern that you want us to be aware of as we proceed through the status review?

Process Objectives

Starting in the summer of 2013, biologists and managers began brainstorming objectives for the 2015 status review. We recognize that the Regional Directors may have additional thoughts on the list of objectives below.

Objectives for 2015 Greater Sage-Grouse Status Review:

- Transparency
- Maximize scientific soundness
- Maximize legal defensibility
- Provide a clear rationale for decision making
- Maintain relationships with Federal, State, and Tribal partners

3. **Are these the correct objectives?**
4. **Are there other process objectives we should include?**