From: Steinwand, Terry R.
To: Matt Kales
Subject: RE: Sage-grouse Task Force assessment template
Date: Wednesday, November 06, 2013 3:28:54 PM
Attachments: North Dakota_assessment review matrix.xls
GSG assessment overview.xlsx

Matt:

Sorry for the delay but I really don't remember getting this e-mail prior to yours—but I also had a little computer glitch a few weeks back and know I received some e-mails that I currently can't find.

In any event, attached are the materials you requested. At this time it doesn't look like I'll be able to attend the Dec.11-12 meeting but know we need someone to attend.

Terry

From: Matt Kales [mailto:matt_kales@fws.gov]
Sent: Thursday, October 24, 2013 1:39 PM
To: Steinwand, Terry R.
Subject: FW: Sage-grouse Task Force assessment template

Terry,

It was good speaking with you earlier. Please see below Noreen's message and related materials re: state self-assessment for sage-grouse conservation. We'd be grateful for any feedback you have on this effort and are happy to answer any questions about the attached. My direct line here in Denver is 303-236-4576 (that's forwarded to my mobile if I'm away from my desk) and Noreen's number is 303-236-7920 if you need to reach either of us by phone.

Thanks again, and we'll see/talk with you soon.

Regards,

Matt

From: Noreen Walsh [mailto:noreen_walsh@fws.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, October 01, 2013 5:44 PM
To: betwarren@mt.gov; bonnie.butler@gov.idaho.gov; Brett.Brownscombe@das.state.or.us; Carlee Brown; Claudia Walker; chuck.bonham@wildlife.ca.gov; civerson@fs.fed.us; cynthia_moses-nedd@blm.gov; Dan Ashe; david.naugle@umontana.edu; Drue DeBerry; Doug Young; Edwin_Roberson@blm.gov; eloft@dfg.ca.gov; eric.v.rickerson@state.or.us; Aristotle Evia; Gisella Ojeda-dodds; greg.schirato@dfw.wa.gov; gstein@fs.fed.us; Jessica Rubado; Jamie Connell; Jeff.Ver_Steeg@state.co.us; JHagener@mt.gov; John Harja; jpena@fs.fed.us; kathleenclarke@utah.gov; kmcdonald@mt.gov; ldrozdoff@dcnr.nv.gov; lweldon@fs.fed.us; Matt Kales; mfinley01@fs.fed.us; Michael Bean; Michael Thabault; Moore,Virgil; Maritiza Harris; nancy.salber@state.or.us; Nicole Alt; Neil Kornze; Noreen Walsh; Pat Deibert; Roslyn Sellars; Steven Ellis; Shawn Reese; Stephen Small; Tim Macklin; Tim.griffiths@mt.usda.gov; Tamara Williams; Tom.Kirschenmann@state.sd.us; tsteinwa@nd.gov; ttidwell@fs.fed.us
Cc: Ren Lohoefener; Alexandra Pitts (CN=Alexandra Pitts/OU=SAC/OU=R1/OU=FWS/O=DOI); Robyn Thorson; Richard Hannan

Subject: Sage-grouse Task Force assessment template

Dear Task Force members,

Last week, at the Greater Sage-grouse Task Force meeting in Denver, Task Force members agreed that it would be helpful for each member agency to conduct a self-assessment of their own ongoing activities and measures to reduce threats to greater sage-grouse. These would contribute to an assessment of collective progress towards the objectives identified in the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report at this point in time. This would provide all of us a "snapshot in time", while recognizing that many conservation efforts continue and others may have not yet even begun. As discussed at the meeting, this type of assessment will help us focus on the progress we are all committed to make.

The Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to prepare a template to guide those "self-assessments." We have been working since the meeting adjourned last week to prepare that template. We would have benefitted from additional time to refine and polish our approach, but deliberations were cut short by today's government shutdown. In the interest of promptly providing Task Force members with a document to work from (and not hold up this process during the federal government shutdown) I am forwarding this draft to you today.

Attached are three files:

1. **Assessment Review Matrix:** States should fill out this matrix for each population that exists in that state (populations as identified in the COT Final Report Table 2).

   If a given state contains 4 populations, you would fill out this report 4 times (one report for each population). The fourth column in this spreadsheet is labeled "State Self-Assessment Ranking" and consists of a scale from 0-6 plus U for unknown. This column is meant to capture your summary of the overall degree to which the issue or threat has been addressed. The definitions of the categories in this scale are found in the second attached file (draft, deliberative description of ranking). The fifth and sixth columns are asking for your narrative description of actions that would support the summary rank you assigned in column 4.

2. **Draft, deliberative descriptions of ranking…:** This file is simply a reference and provides standard definitions of summary ratings 0-6 used in column 4 of the Assessment review matrix.

3. **GSG assessment overview:** This file is an example of an overview "at a glance" of the summary status of all populations in your state. For example, if you filled out the "Assessment review matrix" four times to correspond to the four populations in your state, this table just collates the summary of that information into one table with four rows. It shows each population (rows) by threat category (columns) and the cells are color-coded to show your summary assessment of whether that threat is addressed in that population

(green), or partially addressed (yellow), or not yet addressed (red). For threats in the Assessment Review Matrix that contain only one "measure," the rank you use in this summary table will be a one to one correspondence with the Assessment Review Matrix. However, for threats in the Assessment Review Matrix that contain several measures, consider averaging the rankings for each measure for a given threat.

Ideally, we would have a webinar to walk you through this template. Unfortunately that won't be possible until the federal government re-opens, and we will be happy to do that then. In the meantime, please take a look. In addition to any clarification or assistance we at FWS can provide, it may be helpful for state members to work closely with their BLM/FS counterparts, when the government reopens, in filling out the template relative to impact of the federal planning process in your state. I hope this provides sufficient information for you to begin using the template and I look forward to talking with you as soon as we can.

Best regards,
Noreen

Noreen Walsh
Regional Director
Mountain-Prairie Region
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

303 236 7920

The Mountain-Prairie Region of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service: *We provide conservation stewardship of some of America's most scenic lands, to ensure healthy fish and wildlife for the enjoyment and benefit of all people.*

REVIEW OF STATE SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PLANNING EFFORTS

State: North Dakota

Caveat - To date the North Dakota sage-grouse management plan is primarily voluntary thus the conservation actions outlined below are not regulated within the state. The NDGF is pursuing the possibility of an executive order from the Governor to help implement the revised state plan. Furthermore NDGF, USFWS,NRCS, and the local working group are exploring the possibility of a CCAA with local landowners to help implement the plan on privately owned lands.

GSG Population: Dakota's

Management Zone: 1

Issue	Conservation Objective from COT Report	Conservation Measures from COT Report[1]	State Self-Assessment Ranking (U, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)	Preliminary Assessment of Consistency with COT Report: Actions in Conservation Plans that address the COT Objective and Description of how those actions support the ranking	Preliminary Assessment of Consistency with COT Report: Other Actions that may address this COT objective
Sagebrush Removal / Elimination	Avoid sagebrush removal or manipulation in greater sage-grouse breeding or wintering habitats		3	1) Provide incentives for habitat conservation such as the state-administered Private Lands Program which can provide an incentive payment to private landowners for protecting sagebrush habitats from plowing, herbicides, and burning. 2) Promote sagebrush-grassland habitat conservation through USDA programs. 3) Protect habitat by purchase of conservation easements from interested landowners. 1) Provide landowners with high quality habitat maps of important sage-grouse seasonal use areas on their land or allotments. 2) Evaluate the site potential and desired condition, and develop specific objectives and management plans within specific landscapes and ownership. 3) If sagebrush is lacking < 10 %. a) Develop and implement grazing practices that influence sagebrush establishment and growth,	USFWS and NDGF are currently working on development of a CCAA with local landowners.
Agricultural Conversion	Avoid further loss of sagebrush habitat for agricultural activities (both animal and plant production) and prioritize restoration. In areas where taking agricultural lands out of production has benefited GSG, the programs supporting these actions should be targeted and continued (e.g., CRP/SAFE). Threat amelioration activities should, at a minimum, be prioritized within PACS, but should be considered in all greater sage-grouse habitats.		3	See conservation actions above.	USFWS and NDGF are currently working on development of a CCAA with local landowners.
Fire	Retain and restore healthy native sagebrush communities within greater sage-grouse range (both within and outside PACs)	Restrict or contain fire within normal range of fire activity, including size, and frequency	3	1) Prescribed fires are not allowed within the core sage-grouse area. 2) Accidental fires including lightning strikes should be immediately suppressed within sage-grouse core range. 3) Manage land uses to minimize the spread of invasive species. 4) Manage sagebrush habitat for maintenance, by restoring healthy perennial grass in sagebrush vegetative communities. 5) Close rangelands that are highly susceptible to fire to OHV use during the fire season. 6) When fires occur reallocate fire response resources (crew, equipment, ect.) to critical sage-grouse habitats. 7) Establish defensible fire lines – where the effectiveness is high, fire risk is likely to protect critical sage-grouse habitats. 8) Educate landowners and fire personnel on the need and value of protecting sagebrush areas. 9) Retain unburned areas of sage-grouse habitat, e.g., interior islands and patches between roads and fire perimeter, unless compelling safety, resource protection, or control objectives are at risk. 10) Assure that long-term wildfire rehabilitation objectives are consistent with the desired natural plant community.	
		Eliminate intentional fires in sagebrush habitats, including prescribed burning or breeding and winter habitats	3		
		Design and implement restoration of burned sagebrush habitats to allow for natural succession to healthy native sagebrush plant communities	3		

		Implement monitoring programs for restoration activities	3	11) Re-vegetate burned sites in sage-grouse habitat within one year. Areas disturbed by heavy equipment will be given priority consideration. 12) Emphasize native plant species adapted to the site that are readily available and economically. Proactive treatments that could reduce the risk of loss of habitat critical to sage-grouse. 13) Prioritize rehabilitation on the basis of risk, quality, and connectivity within sage-grouse habitats. 14) Monitor the site and treat for noxious weeds.	
		Immediately suppress fire in all sagebrush habitats	3		
Pinyon-juniper Expansion / Conifers	Remove pinyon-juniper from areas of sagebrush that are most likely to support greater sage-grouse (post-removal) at a rate at least equal to the rate of p-j incursion		3	BLM has added to their RMP the regulatory decision space to remove and eliminate the expansion of pinon-juniper.	USFWS and NDGF are currently working on development of a CCAA with local landowners.
Non-native, Invasive Plant Species - Weeds/Annual Grasses	Maintain and restore healthy, native sagebrush communities (both within and outside PACs)	Retain all remaining large intact sagebrush patches, particularly at low elevations	3	1) Promote measures that prevent the introduction and spread of weed seeds and other reproducing plant parts. 2) Develop and implement management techniques that minimize the risk of infestation. 3) Use weed seed-free livestock forage and mulch. 4) Where feasible, avoid vehicle movement through infested areas. 5) Use weed-free seed for re-establishment of vegetation.	
		Reduce or eliminate disturbances that promote the spread of invasive species	3		2
		Monitor and control invasive vegetation post-wildfire for at least three years	3		
		Require best management practices for construction projects in and adjacent to sagebrush habitats to prevent invasion	3		
		Restore altered ecosystems such that non-native invasive plants are reduced to levels that do not put the area at risk of conversion if a catastrophic event	3		
Energy Development	Energy development should be designed to insure that it will not impinge upon stable or increasing greater sage-grouse population trends	Avoid energy development in PACs	1	ND's sage-grouse range is a checkerboard of private, state, federal lands. Regulatory authority on federal lands is currently being addressed with the amendment of BLM's RMP and FS management plans. Within state lands the NDGF has the opportunity to comment on the front end of any nominated stated mineral leases. We have not yet seen compliance to our recommendations due to the time lag between the permitting process and development phase. The following guidelines are addressed in the NDGF management plan.	The NDGF is currently working with the Governors office to pursue and executive order to protect sage-grouse habitat from Oil and Gas development.
		If avoidance is not possible within PACs development would only occur in non-habitat areas (including appurtenant structures), with an adequate buffer that is sufficient to preclude impacts to sage-grouse habitats from noise and other human activities.	2	When valid existing rights do not apply. 1) Discontinue permitting energy development (including oil and gas exploration, surface mining, and wind development) within the core sage-grouse area (Figure 6) 2) No surface occupancy within habits that are classified as medium and high use areas. 3) No surface occupancy within 4 miles from an active lek. (Lek is defined as a traditional display area in or adjacent to sagebrush-dominated habitat that has been attended by ≥ 2 male sage-grouse in ≥ 2 of the previous 5 years (Connelly et al. 2000).	
		If development must occur in sage-grouse habitats due to existing rights and lack of reasonable alternative avoidance measures the development should occur in the lease suitable habitat for sage-grouse and be designed to ensure, at a minimum, that there are no detectable declines in sage-grouse population trends.	2	When valid existing rights apply. 1) Development should not exceed 1 well pad/sq. mile. 2) No surface occupancy within 2 miles of an active lek. 3) Allow no surface use in nesting and breeding habitat (figure 6) during the period 1 March –15 June (this action applies to drilling, testing and new construction projects, but does not apply to operation and maintenance of production facilities). 4) Restrict maintenance and related activities in sage-grouse breeding/nesting habitat—1 March –15 June—between the hours of 8:00 pm and 8:00 am 5) Do not allow surface use activities within crucial sage-grouse breeding areas during the period 16 June – 15	

Mining	Maintain stable to increasing greater sage-grouse populations and no net loss of greater sage-grouse habitats in areas affected by mining		3		
Infrastructure	Avoid development of infrastructure within PACs	No new development of infrastructure corridors within PACs. Designated, but not yet developed infrastructure corridors should be re-located outside of PACs unless it can be demonstrated that these corridors will have no impacts on the maintenance of neutral or positive sage-grouse population trends and habitats.	3	Cumulative surface disturbance should not exceed 3% /mi2 1) No new construction of roads in sage-grouse core area. 2) No development of new roads within critical sage-grouse habitats (Figure6). 3) No development of new roads within 2 miles of a sage-grouse lek. 4) Close all secondary roads (e.g. two-tracks) within critical seasonal habitats. 5) No travel allowed on secondary roads during March 1- June 15. (Does not apply to operating and maintenance or permitted producer. 6) No recreational OHV use within sage-grouse seasonal sage-grouse habitats (year-round). 7) If valid existing rights require construction of a new road avoid critical habitat.	The NDGF is currently working with the Governors office to pursue and executive order to protect sage-grouse habitat from Oil and Gas development.
		New infrastructure should be avoided where individual state plans have identified key connectivity corridors outside of PACs.	3	Power line impacts 1) No new lines in critical sage-grouse habitat. 2) If valid existing rights exist transmission lines should be buried within critical sage-grouse habitats. 3) Site new lines in existing corridors of non-sagebrush habitat wherever practicable and site power lines and pipelines along existing roads. 4) If applicable use off-grid systems such as solar, natural gas within sagebrush habitat	The NDGF is currently working with the Governors office to pursue and executive order to protect sage-grouse habitat from Oil and Gas development.
Grazing	Conduct grazing management for all ungulates in a manner consistent with local ecological conditions that maintains of restores healthy sagebrush shrub and native perennial grass and forb communities and conserves the essential habitat components for greater sage-grouse (shrub and nesting cover). Areas which do not currently meet this standard should be managed to restore these components. Adequate monitoring of grazing strategies and their results, with necessary changes in strategies, is essential to ensuring that desired ecological conditions and greater sage-grouse response are achieved. (PFC; for riparian areas) or Rangeland Health Standards (RHS; uplands).		3	Maximize grazing regimes to improve rangeland vegetation composition and maintain residual grass 1) Use scientific data and historic information to establish baseline information when evaluating soil conditions and ecological processes and when monitoring seasonal sage-grouse habitats. 2) Set specific habitat objectives and implement appropriate grazing management to achieve those objectives and maintain or improve vegetation condition and trends. 3) Offer private landowners incentives when and where appropriate to achieve sage-grouse objectives. 4) Establish a monitoring plan to ensure that desired ecological conditions and sage-grouse response are achieved. Restore sagebrush communities that have been significantly altered by past grazing management practices 1) Implement appropriate grazing management strategies and range management practices where soil conditions and ecological processes will support sage-grouse and desired commodities and societal values. 2) Establish suitable goals for sagebrush communities that have deteriorated to such an extent that livestock management alone will not be sufficient to obtain habitat objectives. 3) Offer private landowners incentives when and where appropriate to achieve sage-grouse objectives. Minimize impacts from drought that may negatively affect the native plant communities, and reduces forage production, and thus reduces sage-grouse habitat 1) Livestock managers should have drought management strategies or plans (e.g. water facilities; forage sources)	
Free-Roaming Equid Management	Protect sage-grouse from the negative influences of grazing by free roaming equids.	Develop, implement, and enforce adequate regulatory mechanisms to protect sage-grouse habitat from negative influences of grazing by free-roaming equids.	0		

		Manage free-roaming equids at levels that allow native sagebrush vegetative communities to minimally achieve Proper Functioning Condition (riparian areas) or Rangeland Health Standards (upland areas). Similar measures should be implemented on non-federal land surfaces.	0		
Recreation	In areas subjected to recreational activities, maintain healthy native sagebrush communities based on local ecological conditions and with consideration of drought conditions, and manage direct and indirect human disturbance (including noise) to avoid interruption of normal greater sage-grouse behavior. Consider application in all sagebrush habitats (within and outside PACs).		3	Minimize recreational activities within sage-grouse habitats that can result in habitat loss and fragmentation (e.g. creation of off-road trails, camping facilities) and both direct and indirect disturbance to the birds (e.g. noise, disruptive lek viewing, hunting dog trials, and dispersed camping). 1) Agencies should manage where recreational viewing of leks can occur. 2) Educational materials should be developed and provided to the public indicating the effects of concentrated recreational activities and the importance of seasonal ranges to sage-grouse. 3) Establish viewing guidelines, i.e., distance, timing, approach methods, signage, parking areas, and area closures. 4) Designate particular leks for public viewing, and where appropriate, restrict viewing and photography to designated sites. 5) Determine, through the agency(is) and the public working together, whether or not other recreational activities disturb leks, nesting, or winter habitats.	
Ex-Urban Development / Urbanization	Limit urban and exurban development in greater sage-grouse habitats and maintain intact native sagebrush communities		0		

The following categories were not identified in Table 2 of the COT report, but were identified in the text of the report itself. Please provide any information, including rankings, which address these categories.

Range Management Structures	Avoid or reduce the impact of range management structures on greater sage-grouse		3	Minimize impacts from fences on sage-grouse within sage-grouse habitat. 1) Restrict new fences within 1 mile of lek. 2) Mark fences with permanent flagging or other suitable device to reduce sage-grouse collisions on flat to gently rolling terrain in areas of moderate to high fence densities (i.e., more than one kilometer of fence per square kilometer) located within two kilometers of occupied leks. 3) Identify and remove unnecessary fences	
PACs	Retain sage-grouse habitats within PACs *(pertains to PAC designation)*	If PACs are lost to catastrophic events, implement appropriate restoration efforts	2	NDGF is working on an executive order with the governors office to protect sage-grouse habitat. Additionally invested entities are pursuing a CCAA with the FWS to protect sage-grouse on private lands.	
		Restore and rehabilitate degraded sage-grouse habitat within PACS.	2		
		Identify areas and habitats outside of PACs which may be necessary to maintain viability of sage-grouse. If development or vegetation manipulation activities outside of PACs are proposed, the project proponent should work with federal, state or local agencies and interested stakeholders to ensure consistency with sage-grouse habitat needs	0	Our core areas encompasses all known sage-grouse areas.	

	Re-evaluate the status of PACs and adjacent sage-grouse habitat at least once every 5-years, or when important new information becomes available.	3		
	Actively pursue opportunities to increase occupancy and connectivity between PACs.	2		
	Maintain or improve existing habitat conditions in areas adjacent to burned habitat.	U		

[1] Not all Conservation Objectives in the COT report identified Conservation Measures

GSG Assessment Overview Table

Population	Unit Number	Management Zone	Isolated/Small Size	Sagebrush Elimination	Agriculture Conversion	Fire	Conifers
North Dakota			Y	L	L	Y	U

Y = threat is present	
N = threat is not present	
L = Threat present but localized	
U = unknown	

5, 6	Threat addressed
3, 4	Threat partially addressed
1, 2	Threat not addressed
U, 0	Unknown, Not present

L	**Weeds/Annual Grasses**
Y	**Energy**
Y	**Mining**
Y	**Infrastructure**
L	**Grazing**
N	**Free-Roaming Equids**
N	**Recreation**
N	**Urbanization**