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Subject: Important SGTF Updates
Date: Monday, January 12, 2015 4:28:52 PM
Attachments: [AGENDA SGTF Jan 2015 FINAL.pdf](#)
[Attendee List 011215 to SGTF.xlsx](#)
[SUMMARY SGTF Oct 2014 Meeting FINAL.pdf](#)

Dear Sage-Grouse Task Force,

Please review the information below related to our upcoming meeting in Denver, a DOI/BLM webinar, and the 2014 WGA Sage-Grouse Inventory.

Jan 20-21 Meeting Materials and October Meeting Summary

Attached please find the **agenda** for the upcoming task force meeting on Jan 20-21 in Denver. I'm also attaching a **preliminary attendee list**. If you plan to attend and are not listed, please let me know.

A **summary** of the last SGTF meeting held in October is attached for your reference.

Remaining BLM Sage-Grouse Planning Issues Webinar

The Department of the Interior/BLM has organized a **webinar** for **Friday, Jan 16 at 10:00 am MT** to present the resolution of the "12 issues" which were discussed at the last Task Force meeting and an overview of how these will be incorporated in the draft plans. Related materials will be provided this week before the webinar.

Here is the webinar login info. Sound will be through the phone using the audio information below. Log into the WebEx webinar to see the slides. I will also send this as a calendar invite.

WebEx Login

Event address for attendees:

<https://westerngovernors.webex.com/westerngovernors/onstage/g.php?d=668511441&t=a>

Event password: sgtf

Webinar Audio

US TOLL: +1-415-655-0003

Access code: 668 511 441

2014 WGA Sage-Grouse Inventory

WGA is currently collecting information from states, federal agencies, NGOs, industry, tribes and other for our 2014 inventory of sage-grouse conservation efforts. We are extending our deadline for responses from Jan 14 to **Friday, Jan 30, 2015**. If you have questions about the inventory,

please reach out to me. We look forward to your participation in WGA's inventory.

Thanks,

Katie

Katie Kalinowski

Policy Advisor

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State/Federal Sage-Grouse Task Force Meeting

January 20-21, 2015

Holiday Inn and Suites Denver International Airport – Columbine/Centennial Room
6900 Tower Road, Denver, CO 80249

Meeting Objective

Create opportunities for dialogue between states and federal land management agencies about sage-grouse management strategies, conservation tools, and related policies.

Tuesday, January 20

1:00 p.m.	Introductions & Review of Agenda <i>Jerimiah Rieman, Wyoming</i>
1:15 p.m.	Round Robin Update on Sage-Grouse Activities
2:30 p.m.	Sage Grouse Initiative Next Steps <i>Jason Weller, NRCS</i>
3:00 p.m.	Break
3:15 p.m.	Rangeland Fire Discussion of rangeland fire and ways to improve state/federal coordination to reduce fire risk. <i>Jim Lyons, DOI</i>
3:35 p.m.	Overview of FWS ESA Status Review Process FWS will provide an overview of the analytical process that will lead to a determination of whether the species is still warranted for listing. <i>Noreen Walsh, FWS</i>
3:55	Cross-State Coordination
4:15 p.m.	Timelines for Remaining Tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completion of BLM plan consistency reviews, final EISs and RODs - FWS timeline
5:30 p.m.	Adjourn SGTF Meeting
6:15 p.m.	Optional Dinner: DiCicco's Italian Restaurant, 6701 Tower Rd, Denver CO 80249

Wednesday, January 21

8:00 a.m.	Reflections from Day 1
8:15 a.m.	Gunnison Sage-Grouse Update Discussion of the FWS' recent listing decision and similarities to or differences from the greater sage-grouse. <i>Dan Ashe, FWS</i> <i>John Swartout and Jeff Ver Steeg, Colorado</i> <i>Kathleen Clarke, Utah</i>
8:45 a.m.	Update on Battalion Pro (ACK-55) Weed Suppressive Bacteria <i>Richard Lee, BLM (invited)</i>
9:15 a.m.	USGS Conservation Buffer Study <i>Carol Schuler, USGS</i>
9:45 a.m.	Break
10:00 a.m.	Status of BLM Plans <i>Ed Roberson, BLM</i>
10:30 a.m.	Stubble Height Policy and Public Lands Grazing Discussion of research findings on grass height and greater sage-grouse nesting survival and how the findings relate to public lands grazing management.
11:00 a.m.	Preparation for Next Meeting Discussion of a time, location, and proposed topics for the next meeting.
11:30 a.m.	Outstanding Issues and Additional Items
11:45 a.m.	Adjourn

State/Federal Sage Grouse Task Force Meeting
Holiday Inn & Suites, Denver International Airport
6900 Tower Road, Denver, Colorado
January 20-21, 2014

<i>First</i>	<i>Last</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Company</i>
Dan	Ashe	Director	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Tim	Baker	Policy Advisor	State of Montana
Michael	Bean	Counselor to the Assistant Secretary	Department of the Interior
Elise	Boeke	Acting State Conservationist	NRCS Colorado State Office
Astor	Boozer	Regional Conservationist for the West	NRCS
Brett	Brownscombe	Deputy Director	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Bob	Budd	Executive Director	Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources
Stephanie	Carman	Legislative Specialist	BLM
Kathleen	Clarke	Director, Public Lands Policy Coordination	State of Utah
Leo	Drozdoft	Director	NV Dept. of Conservation and Natural Res.
Steve	Ellis	Deputy Director	Bureau of Land Management
Mary	Flanderka	Habitat Protection Supervisor	Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Tim	Griffiths	National Sage Grouse Initiative Coordinator	NRCS/USDA
Mary	Grim	Fish and Wildlife Biologist	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 8
Julie	Grogan-Stewart	Special Assistant to the Chief	NRCS/USDA
John	Harja	Senior Counsel	State of Utah
Robert	Harper	National Director	U.S. Forest Service
Chris	Iverson	Assistant Director/Wildlife, Planning, TES, Air & Soil	U.S. Forest Service
Matt	Kales	Deputy Assistant Regional Director	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6
Katie	Kalinowski	Policy Advisor	Western Governors' Association
Tom	Kirschenmann	Chief of Terrestrial Resources	South Dakota Dept. of Game, Fish and Parks
Neil	Kornze	Director	Bureau of Land Management
Jim	Lyons	Counselor to the Assistant Secretary	Department of the Interior
Tim	Macklin	WGA Liaison	NRCS
Dustin	Miller	Administrator	Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation
Virgil	Moore	Director	Idaho Fish and Game
Dave	Naugle	Sage Grouse Initiative Science Advisor	NRCS
Jerimiah	Rieman	Natural Resource Policy Director	State of Wyoming
Edwin	Roberson	Assistant Director Resources and Planning	USDI - BLM
Greg	Schirato	Deputy Assistant Director	Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Carol	Schuler	Acting Senior Science Advisor - Program Development	U.S. Geological Survey
Glen	Stein	Sage Grouse Project Manager	U.S. Forest Service
Terry	Steinwand	Director	North Dakota Game and Fish
John	Swartout	Senior Advisor	State of Colorado
Jeff	Ver Steeg	Assistant Director	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Noreen	Walsh	Regional Director	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6
Tony	Wasley	Director	Nevada Department of Wildlife

Sage-Grouse Task Force: Meeting Notes and Outcomes

October 7, 2014

Greenwood Village, Colorado

Next Steps

Responsible party in brackets after each next step.

- Provide the states as soon as possible with a list of plan differences that DOI would like to see resolved. [DOI]
- Give states an overview of the models that FWS will use in its listing decision. [FWS]

FWS Data Call

Lief Wiechman from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reported that the Conservation Efforts Database (CED) opened August 11. A handful of projects have been entered thus far. The database closes at the end of December and November 30, 2014 is the last day for batch uploads. Database contributors were urged to name approving officials as soon as possible.

FWS has given eight webinars on the database and can schedule more by request. Contributors were urged to enter data in advance to ensure adequate time to address any problems and help avoid overloading the system.

Landowner Data

Jeff Ver Steeg from Colorado Parks and Wildlife discussed a situation that arose in Colorado where lek data provided to BLM has been subject to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The data was provided under a nondisclosure agreement that required returning or destroying the data after use but BLM still retained the data at the time of the FOIA request. As a result, Colorado is planning to take a more conservative approach when it comes to providing data for FWS's CED.

FWS indicated that they will work with the states to aggregate data to a level the state is comfortable with. It was suggested by Colorado that a FOIA exemption to protect state data provided with federal agencies would help the states to share more detailed data. BLM reported that it is working with the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) on an MOU that would put in a firewall so BLM will not actually own the data. FWS did confirm that data

submitted into the CED will become part of the public record, so the Service is working with parties to safeguard data before that step.

FWS Revised Draft Mitigation Framework

Shauna Ginger from FWS provided an overview of FWS's revised greater sage-grouse mitigation framework released in September. The framework is a guidance document and a living document. Under the framework, avoidance is prioritized especially in the Priority Areas of Conservation (PACs). In the case of offsets, FWS highly recommends that offsets be in place longer than the impact that they offset.

FWS is not soliciting comments on the framework but will take feedback. FWS is also in the process of updating its 1981 Mitigation Policy to incorporate contemporary mitigation practices and emphasize landscape scale approaches. The 2003 conservation banking policy is also being updated. Draft versions of these policies will be published on the federal register.

Rangeland Fire

Jim Lyons from the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) distributed copies of a draft agenda for a workshop on the science of rangeland fire and strategies to reduce that threat. Information gathered at the workshop may be used to frame new policies to deal with rangeland fire in the future and to drive commitment of resources for addressing rangeland fire. Several members of the Sage-Grouse Task Force (SGTF) have agreed to speak at the workshop, as well as local rangeland fire representatives. Target audiences include local communities, state government and the federal fire community. It was mentioned that sage-grouse habitat tends not to be prioritized in a similar way to structures during fires and the workshop may help increase understanding of the consequences of not prioritizing habitat.

Federal Updates

NPT Guidance. Ed Roberson from BLM addressed the status of the National Policy Team (NPT) guidance. After hearing that the guidance was not as clear and consistent as it could be, BLM state directors responsible for the 15 Resource Management Plans (RMPs) under revision were asked to provide feedback. BLM then rolled the information up into Great Basin and Rocky Mountain sub-regions and looked at where there were differences between plans. BLM scheduled webinars with the two sub-regions to begin a dialogue about the differences, a

discussion that is to continue after this SGTF meeting. State representatives expressed disappointment that the federal agencies did not meet with them earlier. Federal representatives suggested that their meetings were to understand where their plans were first before engaging the states.

Stakeholder Outreach. Jim Lyons reported that federal agencies met with representatives from the oil and gas industry, utilities, mining, and conservation organizations. They briefed these groups on the status of the listing process and on their work with the states.

Roundtable Discussion

Jerimiah Rieman from the office of Wyoming Governor Matt Mead led a roundtable discussion to address any unresolved issues. Conversation ensued about whether “consistency” between plans means consistency in approach or consistency in outcomes. It was clarified that consistency in outcomes is most crucial but that it will be important to tell a comprehensive story about how varied approaches achieve consistent outcomes.

FWS suggested that to the extent possible, large differences in threat removal approaches that cross administrative boundaries should try to be resolved. The states requested a list of the differences but DOI said it was still working through them. The states said even a conditional list would be helpful for the upcoming meetings with individual states and that getting a list as soon as possible is critical. States suggested that if there is an approach one state is using that FWS likes, it would be helpful for other states to be made aware of that approach for further examination.

The group discussed what actions fit FWS’s definition of regulatory mechanisms. FWS indicated they will look at a full range of commitments, regulatory or not, to evaluate how they address the threats.

The task force talked about the schedule for completing the BLM and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) plans and FWS’s listing decision timeline. BLM expects plan discussion to wrap by the end of October. There was discussion about potentially doing public review and the Governors’ consistency reviews concurrently to shorten timelines. BLM anticipates issuing two Records of Decision (RODs), one for the Great Basin region and another for the Rocky Mountain region.

FWS will begin its analysis in January. FWS staff indicated a recommendation will be made to Director Ashe by the end of May. If the federal plans are pushed out too far, FWS will not have

time to do analysis with the new plans. Changes to federal or state plans at the end of the listing process will be looked at qualitatively but FWS will not be able to rerun its models. Relying on qualitative changes not captured in the models would introduce risk for FWS in defending a decision in court.

Task force members discussed whether it would be advantageous to have additional time for plan finalization and running of models. The DOI perspective was that the current timeline is difficult but achievable. FWS suggested it is advantageous to everyone to have a listing proposal in September 2015 because then there will be 18 months for response to the proposal (12 months to go from proposed to final plus an administrative option to add six months for scientific agreement).

FWS clarified that it will actually run several models. The states requested an overview of the models and FWS agreed to provide one. Some models will be in-house, some out-of-house. FWS wants to see if the models are predicting the same thing and if not, why. An external review of the models is not planned but independent principal investigators will do a review and the DOI peer review policy will be exercised.

A question was raised about how FWS will consider the certainty of federal plans. FWS indicated that federal land management plans are considered regulatory mechanisms. For the states, FWS will similarly be looking for written commitments to addressing threats.

FWS clarified that the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) analysis is applied to actions not yet implemented or not yet shown to be effective. If states fund a conservation effort that does not yet have a track record of effectiveness, that would be analyzed under the PECE policy.

BLM provided several reports on recent activities. Funds are still available for rural fire training and BLM would still like to work on rural fire programs with interested Governors. In June, BLM held a conference on seeding practices to develop a strategy for improving seed supply and restoration. BLM expects to send a draft report out for comment in early spring and may aim for a show of commitment at the National Native Seed Conference in April in Santa Fe. It was clarified that BLM has changed how it allocates seed for fire, shifting to a national priority system.

NRCS circulated a publication on *Private Lands Vital to Conserving Wet Areas for Sage Grouse Summer Habitat* and USGS circulated a briefing paper on *Research to Support the Management of Sage-Grouse*. NRCS will use the spatial data that contributed to its work as a tool to drive future conservation investments.