

Participants:

Kathleen Rapley - ID	Charles Sullivan - MT	Terry Ireland - CO	Carl Benz - CA
Sarah Hall – R1	Jessie Gonzales - WA	Rich Szlemp - OR	Rick Gooch - WO
Marilet Zablan – R1	Mark Hogan - WY	Julie Moore - WO	Selena Werdon - NV
Steve Abele - NV	Dave Carlson – R6		

1. Summary of the RISC Team meeting (Pat will post her notes from that meeting on the sharepoint site).
 - a. The Team heard from the BLM on their RMP revision/amendment proposal
 - b. They discussed the tall structures research proposal, need and technique for creating a range-wide habitat map for sage-grouse, need for a sagebrush decision support tool, status of new guidelines for energy development (exclusive of mining) and sharp-tailed grouse, plans for the technical meeting next summer, and connectivity research across the species' range.
 - c. Jessie shared that WA is proposing a genetic study for DPS – in pre-proposal stage right now.
2. Summary of the EOC meeting – covered on last call
3. Next EOC meeting – next meeting at AFWA, September 13 – will probably focus mostly on BLM effort, but also some clean-up from last meeting in Big Sky
4. Update on the BLM planning process (which is all consuming currently)
 - a. Still not a lot of information, but the effort is gaining steam.
 - b. Some of the BLM teams have been populated – National Policy Team (Noreen Walsh), Eastern Management Team (Noreen Walsh with Pat as back-up), Western Management Team (Ren Loehoffner and Robyn Thorson with Terry Rabot as back-up), Eastern sub-regional interdisciplinary team (Pat), Western sub-regional interdisciplinary team (Marilet Zablan). The other local teams have not had Service representatives identified yet.
 - c. National Technical Team is meeting next week in Denver to develop the conservation measures for incorporation into the BLM RMPs/revisions. The product this team produces will inform the remaining teams, which are basically tasked with figuring out how to incorporate these appropriately into local plans.
 - i. Will include a place-marker to allow for internal review and comment
 - ii. States are pushing to incorporate Management Zones as part of the planning – will have the benefit of working across state lines and on ecological boundaries instead!
 - d. Sage-grouse summit – R1 and R8 FWS led effort to complement BLM process to work across state lines. Marilet is organizing
 - e. Steve asked if there were other ways of approaching this with reduced time needs, such as changing BLM manuals. This has been considered, but BLM is sticking with the RMP/revision approach for now.
 - f. Julie expressed concern that some folks in BLM still don't get the bigger picture "regulatory mechanisms". Pat co-miserated and advised that even though we put it in writing it still was not getting out to folks.

The following is the excerpt from the FWS June 21, 2011 letter to BLM on regulatory mechanisms: "The BLM Resource Management Plans (RMPs) provide the regulatory framework for future agency decisions regarding permit conditions, lease stipulations, and exception requests, thereby providing the assurance that appropriate measures will be incorporated into future BLM actions. We understand that conditions and stipulations can be added independently of an RMP, and can provide a conservation benefit in specific situations. However, unless specified in and required by an RMP, we cannot project their incorporation into future permits with any certainty. Without specification in an RMP, any assumption that these mechanisms will be consistently utilized to be protective of Greater sage-grouse would be difficult to make and difficult to support. The longevity of the RMPs provides additional assurances, particularly given the time required to effectively

address and reverse habitat impacts in this ecosystem. For these reasons we have consistently encouraged the use of RMP revisions and amendments to provide protective regulatory mechanisms for the Greater sage-grouse.

And BLM's interpretation:

So, what does this mean in plain English? It means that our ongoing and future RMP revisions and amendments are going to have to address sage-grouse conservation in an entirely different manner than has been done in the past. We will have to get more specific in our plans than we usually do (and that managers will feel comfortable with). Managers will have to give up some of our management flexibility to gain credit from FWS for regulatory certainty. Clearly, from the above statement, regulatory mechanisms in oil and gas country will take the form of specific lease stipulations, assuming we allow leasing in priority/core habitats at all. I suspect that this will also apply to land disturbances like coal, hard rock mining, geothermal, oil shale/tar sands, wind development, etc. An RMP might even propose to withdraw certain areas from mineral entry.

For a program like grazing, the RMP may specify rather precise habitat conditions that need to be present in sage-grouse priority/core areas. Meeting land health standards may not be enough or, put another way, land health standards may need to be adjusted in these areas to incorporate specific habitat conditions. For OHVs, a regulatory mechanism may be to close some areas to entry or limit OHV use to existing roads and trails with a timing limitation/season of use restriction. An additional measure may be to restrict land exchanges, sales or transfers of sage-grouse priority habitat unless the transaction results in a net gain of priority habitat. These are just an array of possibilities that could constitute regulatory mechanisms in an RMP.

- g. Rumors about IM – lots of deferrals and putting all in progress EIS's will be put on hold until revision/amendment process is completed.

- 5. Discussion of FWS conservation measures. This conversation was deferred until after the national technical team for BLM meets next week.

Round-the-Lek:

Jessie – WA

- Met with NRCS last week – inquired about SGI and incorporation of FSA programs which are essential for WA (e.g. CRP). NRCS agreed to take those up to their leadership.
- NRCS state budgets used to be calculated on the amount of private lands in each state, but now states are able to request funding under each program and identify what they will do with that funding.
- Previous lawsuit shut NRCS down from using prescribed burning – has been long enough that all expertise has been lost. Is strong interest in putting that back in the toolbox, including using it to reduce wildfires.
- Working with NRCS in review of selections for SGI positions
- Preparing for DPS analyses.

Kathleen – ID

- Kendra is officially out on maternity leave, so Kathleen is the point of contact for Idaho
- Developing guidance on fuel breaks for ID – send example of existing efforts to Kathleen

- West-Central CCAA – on hold, FWS working with landowners on new conservation measures to make it work

Rich – OR

- Met with state lands on grazing leases (improving for sage-grouse) and CCAA. Could be difficult as State may be reluctant to changing leases due to mandate to maximize income for the State.
- Marilet – set of meetings to complement

Charles - MT

- BLM – RMP revision to combine two plans into one in good habitat. Were nearly to DEIS and then range-wide effort occurred, and so is now on hold.
- Charles talked them into incorporating mandatory habitat compensation, but fell out when field manager chose preferred alternative. Charles is still promoting it and is hopeful it may return with range-wide effort. Also pushing for disturbance “cap” for priority areas.

Terry – CO

- Working on transmission lines (Trans-West Express), specifically HEA. Several others potentially in progress. Hoping for consistent protocol between all these efforts.
- Gunnison – listing decision and CH in process. On schedule for end of September.

Mark – WY

- SWAP positions (joint with IMJV) are under way. Mark is working with NRCS on this – are being pushed on wildlife component which is a good for grouse. Bootcamp for these positions is in November to provide all information necessary
- Lots of interest for conservation easements for grouse
- Pat – BLM RMP amendments seem to be on the move again
- Pat – State core area strategy about to face its first real test

Julie – WO

- Chief White with NRCS is making inquiries regarding LPN status given his contributions. Pat has been assigned to work on a response.

Miscellaneous:

- National Wildlife Refuge Association has become interested in how to contribute to sagebrush habitat conservations. May have a meeting at Sheldon-Hart Refuge in the near future to explore options.
- WWF interested in developing conservation banking options for grouse – still in early discussions.
- Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is exploring the potential to conduct research on how NRCS-SGI activities affect other sagebrush obligate birds. Still in the formative process.

Next call:

September 22, 2011 2:00 p.m. MST