

Issues:

At the last two Governor's Task Force meeting, the Task Force has discussed the need for direction from the Service regarding reporting of conservation efforts. We have tried in various ways to describe the type of information and the format that would be helpful for our evaluation across the range of the species.

We do not want to make this an onerous task for any State or other entity, and we are not requesting exhaustive statistical analyses of each individual conservation effort. Rather, we want to ensure that we fully understand the contribution of each conservation effort so that its benefits can be accurately incorporated when we make our listing determination for this species in 2015. In particular we need to understand and see an analysis of why conservation efforts provide a benefit to sage-grouse and their habitats.

It is likely that we will need to evaluate some portion of these efforts under the Policy for the Evaluation of Conservation Efforts when Making Listing Determinations (PECE; 65 FR 15100). The PECE policy identifies the primary components we should consider in our analyses of the effectiveness of conservation efforts not yet implemented or not yet proven to be effective. We need to coordinate this analysis and ensure our State partners understand the components and extent of this analysis.

The key component of this analysis is the explicit linkage between the action being taken, where it is happening, what threat the action is meant to address and the ultimate current or likely benefit to the species.

A very simple example of an assessment of effectiveness would be the acquisition of a conservation easement with the express purpose of acquiring habitat for sage-grouse. An evaluation of effectiveness of this action should include the need for the acquisition (e.g. the land would otherwise be unavailable for sage-grouse conservation due to recreational or subdivision development) and the value of that acquisition for sage-grouse conservation (e.g. retention of a limiting seasonal habitat). Providing this more detailed information allows us to more fully evaluate the effectiveness of the easement versus a simple statement that an easement was acquired.

Specifically, in what format do we provide this guidance to States and other parties and can we use existing examples or provide a template or check list of what to include in this analysis?

In 2010, we developed and used a database for capturing conservation efforts. We could do this again and encourage individual States to submit their information on individual conservation efforts via this database. One of our purposes in providing this database is to ensure that every State has an opportunity to submit their efforts for use in our listing determination and using a database will ensure consistency. One drawback is that we may lose the qualitative analysis of the conservation efforts and the linkage to the threats.

We also need to resolve the issues with sharing data between the States and the Service. Being able to see and understand the conservation efforts spatially will be an important component to the listing determination and the evaluation of the conservation efforts.

Another key component to the reporting is the availability and access to GIS and other spatial data. There are many on-going efforts in this arena that we could use or harness (CHATs, TNC, etc.).

Based on preliminary discussions we see the following items being very helpful to our ultimate analysis:

#### 1. Cumulative narrative report

We see this as a qualitative assessment of the efforts across an area (state, local or national) that describes the efforts undertaken, where they occurred, what threats were addressed or targeted, the current or likely benefits to the species and including a PECE-like analysis of effectiveness and certainty of implementation. This would not need to address every effort, but would likely cover the major threats or the actions most likely to address threats in a particular area or by a particular entity. This is as much a tool for us as an opportunity for those participating in conservation efforts to describe what they have accomplished. We would develop a checklist with recommendations on what to include in the analysis including addressing the major points of PECE and would include examples to help the states develop these reports.

#### 2. Database reporting of conservation

Whether this is the database we used for the 2010 determination or some other data analysis tool (like Conservation Registry) we need a system for reporting conservation efforts consistently across the range of the species. Many of the tools available already include the ability to identify the spatial component of the effort, which is a key component for the Service's analysis. We'd like to discuss at the meeting in Boise, what other key component we need in a data reporting system so we can evaluate our existing options and make a recommendation to the FMT and inform the on-going discussion with the States and the Sage-Grouse Task Force.

#### 3. Spatial analysis and GIS data

There are many efforts across the range of the species to develop spatially explicit data analysis. We'd like to discuss our needs and some of the different options available in Boise. We recommend a small team work with Steve Torbit and other ARDs for Science Applications to identify the key requirements needed, any barriers and recommendations for a path forward so that we have the information and tools necessary by 2015.