

From: **Matt Kales** <matt_kales@fws.gov>

Date: Mon, Nov 18, 2013 at 1:38 PM

Subject: Urgent action, please read: SG data call for Secretary of the Interior, due 1200 MST, 11/21/13

To: FW6 Sage-grouse FMT <fw6_sage-grouse_fmt@fws.gov>

Cc: Kris Tita <kris.tita@sol.doi.gov>, debbie_schreiner@fws.gov

FMT:

I hope everyone had a good weekend. As we discussed on last Thursday's FMT call, the Secretary will meet with the sage-grouse Governors in conjunction with the Western Governors Association meeting in mid-December. The Department, through our Director, has asked the Service for briefing information for that meeting, specifically an update on the status of state conservation planning efforts, our assessment of same, and the interface between state and federal conservation efforts in each of the 11 affected states. The informal feedback you all kindly provided last week in advance of today's federal principals' meeting should serve as a foundation for your more formal contributions to this exercise.

This e-mail message serves as the data call for this briefing information. **It also contains a template that contains the questions we must answer for the data call.** Please review the tasking description and template and let me know if you have any immediate questions. Please note we have a hard due date of **1200 MST this Thursday, 11/21**. Thanks in advance for your time. Matt

Tasking Description:

What: Data call for briefing information about state conservation planning efforts in each of the 11 sage-grouse states.

Why: Secretary will meet with sage-grouse Governors and wants a fine-level understanding of the status of each individual state efforts so she can offer a "mid-term assessment" consisting of (a) Department support for ongoing progress and (b) opportunities to identify and address aspects of each state planning process that requires improvement.

Who/how: FMT members or their proxies will complete the standard template (see below) and provide to a central FWS POC (Kales), for QA/QC and transmittal to HQ via DTS.

When: All information is due to Kales **by 1200 MST on Thursday, 11/21**. We are operating under an extremely tight deadline from the Department and ask everyone please respect this deadline, since we must transmit a complete product and any missing/late information will hold up the larger package.

Template for Completing Data Call:

State: **Colorado**

State plan status: Where in the continuum (of no plan to completed plan) is your state? What key milestones are approaching? How has FWS contributed to the development of the state plan? If a state has a completed plan, what does implementation look like to date? **Colorado completed its Colorado**

Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan in 2008. The state is currently doing a plan assessment, but is not planning to revise or amend the 2008 plan at this point.

The FWS signed a plan agreement (Steve Guertin, RD, 3-17-08), which is attached to the plan and states, in part, that the Service “hereby states its intent to assist with and participate in the implementation of the Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan (CCP) as prepared by the interagency Steering Committee (SC), of which the Service is a member.”

Information on implementation of the plan to date has been compiled by the Colorado Division of Natural Resources and is referred to as the “Colorado Package.” The Colorado Package is a series of tables summarizing the responses of stakeholders detailing what they have done to implement the plan since its completion in 2008. Some strategies contained in the plan have been initiated, some completed, and others have not yet been attempted.

FWS assessment of state plan: this information should be based on your state’s completed self-assessment plan, if available, and your review of that plan. Please address high points of how your state believes their plan comports with COT final report objectives.

Colorado has not yet finalized its self-assessment.

FWS assessment of state plan: please address the degree to which you agree with the state’s self-assessment and identify any major areas where we have a different opinion about the ability of the state’s plan to meet COT final report objectives. Further, please note the degree to which you have been able to develop a dialogue with the state to date over those differences of opinion. Please don’t be shy about reporting significant positive aspects of state plans; we are seeking to develop as balanced and comprehensive an assessment of state planning efforts as possible via this exercise.

The Colorado state plan is strong on biology and strategies needed to conserve GRSG. Implementation of the strategies, however, is voluntary; thus, implementation has been, and likely will continue to be, sporadic. The state plan identifies 18 issues (threats) to GRSG, “but of all these issues, oil and gas development, housing, and improper grazing are expected to have the greatest impacts on GrSG across their range in Colorado” (p. 3).

GRSG protections from oil and gas development are imposed by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) during the permit application and issuance process. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff make conservation recommendations to COGCC on oil and gas development applications that might affect GRSG. We believe these recommendations are, as a rule, sufficiently protective of GRSG. However, CPW’s recommendations are not always adopted by COGCC. Some level of threat from oil and gas development remains, particularly on state and private lands. The COT report recommends that energy development be avoided in PACs, or if avoidance is not possible, the best habitat should be avoided to ensure that GRSG populations do not decline.

Individual county governments regulate housing development. Some counties take GRSG conservation into consideration when reviewing housing development applications, some do not.

Exurban development is not much of a threat to some GRSG populations in Colorado, but it is a slowly developing, long-term threat to others.

Although grazing is a widespread practice, improper grazing that threatens GRSG habitat probably occurs on a more localized level. Information on grazing impacts to GRSG habitat is typically lacking.

Note: I have attached a copy of the state self-assessment status table as of 1200 MST today; please let me know if you haven't seen your respective state's self-assessment and I will send it to you right away.

Interface between state planning efforts and federal conservation planning efforts in your state (i.e., BLM/FS land management planning revisions): this is especially important for those states where the state plans may be under consideration by the federal land managers as an alternative in their planning process.

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