

NW CO GRS Land Use Plan Amendment EIS  
Section 7 Informal Consultation  
Thursday, 13 March 2014 10:00 – 11:00 MDT  
**Draft Meeting Minutes**

Attendees:

Creed Clayton (FWS)	Chris Keefe (WY-BLM)
Terry Ireland (FWS)	Chris Colt (FS)
Doug Laye (FWS)	Robert Skorkowsky (FS)
Erin Jones (BLM)	Katherine Malengo (FS-Teams)
Bridgett Clayton (BLM)	Rick Baxter (FS-Teams)
Lisa Belmonte (BLM)	Craig Morris (FS)

1. Project status briefing (Erin Jones):

Scope of project, Description of key management actions (*w/ respect to impacts to T&E spp*)

Timeline: approximate dates for critical milestones:

- Draft *final* proposed plan (proposed action): March 28<sup>th</sup>, then will be reviewed by regional IDT, regional leadership team, and national policy team, etc. (2 week review).
- Final proposed plan to ID team: April 15<sup>th</sup>, specialists will then have 90 days for impact analysis for EIS
- Completion of impact analysis of proposed plan for EIS: July 14<sup>th</sup>.
- *Preliminary* Draft Biological Assessment completion: April 18<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of this document is for FWS to review the document template and analysis methodology for the GRS Land Use Plan Amendment effort nationally.
- Biological Assessment will be completed by July 14<sup>th</sup>.
- Concurrence and/or Biological Opinion from FWS prior to the ROD.
- ROD: February 2015. Separate ROD for BLM and FS; (possibility for an additional BLM ROD based on plan issues.)

2. Background to consultation/national strategy for GRS Land Use Plan Amendment project (Chris Colt & Doug Laye):

The three agencies (BLM, FS and FWS) are working closely to have a uniform approach to consultation nationally on the GRS Land Use Plan Amendment effort. Individual BAs will be written for each EIS. Consultation will be conducted on each individual EIS. There will be a BLM ROD and a FS ROD for each EIS, yet a single BA per EIS. Consultation is being conducted on the proposed plan amendment actions (sage-grouse conservation measures), as opposed to overall Land Use Plan programs. (e.g. Consult on a 2 mile No Surface Occupancy stipulation, etc. on unleased fluid minerals, rather than all the actions associated with the entire Oil & Gas program within a Field Office.)

3. Discussion on conferencing on greater sage-grouse:

The action agencies are not planning on conferencing on GRS Land Use Plan Amendment. Conferencing on this species is not required and will not provide any additional benefit to the species conservation from this effort. The only benefit would be to the agency in the future if the species were to be listed, however, we are not prepared for the program specific, unit level detail needed for this analysis in order for the FWS to develop a Biological Opinion and Jeopardy decision. Specific to this project, the FWS does not encourage the agencies to conference on GRS Land Use Plan Amendment right now and does not believe that this additional effort would fit into the timeframe available for a decision on this project. Further, they believe that it would be more effective and more appropriate to conduct

conferencing after the completion of the RODs and Plan Amendments at the planning unit level, rather than this multi-unit/multi-state level.

4. BA template & preliminary draft BA overview (Chris):

As per the national consultation direction, we are in the process of completing a preliminary draft BA for circulation and review by the FWS. This document will model how the analysis will be conducted for a plant, aquatic, and terrestrial vertebrate species. The three species under review are Graham's beardtongue, greenback cutthroat trout, and yellow-billed cuckoo.

5. BA specific discussion of analysis strategy and format (Katherine Malengo):

- Species table review: Table structure and species elimination criteria is good, however, some additional language in paragraph form is needed for those species being dismissed from further analysis ("no impact") in the table. This could be done in an appendix to the BA where, for each species (or group of species if appropriate) dismissed there is a brief and clear discussion (~1 paragraph) as to the rationale for the "no impact" determination. (e.g. *Platte River endangered fish will not be impacted by this project. Water depletions to the Platte River and its tributaries are the major threat these species. There are no actions within this Land Use Plan Amendment decision that would cause water depletions in these drainages.*)
- Critical habitat: Based on ESA language, policy, and court decisions, both the species (individual & populations) and designated critical habitat should be specifically analyzed. Therefore, we will leave the critical habitat lines in the table and address it in the analysis below; unless there is a more efficient method developed as we go through the analysis. Since all actions will be focused within sage-grouse habitat (ADH=all designated habitat), it will be beneficial to know if any designated critical habitat for T&E species overlaps sage-grouse ADH, and where these overlaps occur. However, it will not necessarily be important to conduct a GIS bookkeeping exercise of the exact number of acres that overlap, rather that there is an overlap and what the potential impacts will be.
- Analysis approach: There were two organizational approaches discussed, to organize the document by species or by program area. The consensus from FWS was that an organization by species, though it may contain some redundancies, would provide the most clear impact analysis for any given listed species for their review. Therefore, the document will be organized by species (or groups of similar species, like Platte River endangered fish, or listed plants that occur on Green River formation soils), then within a species section, the analysis would be grouped by program area.
- Program areas: In the various sections and chapters of the NWCO DEIS there are 17 or more different program areas. For the purpose of the BA, these program areas will be distilled down into 5:
  - Recreation and Travel Management
  - Lands and Realty
  - Range and Vegetation Management
  - Energy and Minerals
  - Fire and Fuels Management
- Details of the species specific analysis: This final item was not discussed due to time constraints, however we look forward to input from the meeting participants. Elements of the species analysis could include a review of the three following elements for vertebrate species: 1.) direct habitat loss, modification or fragmentation 2.) indirect habitat loss (disturbance, disruption) 3.) habitat protection; and the following four elements for plants: 1.) direct habitat loss, 2.) habitat degradation and disruption to species, 3.) pollinator habitat fragmentation and loss, 4.) habitat protection/restoration.