

## Meeting Notes

Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Work Group  
June 2, 2011 – BLM Little Snake Field Office

In attendance:

Brian Holmes, CDOW  
Justin Shirley, NRCS  
Desa Ausmus, BLM  
T. Wright Dickinson, Vermillion Ranch  
Dean Gent, Landowner  
Jeff Comstock, Moffat County  
Jean Stetson, Landowner  
Scott Patti, AECOM  
Sharon Knowlton, BLM  
Brian King, PacifiCorp  
Garry Miller, Transwest  
Jon Kehmeier, SWCA  
Nate Wojcik, SWCA

Brian distributed lek count summary for 2011 with 3-year averages from 2007-2011. Overall male high counts in the Northwest Population are up compared to 2010. However, some management zones remain of concern.

Zone 1 (Cold Springs Mountain) high male count continued to decline. Jeff pointed out that a lot of “No Counts” occurred in Zone 1 this year. This was because weather and late snow conditions precluded counting leks on top of Cold Springs. The only lek on top of Cold Springs counted this year was Beaver Basin; no others could be reached during the count season. However, distribution of grouse outfitted with GPS transmitters as part of Brett Walker’s research seemed to corroborate that few birds attempted to breed at leks on top of Cold Springs. As of early May, only two GPS-outfitted males and no GPS-outfitted females had left winter range and traveled to the top of Cold Spring, indicating that few birds were likely missed on top of Cold Springs.

Zone 6 (Blue Mountain) high male count increased slightly from 2010 (from 99 to 101) but is still much lower than 2006, 2007 when in excess of 400 males were counted in each of those years.

Because the three year average for Zone 1 has fallen below 100 males, the group discussed management options that this triggers, in particular whether hunting should continue in that zone. After some discussion, the group unanimously agreed that since this management zone meets the management trigger set in the Northwest management plan that CDOW should move to close hunting in this zone, which corresponds, very closely, to Game Management Unit 201.

The status of hunting in Zone 6, which corresponds to Game Management Unit 10, was also discussed. While the group expressed some concern over the apparently large decline in male counts on Blue Mountain, there was unanimous support for NOT changing the current hunting season there unless the unit falls below the three year average criteria of 100 males, which it has not yet.

Several members of the group pointed out that three year average high male counts in Zone 2 exceed the 100 male threshold. Jeff suggested that CDOW move to open this management zone, which corresponds to Game Management Unit 2, to hunting to bring management in alignment with the Northwest plan. After some debate, with at least a couple group members expressing more or less indifference to this motion (not strongly in support, but not in opposition either), the group unanimously supported the recommendation that CDOW open the hunting season for sage-grouse in GMU 2.

The next topic of discussion was the proposed Transwest Express transmission line. Gary Miller, representative for the Transwest power line project, presented an overview of the project, the project proponent (which is the Anschutz Corporation), and research and conservation work for sage-grouse being conducted on the Overland Trail Ranch in Wyoming. The Overland Trail Ranch is the site of the proposed wind farm which will produce power to be transmitted through the Transwest power line project to demand centers in the Southwest. Gary also provided several copies of a report entitled "Contemporary Knowledge and Research Needs Regarding the Potential Effects of Tall Structures on Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus* and *C. minimus*)."

This document will be transmitted to the work group in electronic format to accompany these notes.

Jon Kehmeier and Nate Wojcik from the consulting firm SWCA presented data on ongoing sage-grouse research and efforts to mitigate the impacts from the proposed wind farm on the Overland Trail Ranch. The ranch is in the process of establishing a CCAA with USFWS for sage-grouse. They propose that the ranch can continue to support the current number of sage-grouse following wind farm development by implementing a series of mitigation "treatments." These include a variety of things including habitat enhancement through vegetation treatments, marking and/or removing fences, improving grazing management, etc.

There was discussion about the EIS process and timeframe. Sharon Knowlton, BLM project lead for the Transwest project, described the process and timeline to the group. There was a desire from several work group members to have additional future discussions, which would potentially involve affected private landowners, on how to mitigate impacts in Colorado. T. Wright expressed his desire that the Work Group play an advisory role to CDOW on future comments and mitigation/conservation plans that may be required as part of the EIS and final planning process for the transmission line.