

Approved

Big Horn Basin Local Sage-grouse Working Group
Meeting Notes
February 28, 2007
Bureau of Land Management—Worland

Working Group Members Present:

- Kathleen Jachowski, (Chair) Executive Director, Guardians of the Range, Cody
- Tom Easterly, Wildlife Biologist, Wyoming Game & Fish Department, Greybull
- Keith Hamilton, Rancher, Hyattville
- Rory Karhu, District Conservationist, Natural Resource Conservation District, Worland
- Tim Stephens, Wildlife Biologist, Bureau of Land Management, Worland
- Matt Call, Environmental Specialist, WyoBen (Bentonite), Greybull
- Chris Pfhistler, Rancher/Falconer, Worland
- Bill Alldredge, Rancher (Retired Professor-CSU), Thermopolis
- Marvin Blakesley, Adv. HES Professional, Marathon Oil Company, Cody

Working Group Members Absent:

- Carl Meyer, Member at Large
- Lee Campbell, Hot Springs County Planner, Thermopolis

Facilitator: Dennie Hammer, Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Note Taker: Dennie Hammer

Observers/Presenters:

- None present

Approval of Agenda and February 9, 2007 Minutes-Dennie Hammer

- Dennie reviewed the day's agenda
 - o Corrections to "Review and Discussion"
 - Delete buffer discussion bullet
 - Delete goals and objectives-conservation strategy-bullet
 - Insert, "some information on NRCS programs that could provide incentives, to first bullet after lunch sentence
 - Delete "Tim felt" bullet
 - o Minutes were approved.

Statewide Working Group Update: Tom Christiansen (via speakerphone)

1. Conflict of Interest—Project Proposals
 - o An issue of "potential for conflict" has arisen in some areas of the state where there are direct benefits to working group members based upon project selection
 - o It is felt that members should not receive direct benefits and there will be a policy forthcoming that will provide guidance.
 - o Tom stated that the statewide project review group would reconvene to review project proposals that the working groups have selected for funding.

- If a group member does have a conflict with any particular projects, the individual should recuse him or herself from all project selection decision-making.
- If the member is involved in a long-term project and there is a conflict, the member may be asked to step-away from the group.
- The statewide review group will establish some hard deadline for project submission.

2. Escape Ramp (statewide) Project Proposal

- Tom indicated that there were two versions of the escape ramp project; the \$5000 version is no longer valid.
- The Bates Hole project asking for \$1000 from each of the working groups is the one on the table and the one to review.

2007 Sage-grouse Hunting Season Recommendations—Tom Easterly

- Tom passed out a copy of the season proposal; Tom Christiansen, uses an “adaptive management” approach.
- Tom informed the group that under the adaptive management proposal, the seasons would be reviewed on a yearly basis rather than the 3-year review currently in place for upland game birds.
- As outlined, the harvest would fluctuate with the number of males observed on the leks over a 2-3 year period.
 - Group Comments
 - The proposal seems logical and there would still be opportunity for the public to comment during the public season setting process.
 - The adaptive management strategy and longer-seasons are good.
 - Overall, group supports the concept and the proposal as written

Thermopolis Independent Record Article—Kathleen Jachowski

- The Thermopolis Independent Record reported on a presentation that Lee Campbell made before the Hot Springs County Commissioners.
- The article state that the draft Big Horn Basin Sage-grouse Conservation Plan “would result in locking up of huge tracts of land for anything but grouse habitat”, and “the fact that the sage-grouse population has been stable, and even growing, under several years of drought in the county, according to Campbell, does not seem to be relevant.”
- Dennie received a copy of the article and forwarded it to Kathleen who immediately contacted Lee, regarding the accuracy of the reporting.
- According to the Hot Springs County Clerk who was present at the commission meeting, the reporter did not accurately report what had been presented.
- Lee met with managing editor Pat Schmidt to determine if the article could be retracted or a correction published. The editor agreed to publish a correction.
- Kathleen suggested that a letter be drafted and sent to the Hot Springs County Commission and to the Independent Record to correct the mistake and get the response into the permanent record.
- Apparently, the Worland Wyoming Daily News also attended the meeting, ran an article with more accurate reporting.

Living on a Few Acres—Kathleen Jachowski

- Seminar is slated for March 10; Kathleen will provide information on sage-grouse similar to last year.

Review and Discussion of Proposed Projects

- Seven projects were submitted
 1. Bighorn Basin Land/Habitat Cover and Shrub Overstory Classifications Using Remote Sensing (\$30,000)
 2. Sagebrush Establishment on Bentonite Reclamation in the Big Horn Basin (\$20,000)
 3. North Butte Wildlife Guzzler (\$12,000)
 4. McCullough Peaks Watershed Enhancement & Rangeland Health Improvement (\$15,000)
 5. Water Trough Escape Ramps for Private/State Lands (\$1,000)
 6. Inventory and Mapping of Sage-grouse Habitats (\$6,500)
 7. Emblem Bench and Table Mountain Sagebrush Habitat Enhancements (\$8,850)
- Dennie had workbooks made from Lee's master copy for each of the working group members to simplify the discussion.
- Tom provided the members with an overall synopsis of each project to determine if the project should or should not be discussed further. All projects proposed had merit and were defined as "keepers" for further discussion.
- Bill suggested that in the future the working group members might present the proposals that represent their interests to the working group and that they attempt to answer questions that might arise prior to the project review process.

Dennie provided an in-house pizza lunch to maximize time.

Project Review Discussion and Selection—All

- ❖ Bighorn Basin Land/Habitat Cover and Shrub Overstory Classifications Using Remote Sensing
 - Would provide much needed information
 - Would complete the basin area coverage for the statewide effort
 - The project would include ground truthing
 - This has never been done in the basin before
 - Doubt whether or not all of the goals can be achieved
 - The technology needs to improve, not there yet
 - Overstory cannot be determined at the level proposed.
 - It might be better to partially fund this proposal as in all likelihood it will get funded
 - It will achieve two out of the three stated objectives, it cannot meet the canopy objective
 - Decision: provide full funding (\$30,000)
- ❖ Sagebrush Establishment on Bentonite Reclamation in the Big Horn Basin
 - This is a worthwhile project
 - Decision: provide full funding (\$20,000)
- ❖ North Butte Wildlife Guzzler
 - None of the members are very familiar with the area
 - Project may have as much or more benefit to other sagebrush obligates
 - There is a commitment stated for monitoring, maintenance and repair
 - Decision: provide full funding (\$12,000)

- ❖ McCullough Peaks Watershed Enhancement & Rangeland Health Improvement (\$15,000)
 - What happened to the existing pipeline and tank system?
 - According to the project proposal guidelines, this project requires a grazing management plan, which was not included
 - Questions raised for the project coordinator;
 - What is the grazing plan for the project allotments?
 - Are you comfortable with stocking rates and season of use?
 - When will livestock be using these water developments, and will wildlife
 - Have use of developments when livestock are not in allotments?
 - Who will be responsible for maintenance of water systems?
 - Do the project proposal allotments encompass 1 sage-grouse lek, or 3-4
 - Leks as your proposal states? Could you please show leks on proposal maps?
 - Would you consider creating overflows and/or wet areas associated with livestock waterers?
 - Will the 2 fiberglass wildlife waterers be fenced?
 - Decision: Do not fund at this time, contact project coordinator and ask above listed questions. Inform the coordinator that there will be another project proposal review and application period.

- ❖ Water Trough Escape Ramps for Private/State Lands
 - There needs to be assurance that they will be maintained
 - The only incentive to the landowner is to keep dead things out of the stock tank
 - Clearly, there isn't enough time to check them all for maintenance purposes
 - This will benefit all wildlife that use the tanks
 - Decision: provide full funding (\$1,000)

- ❖ Inventory and Mapping of Sage-grouse Habitats (\$6,500)
 - The Wyoming Game and Fish Department will not allocate money toward personnel time
 - The amount of money requested does not seem commensurate with the amount of work identified.
 - Marathon Oil Company is willing to allow their donation (\$9000 remaining from 2006 donation) to be used for three months of temporary contract time. This would have to be run past Moe Brown, exec. Director, Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming
 - This might be a better proposal if the working group puts out a Request For Proposals (RFP) to consultants to avoid the under-educated applicant and those who might quit the project for more lucrative employment.
 - The working group should put a cap on the money available if an RFP is written.
 - Members felt it would be best to obligate the money now for such an RFP including the Marathon Donation.
 - Tim Stephens, Tom Easterly, and Rory Karhu will develop and RFP for the group to review at the April meeting.
 - Decision: table this project, draft a RFP, then solicit applications from consultants

- ❖ Emblem Bench and Table Mountain Sagebrush Habitat Enhancements (\$5,000)
 - There is no map for Emblem Bench, so it is difficult to determine where the treatment would take place.
 - There is limited sagebrush on Emblem Bench as it is
 - Partial funding is a possibility

- Seeding may be a waste of time, but the mowing should stimulate sagebrush growth
- Decision: Partially fund (\$2,500)
 - Use partial funding to conduct the sagebrush mowing on Table Mountain only.

Do not fund any work on Emblem Bench at this time, contact project coordinator to inform them that there needs to be more detail and experimental design. Inform the coordinator that there will be another project proposal review and application period.

❖ Flitner/Snake Sage Habitat Project (\$8838)

- This project does not address how to reduce competition with Russian wild rye
- Will there be enough topsoil?
- How will we know what to recommend? There may be a low probability of learning something. There may not be the ability to identify what worked and what didn't.
- There is a spirit with the company to do a better job
- There needs to be much more detail and more experimental design.
- The project coordinator should contact David Legg from University of Wyoming for guidance on experimental design.
- Decision: Do not fund at this time, contact project coordinator to inform them that there needs to be more detail and experimental design. Inform the coordinator that there will be another project proposal review and application period.

❖ TOTAL MONIES OBLIGATED = \$65,500

Bill Barrett Corporation Settlement Money—Tom Easterly

- Tom stated that he has not seen any solicitation by the Biodiversity Alliance for projects. Should they be soliciting?
- It appears that the alliance has the last say on how the money is spent.
- Questions surround the project area; where can the money be spent?
- The role of the working group is not clear at this time.

- ❖ The next meeting will take place on April 3, 2007 in Thermopolis at the Hot Springs County Museum.
- ❖ The working group will review the feedback obtained from the internal draft review and decide what changes/additions/deletions should be made to the draft conservation plan.
- ❖ Kathleen asked that all members wear their sage-grouse working group shirts for a group photo.