

Upper Snake River Sage-Grouse Working Group

April 5, 2007

Wyoming Game and Fish Conference Room, Jackson 1 – 3:30 pm

Members Present: Joe Bohne, Bert Raynes, Eric Cole, Franz Camenzind,
Absent: Paul Bruun, Lance Koch, Randy Williams, Sue Wolff, Doug Johnston, Doug Wachob
Guests: Bryan Bedrosian and Vince (?), Beringia South; Aly Courtemanch, GTNP;
Geneva Chong and Will Wetzel, USGS;
Facilitator: Barbara Hauge, Center for Resolution

Administrative Matters

The minutes of the March 9th meeting were approved.

Update on Beringia South project

Bryan reported that 10 birds are now marked (8 hens and 2 males from near the Kelly pit). Marked birds are monitored every 2 or 3 days. He will trap at the Moulton lek tomorrow. He and Geneva will go out and look at locations on the ground to see how they can do habitat work.

Bryan said that he hopes to get an airport board grant of \$30,000. Howard is meeting with the board on Monday and will have an update.

The grant request to the Animal Damage board is due in mid-May. He submitted to a request to the wildlife trust board, but as of yet has no word. The Wildlife Conservation Society did not come through. Bryan will give a summary fundraising report at next meeting.

Beringia South was formally awarded the raven research project in Pinedale.

Report on the Composition and Structure of Sage-Grouse Winter habitat

William Wetzel of the Teton Science School presented his report on winter habitat. The study's purpose was to understand:

- the plants that make up the sage-grouse's winter habitat
- the structure of the plants
- the quality and availability of the habitat, and
- the baseline for future management.

Will found more variation than he expected in shrub cover and height. There were 7 main shrubs. Mountain big sage is the dominant species (over 75% of the plots). Basin big sage is the tallest shrub.

Will expected sage-grouse to cluster in sage stands with high sage cover and height, however he observed birds in places with a variety of sage percent cover and height. His possible explanations were that:

- there were sampling problems (most of which were Holloran's), in which case there is not much to say about management;
- there was a lack of adequate habitat, so the birds are going to lower height and cover areas; yet there is a lot of exposed winter sage and unused exposed sage, so there's not a lack of tall enough sage--maybe something else is wrong with it;
- sage-grouse have wide habitat requirements: they use low sage and tall sage, so management for this would mean we don't have to focus on winter habitat, as the limiting season might be a different time of the year;
- sage-grouse have a mosaic requirement—they need temporal and functional separation, they need low and high sage (tall sage for storms, and short sage during the day

when feeding is better and from which they can see a predator better). This theory has more difficult management demands.

Will's conclusions were that

landscape is heterogeneous to a small scale so management will have to be too; sage-grouse use seemingly inadequate habitat (Bryan's hourly GPS data will show when and how habitat is used);

summer and winter range overlap: forb, grass and shrub data can be used year round.

Joe commented that sage-grouse obviously use more than just the tall sage. Franz asked whether Will had factored in other issues such as proximity to a raptor roosting tree and the effect it could have on habitat use. Tom stated that even though the birds seem to use a variety of sage, if they didn't have the tall sage, we wouldn't have successful wintering sage-grouse—they may not need only tall sage, but when they need it, it has to be available.

Draft plan for stakeholder review

Joe handed out the Preface & Executive Summary, and stated that he was still missing the fire history.

He suggested that the Appendix section include: Will Wetzel's report, Aly Courtemanch's report, McDonald's demographic assessment, and funding opportunities. Tom suggested the group include an abstract or summary and a reference location instead of a whole report, but Eric and Franz stated that they prefer to have all documents included in full in the Appendix for handy reference.

The group stated that their reading audience will include primarily agency biologists and managers. Bert reminded the group that the general public is not in the habit of reading documents like the plan, which is full of jargon, acronyms and other professional terms of art. Bert, with Franz's help, will draft a lay executive summary to ensure that the general reader will understand the purpose and importance of the conservation plan.

By April 16th, Joe will have a draft available for stakeholder review (if the fire history is not yet available, that will be noted on a place-holding page). **The stakeholder review period will last 30 days.**

The LWG will meet again on Thursday, May 24 from 1 - 5pm to review stakeholder comments and incorporate them. **The public input period will begin Friday, June 1** and **the public open house is scheduled for Wednesday, June 13th, from 7 – 9 pm at the WGF conference room.**

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.