

**South Central Sage Grouse Working Group  
Meeting Minutes  
Dec. 14, 2006  
BLM Building, Rawlins Wyoming**

**Attendees:**

Randy Phipps, John Espy, Frank Blomquist, Bill Nation, Roger Cox, Tim Woolley, Chris Burkett

**Guests:**

Tom Christiansen  
Larry Kmoch

**Start Time:** 8:45

**Introduction and Preliminary Items:**

Managers of the BLM facility asked me to ensure that all meeting participants signed the guest book.

It has been many months since Tom Christiansen was able to meet with the SCLWG, and Tom was asked to offer his insights on several issues.

- Tom provided the group with two copies of a DVD that contains presentations on Raven/Sage Grouse interactions.
  - The DVD contains almost four hours of information.
  - Chris Burkett will keep the discs with group materials in Cheyenne. However, Chris will send them to any group member that wishes to view them.
- Tom reminded the group that the RFP has been distributed and research money is available.
- Tom gave a brief overview of the Corporate Sage-Brush Initiative (CSI) which is an opportunity to tap into private money to implement conservation work.
  - Based on WAFWA recommendations, CSI personnel have identified 5 priority range-wide projects. CSI personnel have also decided that half of the funding will be used for big initiatives and the remainder will be dedicated to local working groups.
- Tom discussed his expectations for the public review process.
  - At a minimum the group must accept comments for 30-days. Chris Burkett will be responsible for compiling and analyzing the comments so the SCLWG can accommodate any modifications to the plan.
  - Tom advised that the SCLWG allow themselves time to review and consider the comments.
  - Tom described the public meeting process used by other local work groups. Frank B. indicated he had attended the Bates Hole Working Group's meeting in Medicine Bow and provided an overview of that event.
  - Tom indicated he would provide a list of stakeholders who should receive a copy of the draft plan. Tom also indicated he would try to obtain copies of meeting

materials used by the Bates Hole Working Group and the North Eastern Working Group. These may be useful templates of the SCLWG to follow.

- Tom discussed the USFWS and their review of the local plans.
  - Technically, the Service is not required to review draft plans, but they have been accommodating to requests from other local working groups. Typically, these reviews take about 30 days, but could take longer if Service personnel receive many plans at once. Following their review, Service people will send a response in writing.
  - When Service personnel review local plans, they are looking at conservation commitments while considering the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE policy). In essence, they are evaluating how effective future actions are likely to be and how those actions are likely to effect the species in question.
- Tom reminded the SCLWG that following their public input process, the finalized plan will need to be submitted to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission 30 days before the group presents the document at a public Commission meeting.
  - The Commission is scheduled to meet:
    - March 15
    - April 24 – 25
    - July 19 - 20

### **Minutes from the November Meeting:**

The meeting minutes for the November meeting were reviewed and approved by the workgroup.

### **Public Comment:**

Mr. Larry Kmoch attended this meeting. During the comment period he asked SCLWG members if they could explain the affinity Sage Grouse have shown to specific road materials that were recently applied in his area. Bill Nation explained the material contains salt sand which the grouse and antelope are attracted to.

### **Where are we and where do we go from here?**

Tim provided an overview of the plan's status and changes he has incorporated since the last meeting. Afterwards, the group collaborated to refine the Education and Information text and compile language for the Vegetation and Predation sections. Tim will take this input and make additional refinements as needed. Other group members are also encouraged to review and help refine this new material.

### **Project Prioritization:**

When reviewing funding requests, participants decided that projects must address at least one of the following priority categories:

- Upland Vegetation Management (includes Fencing, Grazing Management, etc.)
- Water Development
- Reclamation (such as seed source development)
- Production of Information and Education materials
- Research that ties directly to some objective within the plan.

When reviewing proposed projects, members indicated the following circumstances would also be considered.

- Participation of partners (this will be favorably considered but is not required).
- Proximity of the project to priority sage grouse areas
- The project's relevance with plan priorities
- The project's scale and potential to have a positive impact on these resource issues.

The group considered two distinct habitat strategies related to sage grouse conservation: conserving existing high quality habitat and working to rehabilitate degraded lands so they will provide habitat. The group recognized the benefits and detriments of both options. At this point, the group decided against making one tactic a higher priority than the other, but agreed to revisit the issue on a case by case basis.

Finally, participants decided it was better to keep the \$134,000 than to fund low priority or low quality projects. The group decided it was best to avoid the trap of funding something just to fund something.

### **Financial Considerations:**

The SCLWG has \$134,000 of the legislatively appropriated funds that it can allocate to projects. In terms of managing this money, the group decided to spend money as good projects are submitted and not reserve funds for potential projects.

The group decided to require a 50% match for any projects that receive money from their account.

No project may receive more than \$10,000.

In-kind match is acceptable, but project proposals that rely upon in-kind contributions to meet the match requirements must include an itemization of in-kind value.

All projects must be completed by September 30, 2008.

### **Ground Rules:**

The discussions related to project priorities and the financial decisions (see above) constitute ground rules which will be communicated to those who might propose projects for funding.

### **Project Proposals:**

Frank Blomquist presented a preliminary project proposal for the group's consideration. Generally, the project would fit individual sage grouse with radio transmitters. These birds would be monitored and the collected data would be used to refine and revise information on the birds' habitat use. Frank provided handouts to demonstrate points of his discussion. Copies of these handouts will be included within the files for this meeting.

Frank informed the group that he needed to begin addressing logistical issues as quickly as possible if this project was to be initiated during the upcoming field season. The group committed to provide this project with up to \$10,000, contingent upon the submission of a

completed application. The group also requested that at least five of the transmitters be placed on male birds so the project would provide more comprehensive data.

Since the November meeting, Cameron Aldridge contacted Chris Burkett to discuss the possibility of the SCLWG funding a project on the Stratton Sagebrush Ecological Research Site. Cameron provided Chris with a draft project proposal and asked Chris to distribute it to the SCLWG during their December meeting. A copy of this handout has been included in the file for this meeting.

The group reviewed the proposal but decided to postpone making a final decision until the project priorities and financial decisions are formally approved and these decisions are communicated to those requesting funds.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the SCLWG will be on Thursday January 18 at the BLM office in Rawlins. The meeting will begin at 8:30 and will end at 3:30.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:00