

WIND RIVER/SWEETWATER RIVER LOCAL SAGE-GROUSE WORKING GROUP
December 14, 2006 MEETING MINUTES

ATTENDANCE: Tom Abernathy, Dave Vaughan, Jack Welch, Bill Skelton, Steve Platt, Pat Hnilicka, Stan Harter, Jim Haverkamp, Rob Philp, Mickey Asbell, and Western Thayer.

ABSENT: Sue Oberlie, Dave Lieb, and Tony Malmberg.

PUBLIC: Tom Bell, Patty Slack, Dick Loper, Tim Kramer, and Carrie Dobey,

Meeting began at 9:15 AM and ended about 1:15 PM and was held at the BLM office in Lander.

Mickey reported that people had seen 100+ grouse in the Sand Draw area. He would try to get a more accurate location of where these birds were seen.

Dave V. and Tom will try to get together to discuss grazing RMPs.

Stan had visited Lars Baker of Fremont County Weed and Pest and gave him updated locations of sage grouse leks within Weed and Pest's jurisdiction. Lars compared the weed treatment projects done in relation to lek locations and found that they have spent \$455,000 on projects within 3 miles of known leks since 2003. Stan had met with Sue, Carrie Dobey, and Bret Berg of the Yellowstone Ranch to discuss the Beaver Creek weed management project. The ranch is interested in doing weed treatments on knapweed. Tom is also interested in participating and having weed treatments done on his ranch.

Stan mentioned that the Game and Fish believes that the Sage Grouse Conservation dollars that LWGs have to spend should not go toward predator research or control projects. This is due to the legislature authorizing \$6,000,000 to local predator boards for such projects. Dave V. said the local Sportsman for Wildlife group has \$6,000 that they will pay for coyote bounties. They will pay \$15 per coyote.

Dave V. shared a Thank You letter that he had written to send to the 76 respondents to our questionnaire. Mickey suggested sending it out to the entire 269 individuals that we had mailed a questionnaire to in order to drum up more response. Stan thought we should hold off on doing and maybe do a second survey at a later date.

Mickey asked about a summary of West Nile Virus. Pat will send out to the group the summary he had gotten from Tom Christiansen.

Mickey asked about building bird escape ramps using plastic material instead of metal which can corrode. Bill mentioned that they use traction mats on the banks of evaporation ponds in case someone falls in and this material could be used on bird ramps. Stan will incorporate the bird ramp design he had sent around into the Appendix of the plan.

Pat asked the group to discuss whether we should recommend a specific residual grass height to provide for nesting cover. Everyone thought that we should not have one because of the great variability in grass growth due to grass species types, precipitation, soil types, etc. Patty Slack mentioned that leaf growth on needle and thread is 1 to 4 inches in dry years and up to 8 in wet years. This year there was very little growth due to extreme drought, but there was some growth during September when we got some moisture. Stan will incorporate into the Conservation Assessment part of the plan descriptions of sage grouse habitat that will have typical grass heights for nesting cover found in the scientific literature, but will not include a specific recommendation.

Stan gave the group flow charts from the Bates Hole and NE working groups that showed how to prioritize project proposals. The group preferred the Bates Hole version, and Stan will modify and include

it in our plan. Stan walked the group through the list of Project Commitments to see where we could direct the \$104,000. At this time the projects that will be needing funding in the near future are the Government Draw mowing, Beaver Creek weed treatment, and possibly the Government Draw noise study.

Dick Loper mentioned that we may want to approach the State Land Grazing Board to partner and match funds for range improvement projects.

Stan asked how to handle the spreadsheets that we developed early on that showed the factors influencing sage grouse. Mickey mentioned that these were done to help start us writing our plan and have been incorporated into the written RMPs and other parts. There was not a need to include the spreadsheets themselves in the plan.

Pat mentioned that that he and Western attended the Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative in Denver last week. CSI is a national effort involving high levels of administrators from industry, conservation groups, and state and federal agencies, along with private landowners. Its primary goals are to provide funding for on-the-ground projects that will benefit sage grouse and sagebrush and to have a credit banking system that will allow industry to buy credits to offset habitat impacts from gas drilling. It's in its infancy. Pat mentioned that developing partnerships is great, we have to work together. Pat, Western and Stan had concerns as to how this would impact Wyoming such as would the mitigation be enough to offset losses of habitat from drilling and field activities, how does reclamation fit it, and to what level of reclamation would industry have to do.

Next meeting is **Tuesday, January 23 at 9:30AM at the Lander BLM office.** The main agenda item is to review the newly completed draft plan.

To Do:

- Pat will send USGS summary of West Nile Virus and impacts on sage grouse in 2006 to members.
- Stan will continue writing draft plan.
- Dave V. will edit Thank You letter to those that responded to our survey in 2005.