

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership
FROM: Julia Babcock, Oregon Solutions Staff
SUBJECT: February 14, 2014 SageCon Draft Meeting Notes

This memo follows up on the February 14, 2014 meeting of the Sage Grouse Conservation Partnership. The memo includes the following: (1) upcoming meetings calendar and (2) identified action items and (3) overview meeting notes and (4) attendance list.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Date	Meeting	Location	Potential Agenda Items
Mondays Ongoing	Core Team Meetings	Portland	Share updates to align federal and state planning processes
February 18, 24 2014	Mitigation Technical Team Meetings	Portland	Develop mitigation framework for state plan
February 19, 2014	Final State Comment Revisions	Salem	Review and finalize state comments for BLM DEIS

ACTION ITEMS

Action Item	Who	Date
Public comments due to BLM	All	February 20th
Develop 2014 Process Map and Schedule	Core Team	March 2014

MEETING MATERIALS POSTED TO SAGE CON WEBSITE

- [Final Draft Agenda](#)
- [Draft Executive Summary-Rural Community Alternative](#)
- [Draft Basic Framework for Rural Community Alternative](#)
- [Mitigation-Subteam-February-Progress-Report-Sara Obrien](#)

BRIEF MEETING SUMMARY BY AGENDA ITEM

Welcome from Conveners

Richard Whitman: We've held these two SageCon meetings in a short period of time to coordinate the great efforts of all of the folks around the table into providing substantive comments for the BLM DEIS. The first half of the meeting is focused on hearing from the counties and USFWS on their recent meetings and coordination with BLM. For the second part of the meeting, we will share the three initial elements of the state plan that are moving forward to be submitted to BLM in conjunction with state agency comments. The state plan is at a starting point and open to feedback and discussion.

Eastern Oregon Counties Review of BLM DEIS

Marty Goold shared the Rural Community Alternative developed following the cooperative agencies discussion between BLM and the Eastern Oregon counties and SWCD's. Asking for feedback/recommendations for consistency and substance from SageCon. Hopeful that this alternative will help reduce future litigation and not be viewed as a new or separate alternative but be integrated into future planning efforts for BLM and the state.

Judge Grasty shared that he was pleased with the tone and level of discussion at the meeting between BLM and Eastern Oregon stakeholders, feeling as though BLM treated participants as partners. Varner Seaman thanked Judge Grasty and others for putting forward this alternative and expressed agreement with a lot of the information being put on the table. Ken Kestner shared that grazing and wild horse issues were discussed and put forward in county comments and encouraged folks to read and submit information from this work individually to BLM.

Mike Haske found the meeting useful to the BLM DEIS process and continues to encourage folks to ask the hard questions at this juncture and submit comments. The cooperating agency relationship is very important to BLM and BLM is grateful for the openness and high level of participation of community partners.

USFWS Considerations Regarding the DEIS

Sage Grouse Task Force brings together high level staff from 11 states with BLM and USFWS participation. The Task Force meets every other month, with the last meeting in Denver in February. Discussions centered on where each state is in its planning process and how to best coordinate/share information to maintain consistency where appropriate. USFWS has been proactively engaged in providing guidance across the range of the sage grouse. States exploring notion that scientific research is evolving and there is a need to be flexible yet provide certainty to address threats and stem population declines. Voluntary approaches and actions are good, though if going to rely on voluntary measures the Service needs to see effectiveness measures and certainty (for example, funding for conservation measures.)

Shauna Ginger and Paul Henson presented on USFWS mitigation principles and standards at the February meeting which led to a productive discussion amongst participants about the need for a new approach for sage grouse for anthropogenic and nonanthropogenic threats across a wide

landscape. Oregon was well represented. No longer will “on site in kind” mitigation be the only option. One analogy used described mitigation in the past as spilling someone's beer at the bar, grabbing a sponge, soaking it up and squeezing the sponge back into the glass. Going forward, USFWS is looking for mitigation in the context of no net loss, that is a net conservation benefit, and encouraging stakeholders to see sage grouse as an asset not a liability.

More information about the Sage Grouse Task Force can be found on the Western Governors' Association website: <http://www.westgov.org/initiatives/wildlife/sage-grouse-and-sagebrush-conservation>

Governor Kitzhaber will be going back to DC and will have discussions with the Secretary of Interior.

Federal Family meeting between USFWS and BLM senior staff in Great Basin region was held in Portland 2/10-2/14 to discuss consistency across the 4 states with the COT report and potential reporting mechanisms. Common theme was fire and invasives. It was emphasized at the meeting that some variation is likely necessary but that there must be scientific justification. USFWS will be submitting about 35 pages of comments on the DEIS to BLM next week. One concern is that the adequate regulatory mechanisms are difficult to assess with relation to medusahead, cheatgrass and conifer encroachment.

State Plan and Work Groups Update

Richard Whitman introduced the three key elements evolving for the state plan which will be the basis of comments to BLM on their DEIS as well as state planning efforts going forward.

1. Fire and Invasives

- Fire and Invasives are the major threats requiring attention in Oregon’s planning and reporting efforts to USFWS.
- Heard from BLM that there will be more strategic/systematic approaches moving forward to address fire threats (not all were outlined in the DEIS).
- Recognized the work Brian Pew of ODF provided on the state comments. Brian crosswalked the COT report with existing goals and strategies being implemented in Oregon by the state primarily through Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.
- No general fund money to support efforts currently, interest in developing secure funding (to support volunteers with communication and firefighting equipment and training) if we want to ramp up efforts. There are opportunities to conduct cross trainings with other states as well as BLM districts to improve coordination and share resources. Currently volunteer model, not meeting federal firefighting standards to work on public lands.
- There is a need for more sophisticated communications equipment, and more equipment for safety’s sake, for the RFPAs.
- MOU in place to go on public lands if there is a threat to private lands. Next step could be to amend MOU to develop a more proactive relationship to fight fires together with best available resources across jurisdictions.

- Invasives -WAFWA added comments to BLM from 3 peer-reviewed articles that looked at restoration outcomes over a twenty year period in sagebrush. Current techniques have not been producing the desired results.
- Conifer encroachment – Need to treat up to 1M acres annually per BLM. Oregon – how to focus and prioritize effort in a more strategic fashion? For example, could consider juniper canopy closure, eradication in proximity to leks, open up connectivity corridors between leks/populations. Consider more/better use of State’s GIS layers, TNC juniper mapping.
- Are we effectively integrating state resources, for example, the work of Weed Board, NRCS and BLM work with efforts on adjacent private lands?
- Consider a strategic framework for allocating conservation funding for invasives management.
- Consider more of an ecological approach to restoration in Chapter 5.
- Consider local opportunities for collection of seed, storage, nurseries as part of the plan.
- Invasives conference call to work through state comments was held 2/13, a similar meeting is set for 2/18 to finalize fire comments to submit to BLM.

2. *Disturbance Framework*

- Historically Oregon’s land use planning has been effective in keeping dispersed development and disturbance down, providing the state with less fragmentation and a lower baseline as a result. This tends to put our focus on fire and invasives as the larger threats across the state’s sagebrush habitats.
- Main disturbance focus to date has been around renewable energy.
- The disturbance framework is being developed as a backstop to state and local planning in step with mitigation policies to create an accounting system and calculate impacts to achieve no net loss from anthropogenic disturbance in Oregon. It follows the mitigation hierarchy approach to avoid, minimize and offset development and land use impacts.
- The current ODFW sage grouse mitigation policy is very strong and does not allow for any disturbance in core areas. This may not be realistic in the long term.
- The framework is about steering development and disturbance to avoid or minimize impacts. Intention to meet with counties to work through details of how this system could be implemented. Still analyzing how different land uses and management activities would be calculated in disturbance threshold.
- Immediate opportunity to present at next 2/17 AOC Board meeting proposed by Judge Grasty.

3. *Mitigation*

- Sara O’Brien from Willamette Partnership, on contract with ODFW, is leading the mitigation effort in relation to the state plan going forward.
- Sara worked with the Mitigation Technical Team to submit state comments for the BLM DEIS around the mitigation principles that were supported by SageCon and vetted in the Mitigation Working Group previously. See powerpoint for details.

- BLM will benefit from as much detail as possible to consider as working toward a Record of Decision for the Resource Management Plans later this year.
- Concerns expressed that Knick study only looked at direct impacts, and at a large landscape scale.
- Question from landowners/ranchers: Will any credits be calculated for conservation work done in advance of implementing a mitigation plan? Initial thinking is that CCAA lands will not be precluded from generating mitigation credits based on “additionality” principle.
- USFWS perceives the state and BLM mitigation discussions going in a good direction. Service areas for mitigation, additionality are bigger questions than just about sage grouse. The Service is wrestling with these at various levels and with various agencies in the Dept of the Interior. Judge Grasty/Harney County requests an opportunity to discuss mitigation with the Service after 2/20 comment deadline.
- ODOT/ODFW have been implementing mitigation and will work with the Governor’s Office to resolve any conflicts.
- BLM continues to be appreciative of the discussion.

Other Updates

- Harney County CCAA-comments period closes today 2/14. As of today, 22 landowners with over 110,000 private land acres have signed up and are waiting for their site specific plans. Marty estimated 80% would continue to move forward regardless of private property information legislation.
- DSL CCAA-received positive feedback from USFWS, hoping to follow Harney County track to go through the EA process as well.
- Jon Jinings presented an update on the SageCon process and state comments to LCDC. DLCD will continue to be a liaison between the state and local government.
- Next steps: Last June a Sage Con and All Lands All Threats Plan process timeline was presented. We are now at the end of that timeline. The Core Team will map out the next 6 – 10 months and develop a new timeline. Anticipated next SageCon meeting: late March/early April.

ATTENDANCE

Conveners:

Mike Haske, BLM (by phone)
 Bill White, NRCS (by phone)
 Richard Whitman, Governor’s Natural Resource Office

Andrew Shields, Roaring Springs Ranch
 Bob Hooton, ODFW (retired)
 Bob Sallinger, Audubon Society
 Bob Skinner, OCA
 Brett Brownscombe, Governor’s Natural Resource Office
 Brian Pew, ODF
 Bruce Taylor, Defenders of Wildlife

Cathy Macdonald, TNC
Dan Morse, ONDA
Dave Budeau, ODFW
David Simmons, OACD
Dede Steele, USFS
Eric Rickerson, ODFW
Garth Fuller, TNC
Gordon Foster, ODF
Holly Michael, ODFW
Isaac Sanders, DOGAMI
Jeff Everett, USFWS
John O'Keefe, OCA
Jon Jinings, DLCD
Ken Kestner, Lake County
Ken Mayer, WAFWA
Lanny Quackenbush, DSL
Robert Welsh, OR Foundation for North American Wild Sheep
Robin Estes, BLM
Sara O'Brien, Willamette Partnership
Shauna Ginger, USFWS
Judge Steve Grasty, Harney County
Judge Mike McCabe, Crook County
Susanna Julber, Senator Merkley's Office

By Phone

Brian Fritz, Pacificorp
Christian Jilek, ODOT
Dan Hilburn, ODA
Dawn Davis, ODFW
Glenn Frederick, BLM
Jimmy Kagan, INR
Ken Mayer, WAFWA
Lynn Sharp, RNP
Marty Suter-Goold, Harney County SWCD
Meta Loftsgaarden, OWEB
Mia Sheppard, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Mike McCabe, Crook County
Norm Johnson, Lake County
Sandra Ackley, BPA
Todd Cornett, ODOE
Tom Sharp, Harney County CCAA
Varner Seaman, Renewable Northwest Project
Zola Ryan, NRCS
Brett _____ Oregon Electric Cooperative (?)

Staff

Jamie Damon, OSN Sage Grouse Project Manager

Turner Odell, Oregon Consensus

Pete Dalke, Oregon Solutions

Theresa Burcsu, Technical Lead

Julia Babcock, Administrative Lead