



M E M O R A N D U M
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Hines District Office

DATE: July 30, 2012

TO: Baker Sage Grouse Local Implementation Team

FROM: Autumn Larkins

SUBJ: **Minutes Baker Sage-Grouse LIT Meeting July 30, 2012**

Participants: Autumn Larkins (ODFW), Craig Martell (BLM), Melissa Yzquierdo (BLM), Brian Ratliff (ODFW), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Marisa Meyer (USFWS), Parker Ussery (NRCS), Matt Kniesel (retired BLM), Nick Myatt (ODFW), Joshua Uriarte (SWCD-SGI), Wannie Mackenzie (Rancher)

General Discussion:

We reviewed the previous LIT meetings topics including fires (prevention, suppression and restoration ideas), prioritization guidelines and scorecard criteria. Each participant gave a quick update of their activities related to sage-grouse. SWCD, NRCS and BLM are all involved in medusahead inventory and mapping projects. Greg Jackle gave an update of the B2H transmission project status (routing placements and potential ideas for mitigation). We had a brief discussion about altered grazing regimes, tripled forbs and understory on one ranch. This increased antelope populations which in turn increased coyote populations. The sage grouse counts have not increased in this area because of the dominance of sandberg bluegrass which does not provide very good nesting cover (vertically). We also discussed raven predation and the associated short term fixes with raven population control as compared to the long term fixes when all habitat components are addressed (reduction of perching structures, improved nesting cover for sage grouse, etc.). There was also some concern about the increase in raptor (hawks) populations around the Cow Lakes Action Area (maybe the increase is due to releases from the Birds of Prey rehabilitation center in Idaho)?

Project Discussion:

We reviewed the map of "Action Areas" identified during the last meeting. Text in italics is the justification of why the area was chosen and the issues and threats identified during last round of meetings. Agencies provided sage-grouse specific habitat improvement projects that were added to the Action Area maps. We discussed projects not mapped and identified areas that still need work. The teams developed a list of prioritization guidelines to help streamline grant applications and project proposals as they may arise.

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM'S PRIORITIZATION GUIDELINES:

- 1) **Is the project within an Action Area?**
- 2) **Does the project address an identified threat in that Action Area?**
- 3) **Is the project adjacent to a completed or planned project that benefits sage-grouse?**
- 4) **What is the level of positive impacts to sage-grouse related to all threats?**

BAKER

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-19: Baker Valley)*
- *Issue are noxious weeds and invasive species, transmission lines, energy development, human impacts (motorized recreation at Virtue Flat), lack of understory in moderately deep rooted and deep rooted perennial grasses, lack of forb diversity, altered sage brush habitat due to fire, mining, juniper encroachment at higher elevations, crested wheat seeding throughout*

Project ideas or issues supported by the LIT for this Action Area:

- Support juniper removal on private lands NRCS-SGI
- Support medusahead inventory, mapping and treatment projects on all lands
- Potential ARS precision restoration test site
- Currently 90% sandberg bluegrass in the understory community
 - Need more native perennial diversity
- Support BLM Resource Management Plan amendments and comment on road designations
 - Address seasonal and emergency closures
 - Address lack of enforcement
- Support changes to grazing management plans on private ranches that address sage-grouse life history needs

COW VALLEY

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-16: Bully Creek Area)*
- *Same issues as the Vale LIT identified: juniper invasion at higher elevations, mining and renewable energy, noxious weeds and invasive species at lower elevations, connectivity for the birds, sagebrush canopy closure (>17%), transmission lines*

Project ideas or issues supported by the LIT for this Action Area:

- Medusahead problem on public land
- Allowing BLM to utilize the appropriate chemicals to treat invasive weeds (injunction)
 - Provide letter of support
- Continuation of BLM and private land juniper removal
- Continuation of NRCS-SGI juniper removal (6,824 acres)
- Protect meadows on Table Mtn (public and private)
- Fires from 2005 in need of reseeding efforts
- Potential for mosaic brush mowing (tall) where canopy closure is dense (>20%) and has an existing good native understory
 - Follow up with native seeding
- Support Conservation Easement option for mitigation
- Research opportunities to determine connectivity corridors (telemetry project)

UNITY

- *Within Low Density*

- *Issues are human impacts (OHV recreation), juniper encroachment, isolated population and connectivity issues*
- **Added during Round Two Baker Meeting: noxious weeds**

Project ideas or issues supported by the LIT for this Action Area:

- NRCS-SGI juniper removal (12,117 acres)
 - Almost all the juniper has been treated
 - Lots of follow up and clean up needed
 - Potential reseeding on some of those project locations
- Denny Flat (public land) lek is currently abandoned due to weeds (white top and medusahead)
- Allowing BLM to utilize the appropriate chemicals to treat invasive weeds (injunction)
 - Provide letter of support

Future meetings and final thoughts:

- Will only meet when action needed
- Poor landowner participation at this meeting
- Need more shapefiles or acreages of habitat improvement projects from agencies (sage-grouse specific and others) to help create the most accurate scorecard table for USFWS