



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

DATE: August 2, 2012

TO: Burns Sage-Grouse Local Implementation Team

FROM: Autumn Larkins

SUBJ: **Minutes Burns Sage-Grouse LIT Meeting August 2, 2012**

**Participants:** Autumn Larkins (ODFW), Angela Sitz (USFWS), , Matt Obradovich (BLM), , Chad Karges (Malheur NWR), Steve Grasty (Harney County), Bill Pieratt (BLM), Rod Klus (ODFW), Randy Wiest (DSL), Darwin Johnson (Lake County Planning Dept), Brandon McMullen (Harney County Planning Dept), Marty Goold (SWCD), Cyndee Hill (NRCS), Ronald Whiting (Landowner), Jeremy Thanert (EnXco)

**Participant Updates:**

**Angela Sitz:** Working on Harney County CCAA, OCA CCA, other individual ranch CCAAs, commenting on RMP amendments

**Matt Obradovich:** Working on RMP amendments and fire rehabilitation plans

**Marty Goold:** Working on Harney County CCAA, lots of projects trying to fill in the gaps that don't meet the SGI criteria (medusahead projects)

**Cyndee Hill:** SGI juniper removal, fence marking, working with SWCD, Riley is a focus area for medusahead

**Ron Whiting:** Participating on the Harney County CCAA

**Steve Grasty:** Received a grant for all 7 sage-grouse counties to update Goal 5 resource planning

**Jeremy Thanert:** Gathering information

**Chad Karges:** Working on the OCA RESTOR Task Force

**Bill Pieratt:** 3 grazing permittees significantly or completely burned; have fund substitute late winter feeding areas. Also working on the fire rehab planning

**Rod Klus:** Completing brood routes, very dry in southern portion of the county even at higher elevations, surveys indicate decent nest success which is an improvement over the last couple years

**General Discussion:**

We reviewed the previous LIT meetings topics including fires (prevention, suppression and restoration ideas), prioritization guidelines and scorecard criteria. 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.). Wind energy companies are trying to determine solid methods for analyzing these areas. What happens when the Core Areas shift? We had a discussion on kernel density methods and the process of how the Cores were determined. Updates will occur every 5 years but that does not necessarily mean Core Areas will change every 5 years. We had a brief discussion about crested wheat seedings. There is a need to

identify the thresholds for proper utilization of crested. There are places where sagebrush comes back in to crested seedings and places where it hasn't. There is a lack of diversity and structure within the seedings which can be a fire risk.

#### **Fire Discussion:**

The Miller Homestead fire was handled very well; effort was phenomenal considering the resources that were available due to other fires (Long Draw) ongoing at the time. A new rural fire district was created in Frenchglen. BLM has submitted a general plan for emergency rehabilitation and stabilization. They will have more time to submit a full plan including cost estimates. There is considerable concern about subsequent cheatgrass invasion post fire. Potentially utilize some of the new precision restoration science being developed at the Burns ARS experimental station. Concerns were raised about the lack of private landowner participation during the fire fighting efforts. We should develop preseason contracts so that people can use their equipment to help. Other suggestions included: being more aggressive about fuel load levels, more flexibility within permits, habitat protection being added to severity index for fire ranking, creating more plant diversity as a fire suppression tool, and utilizing sagebrush mowing and beatings as fire breaks. We also discussed the potential to radio-collar some sage-grouse within the fire boundary. We need to develop a study design and set parameters. Burns BLM has some collars available. Depending on what questions we want to answer we may want to utilize GPS backpacks instead of traditional VHF radio collars.

#### **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. Also listed in red is if an Action Area was affected by a summer 2012 fire. 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?**

#### **BURNS**

- *Within Core and Low Density*
- *Issues are connectivity, fragmentation from urbanization, transmission lines, and juniper encroachment, invasive weeds (medusahead, dalmatian toadflax, spotted knapweed, whitetop), and lack of sagebrush habitat in the lower elevations*

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

- Continuation of juniper removal on private lands (NRCS-SGI 3,608 acres, NRCS-MDI 71 acres, SWCD 1,314 acres)
- Continuation of dalmatian toadflax treatments (SWCD)

#### **DREWSEY**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-15: North Fork Malheur-Monument Rock area and BM-16: Bully Creek Area)*
- *Issues are juniper and pine encroachment, invasive weeds (medusahead), mining development, and fires*

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

- Continuation of juniper removal on private lands (NRCS-SGI 11,829 acres, NRCS-MDI 1,580 acres, SWCD 3,902)
- Continuation of juniper removal on public lands (BLM Otis Mtn and Moffit Table)
- Continuation of medusahead treatments on private lands (NRCS 6,700 acres)

**DRY VALLEY/JACK MOUNTAIN**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-5: Hart Mountain Area)*
- *Issues are altered sagebrush habitat from fires, juniper encroachment (eastside), wind energy threats, and feral horses*
- *Lakeview LIT identified issues on the westside of DRY VALLEY to be noxious weeds, fire and sagebrush canopy closure*
- **Within the Miller Homestead Fire boundary**

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

- Fire prevention/suppression and restoration recommendations (TBD)
- Potential ARS precision restoration test site
  - Need successful seeding techniques
- Identify a funding pool for private landowners to acquire seed mix for planting this fall (NRCS?)
- Potential telemetry project to study the fire effects on sage-grouse
  - Bird response to fire and response to different restoration techniques
  - BLM can potentially help with funding and capture efforts
- Promote mosaic brush mowing (tall) where canopy closure is dense (>20% ) and has an existing good native understory
  - Approximately 3,700 acres have already been treated since 2007 (BLM)
- Provide letter of support to BLM to control feral horse HMA
- Wind energy: recommendation to avoid all impacts in Core

**FOLLY FARM**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-09: Steens Mountain-Alvord Basin)*
- *Issues are wind energy threats, juniper encroachment, invasive weeds (medusahead, spotted knapweed), fires, sagebrush conversion to crested wheat seeding monocultures, West Nile Virus, and feral horses*

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

- Wind energy: recommendation to avoid all impacts in Core
- Continuation of juniper removal projects (DSL 300 acres, SWCD 3,787 acres)
- Continuation of medusahead treatment projects (DSL 35-40 miles of desert roads, BLM spot treatments)
  - DSL plans for another 30 miles of roads in 2013
  - Need to talk to the counties regarding spraying roads and grading practices

- BLM needs authorization to utilize appropriate chemicals for weed treatments
  - Provide letter of support
- Provide letter of support to BLM to control feral horse HMA

### **GLASS BUTTE**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-08: Silver Creek-Emigrant Creek) and Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-01: Squaw Ridge area playas and sagebrush)*
- *Issues are geothermal and wind energy threats, juniper encroachment, invasive weeds (medusahead, spotted knapweed), and potential seasonal human impact (OHV)*

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

- Geothermal and wind energy: recommendation to avoid all impacts in Core
- Support BLM plan amendments and comment on road designations
- BLM needs authorization to utilize appropriate chemicals for weed treatments
  - Provide letter of support

### **NORTH STEENS**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-09: Steens Mountain-Alvord Basin)*
- *Issues are altered sagebrush habitat from fires, crested wheat seedings at lower elevations (north and west side), juniper encroachment, invasive weeds (thistle), and feral horses*
- **Added during Round Two Burns meeting: medusahead**

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

- Continuation of juniper removal on private lands NRCS-SGI 720 acres, NRCS-MDI 1306 acres, SWCD 568 acres)
- Continuation of juniper removal by BLM (Five Creeks Project, Dollar Lake 360 acres, Frazier Field 400 acres, Moon Hill 990 acres)
- Continuation of BLM medusahead projects (spot treatments)
- BLM needs authorization to utilize appropriate chemicals for weed treatments
  - Provide letter of support
- Continuation of medusahead projects on private lands SWCD
- Continuation of sagebrush seed head piles (500 acres within the Granddad fire boundary)

### **PUEBLOS**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-09: Steens Mountain-Alvord Basin and NBR-06: Basque Hills-Hawk Mountain area plains)*
- *Issues are fire and wind energy threats*

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

- Discussion about taking wind energy off the threats list because the permit has been withdrawn
  - USFWS is still concerned about regulatory authority
  - What is protecting this area from future energy developments?
  - Maybe the County LUP Goal 5 revisions will address this?
- 2006 fire (40,000 acres)
  - Recovery at higher elevations is occurring

- Lower elevations will take longer to recover
- Potentially expand the sagebrush seed head piling efforts or add in sagebrush plugs on the north slope near Long Hollow

### **SOUTH STEENS**

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-09: Steens Mountain-Alvord Basin)*
- *Issues are wind energy threats, fire, juniper encroachment, invasive weeds (medusahead, ventanata), and feral horses*

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

- Continuation of juniper removal by BLM (3,700 acres Tombstone, 200 acres South Loop)
- BLM needs authorization to utilize appropriate chemicals for weed treatments
  - Provide letter of support
  - Promote state assistance to more process forward
- Provide letter of support to BLM to control feral horse HMA
- Wind Energy: recommendation to avoid all impacts in Core

#### **Future meetings**

- Will only meet when action needed
- Need to get another landowner representative on the team (suggestions)
  - Ron Whiting
  - Berry Anderson
  - Travis Williams
- 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