



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

DATE: July 24, 2012

TO: Vale/Jordan Valley Sage-Grouse Local Implementation Team

FROM: Autumn Larkins

SUBJ: **Minutes from Vale/Jordan Valley Sage-Grouse Meeting July 24, 2012**

Participants: Autumn Larkins (ODFW), Scott Torland (ODFW), Philip Milburn (ODFW), Bob Skinner (Rancher), Larry Cottrell (Resident), David Stoddart (Rancher), Tony Svejcar (ARS), Kathleen Cathey (Senator Wyden's office), Ron Smallwood (Pheasants Forever), Morgan Johnsrud (Malheur Cattleman's), Chris Hansen (ONDA), Jon Beal (Malheur County), Chad Boyd (ARS), Kay Teisl (OCA), Brad Leamaster (ODA), Scott Fairley (Governor's office), Cheryl Martin (Rancher), Curtis Martin (Rancher), Naomi Wilson (BLM), Chris Bengoa (Rancher), Conrad Bateman (Malheur County), Berry Anderson (Rancher), Randy Wiest (DSL)

Fire Discussion:

Very wet two years previous which equals lots of residual grass, very dry this year only 5% moisture, 30 mph winds, Aroga moth outbreak, etc.

Bob Skinner: Total devastation, dead wildlife and livestock (no reports of dead sage-grouse). Agencies are dealing with very limited resources and the fire protection was very organized North and East flank of the fire was 100% local fire fighters!

Tony Svejcar: Working on recent scientific information about restoration

Chris Hansen: Questions about fire severity and BLM's fire restoration plan timeline

Brad Leamaster: Emergency Executive Order, want to know about loss of livestock, habitat, socio-economic, etc.

Naomi Wilson: Emergency stabilization process

Ranchers may not want reseeding because of the timing restriction post seeding (3 year rest)

Berry Anderson: Concerned about the priority level, we know this fire was inside sage-grouse Core Area but protection was lacking, the Riddle Fire received much faster response and had more resources (4 planes/30 trucks)

Randy Wiest: DSL will work with lessees to adapt and adjust accordingly

OCA: RESTOR Task Force (Restore Everything Strategically Through Organized Response) holding a meeting after this one to assess the loss and hand out Impact Information Gathering forms

Restoration Discussion:

Invasive weeds are the biggest issue on public lands

We need to support the use of chemicals to treat weeds (injuncton)

Target areas that were previously infested with crested wheat seedings

Target sagebrush seeding in islands that remain

Success is very dependent on the conditions within the next few years
Sagebrush seeds can survive for 1-2 years
Spray this fall then seed (kochia, crested wheat)
Cultivation may help stimulate sagebrush?
Use the best available science, design a monitoring program and set success criteria

Possible Outcomes:

Need to take information back to the agencies
Review BLM’s fire line policy
Review BLM’s Ecological Site Description (ESD) of the area that burned
Can we get funding for more pumper tanks, fire prevention grants?
The LIT group needs to write letters of support to address suppression, prevention, ask BLM to reevaluate their policy
Want to see more fire districts to aid in suppression
Need to see the most effective restoration applied
Discussion about the percentage of “good stuff” that’s left
Relocation of birds, adding to the existing population, radio-collaring birds to evaluate fire affects

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?**

BOWDEN HILLS

- *Within Low Density*
- *Issues are fire and weeds*
- **Within the Long Draw Fire boundary**

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

- NRCS-SGI program work with Tree Top Ranches

BULLY CREEK

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-16: Bully Creek Area and BM-15: North Fork Malheur-Monument Rock area)*
- *Issues are juniper, invasive weeds (medusahead and whitetop), potential wind energy and geothermal*

- Within the Bonita Fire boundary

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

- Fire suppression efforts
- Continuation of BLM juniper removal efforts
- Continuation of NRCS-SGI juniper removal (5,890 acres)

COW LAKE

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-13: Middle Owyhee River Area)*
- *Issues are fire, annual grass, weeds (white top), crested wheat seeding/lack of sagebrush, West Nile virus, population level concerns, human impacts (ATV-Succor Creek), and raven predation.*

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

- Reestablishment of sagebrush
- Support grant application for WNV vector control (private lands)
- Allowing BLM to utilize the appropriate chemicals to treat invasive weeds (injunction)
 - Provide letter of support
- Raven population control
 - Create salvage operation to clean up road kill carcasses
 - Clean up recreation sites that act as artificial food sources
 - Utilize Wildlife Services to assist with population control (short term fix)
 - Support projects such as juniper removal, and improvements of sage-grouse nesting cover to address long term solutions

COW VALLEY

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Blue Mountains Ecoregion (BM-16: Bully Creek Area)*
- *Issues are juniper invasion, mining and renewable energy, noxious weeds (whitetop), connectivity for the birds, sagebrush canopy closure (>17%)*

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

- Continuation of juniper removal on public lands (BLM)
- Continuation of juniper removal on private lands (NRCS-SGI 6,824 acres)

CROWLEY

- *Within Core and Low Density*
- *Issues are fire and annual grass, juniper (at highest elevations)*

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

- Fire suppression recommendations (TBD)
- Continuation of private land juniper removal

LOUSE CANYON

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-14: Upper Owyhee)*
- *Issues are wind energy threats, invasives at low elevation, and sagebrush canopy closure*
- *Protect existing continuous sagebrush habitats*
- Within the Long Draw Fire boundary and the Ten Mile Fire boundary

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

- Fire suppression recommendations (TBD)

SADDLE BUTTE

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-12: Saddle Butte Area)*
- *Issues are fire, lack of sagebrush/decadent sagebrush, protect low sage and wet meadows*

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

- DSL green stripping
- Promote mosaic brush mowing (tall) where canopy closure is dense (>20%) and has an existing good native understory

SOLDIER CREEK

- *Within Core and Low Density*
- *Issues are medusahead (talk to DSL), juniper (east end), fire risk, lack on sagebrush (west side), raven predation, west Nile virus (north side), human impacts (snowmobile use on the south end)*
- **Within the Long Draw Fire boundary**

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

- Private land invasive weeds treatment (medusahead) possibly work with NRCS program
- Public land invasive weeds, focus on key areas (road ways)
- West Nile Virus vector control is good in this area (provide letter of support to continue efforts)
- Raven population control
 - Create salvage operation to clean up road kill carcasses
 - Clean up recreation sites that act as artificial food sources
 - Utilize Wildlife Services to assist with population control (short term fix)
 - Support projects such as juniper removal, and improvements of sage-grouse nesting cover to address long term solutions

TROUT CREEKS

- *Within Core and Low Density and Conservation Opportunity Area (COA); Northern Basin and Range Ecoregion (NBR-11: Trout Creek Mountains)*
- *Issues are uranium mining, sagebrush canopy closure, possible weed issue (lower east side), possible grazing impacts on lower elevations (Trout Creek Working Group)*
- **Within the Holloway Fire boundary**

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

- Uranium mine: recommendation to avoid all impacts in Core
- Encourage more grazing at higher elevations to reduce sagebrush density/decadence
 - 70 acres/AUM right now, propose 2 year use with 1 year rest
- Letter of support from LIT to Trout Creek Working Group/Ranchers to change season of use and forward to BLM
- Address the biological opinion (USFWS)

Future meetings and final thoughts:

- Will only meet when action needed
- Very good landowner participation but lacking agencies representation (BLM, NRCS, SWCD)

- 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