**Draft Meeting Notes**

**Executive Oversight Committee**

**Bi-State Sage-Grouse**

**April 23, 2020**

**Location:** Conference Call

**Time:** 13:00-15:00

**Participants:** Bill Dunkelberger, Tony Wasley, Shawn Espinosa, Steve Abele, Ray Dotson, Max Symons, Justin Barret, Melyssa Navis, Katrina Krause, Seth Dettenmaier, Kris Boatner, Pete Coates, Amy Sturgill, Scott Gardner, Steve Nelson, Jill Ralston, Dave Martin, Wendy Sugimura, Charlotte Lange, Carolyn Sherve, J Vacca, Amy Sturgill

1. Introductions and Co-Chair Comments

* 1. Bill Dunkelberger: Shared hopes that EOC members were staying home, safe and healthy during these challenging times. He noted the Humboldt-Toiyabe NF is working to support the Governor’s orders in both California and Nevada
  2. Tony Wasley: Shared thanks to the Bi-State partnership regarding the recent listing decision. This unique partnership has withstood the test of time and has demonstrated dedication, commitment, and effectiveness.

1. Approval of December Meeting Notes

1. USFWS Listing Decision (Remarks from Justin Barrett)

1. The Service published the (most recent) final listing decision for the bi-state sage-grouse on March 30th as not warranted, thereby again withdrawing the 2013 proposed rules to list the species as threatened and to designate critical habitat.
2. The following statement was provided in our News Release: *After an extended, comprehensive analysis of the best available science, the Service has concluded that successful implementation of conservation actions to date, as well as future commitments to aid the bird and its habitat by a coalition of federal, state, tribal, private and non-governmental partners, are sufficient to ameliorate threats to the species.*In the News Release, Paul Souza was quoted as saying: *“The Service is humbled and proud to work with such a committed group of partners to conserve the bi-state sage-grouse and its habitat in California and Nevada. This partnership shows that conservation for at-risk species can be successful when we work together and leverage our resources.”*
3. This decision to again withdraw the listing proposal should be seen as recognition and appreciation for all that you and your agencies have accomplished to date. For a demonstration of how conservation should occur, this is an absolute success story. We would likely not be in this position had it not been for your continued dedication.
4. As I’m sure you all realize, this was not an easy decision. While this group (and all the partners that have contributed to these conservation efforts) have clearly demonstrated that they can rally and provide unparalleled conservation actions that are based on the best available science. The fruits of this labor, how these projects are ultimately benefitting sage-grouse populations and habitat, is still materializing. In addition, there are still several threats impacting and limiting this species so, we certainly can’t get complacent but rather must continue to maintain this momentum.
5. As with the commitments made before the 2015 listing decision, this group, through renewed commitments, has shown that they don’t see our work being done yet and they are in this for the duration. This is not just about sage-grouse, it’s also about managing for resilient ecosystems.
6. I cannot emphasize enough how valuable the work by Dr. Pete Coates and his colleagues has been to this conservation effort. Being able to strategically plan for projects as well as monitor for population-level responses to these actions is the key to effective and adaptive management. I encourage this group to continue supporting research such as the products coming out of the Coates lab. It has been instrumental in getting us where we are but also, and almost as important, in being to justify our approach because the scrutiny surrounding this species and this effort will not go away.
7. We need to continue identifying, assessing, and addressing the threats to the bi-state sage-grouse. We need to continue improving habitat in peripheral populations and corridors. We need to continue maintaining or improving conditions in those areas currently seen as core habitats such as Bodie and Long Valley. We need to continue working together to figure out the nuts and bolts and appropriately address some of the current conservation challenges such as water delivery and maintenance of brood-rearing habitat in areas like Long Valley. We just need to pick up the baton again and keep moving forward together.
8. I can guarantee the Service will continue to be committed to this effort!

1. TEK Summit Update (Melyssa Navis and Charlotte Lange)

1. The TEK Summit has been postponed. A rescheduled date will be selected for Spring 2021 to be held at the Carson Valley Inn in Minden, NV.
2. The BTNRC has worked with the TAC to secure funding and to ensure allocated funds can be transferred to fund the postponed event.
3. The BTNRC will continue working on TEK Summit planning
4. The BTNRC would like to thank the EOC for their time, energy, and commitment to the TEK Summit
5. Justin noted the Service is still working to secure funding and should be able to determine the final commitment amount in the coming weeks.
6. Field Operations, Monitoring, and Research Update Regarding COVID-19 Directives

1. Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest: Only mission field critical fieldwork is occurring. The majority of the staff is teleworking. The Governor of Nevada is working on a transition plan to normal operations that will be included in field protocols. The H-T is working to adapt and be flexible and will generate procedures as the situation dictates. No lek monitoring is occurring. Project contracts and planning are moving forward. Two contracts for conifer treatment in Rough Creek and Sweetwaters are in place. Implementation of those projects is planned for late summer/early fall.
2. California BLM: The Bishop Field Office is taking a cautious approach while following the California Governors' orders. Staff is teleworking, law enforcement is operational, and they are working to establish safe onboarding procedures for fire personnel. Mono County has been helping with logistics. Allocation of sage-grouse funding has not been affected and Steve Nelson anticipates receiving additional funding beyond what was requested. The Bishop FO will need to determine how to spend funds before the end of the fiscal year.
3. Nevada BLM: The NV BLM has been focused on mission essential fieldwork. The agreement between BLM and NDOW will expire in June 2020. Carson BLM is working to renew the agreement or request an agreement extension. Lek monitoring, habitat assessment, and monitoring fieldwork has been put on hold. Carson BLM is putting in a request with the Great Basin Institute to allow technicians to safely conduct fieldwork consistent with the Governor’s orders. Katrina is working on completing NEPA documentation for a conifer treatment project in the Pine Nuts that should be contracted this fall.
4. CDFW: CDFW has been allowed to complete lek counts in the Bi-State this season. They are working on establishing procedures in compliance with the Governor’s orders to move forward May 31st.
5. Mono County: Staff is teleworking. They are allowed to go into the field if work follows orders and guidelines. County staff is available to help with Bi-State field operations where they can.
6. NDOW: NDOW is following the Governor’s direction and working to decrease risk to staff. Lek count activities ceased in March. Aerial infrared surveys were completed in nine polygons last week across Nevada. A few individuals have conducted lek counts since mid-March on their own time, but 2020 data will be limited. NDOW is now focusing on funding proposals and budgets—some of which are sage-grouse specific, technical reviews, and QA/QC of datasets. Two meetings have been held regarding proposed mining operations in Pine Grove and in the Pine Nuts. Both mines are on the periphery of sage-grouse habitat in dense pinyon-juniper woodlands and not likely to pose risk or threat to sage-grouse populations.
7. USFWS: Staff is teleworking. Fieldwork can continue for mission-critical projects, at this point nothing has risen to that level. The Service will not be hiring the Seeds of Success crews this year. These crews are typically hired each year to collect native seeds for seed source storage and restoration projects.
8. LADWP: Staff has been conducting lek counts in Long Valley and Parker Meadow with hopes of returning to normal fieldwork capacity in May.
9. USGS: Fifty technicians began working in March and focused on trapping and deploying transmitters to generate an adequate monitoring sample size. As of now all fieldwork in the Bi-State is on pause. There are 6 technicians still working in Reno and Elko. Technicians may be able to return to restricted and cautious fieldwork. Pete will coordinate with Scott and Shawn to discuss the potential for lek counts.

1. Revised USGS Objectives and Product Development for FY2020 (due to COVID-19 disruption)

1. 2.0 Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) which accounts for habitat selection patterns, population performance (demographic rates), space use and abundance indices (**high priority**)
2. Develop a user interface of CPT to be used by managers, landowners, etc. (**high priority**)
3. Develop process automation CPT for conifer removal that assists in designing the shape and location of treatment areas (**high priority**)
4. Manuscript development for journal submission based on existing analyses completed (**high priority**):
   1. Overall population trends using IPM across the Bi-State DPS
   2. Seasonal habitat mapping across the DPS
   3. Distributional mapping of and comparison with trends
   4. Influence of irrigated pastures on brood selection and survival
   5. Brood translocation protocol using enclosure system
   6. Post-release performance of translocated broods compared to pre-nesting hens
   7. Impact of translocation on population trends at Parker Meadows
5. 2.0 IPM which incorporates environmental covariates into different life stage subcomponent models (**priority**)
6. Complete genetic divergence analysis and incorporate model parameters into CPT that would assist in designing treatment areas that consider population connectivity (**priority**)
7. Contribute to workshops on riparian inventory and pilot remote sensing techniques to help establish a monitoring framework and readily updatable database (**priority**)
8. Initial evaluation of conifer removal on sage-grouse population performance provided existing data in a before-after-control-impact design (**priority**)
9. 2.0 EWS which identifies leks and clusters of leks (PMUs) that exhibit trends in abundance that are declining and decoupled from higher level spatial scales (**relatively low priority**)
10. Conduct late brood-rearing fieldwork (**relatively low** **priority, low probability of execution**)
11. Conduct winter field study to evaluate winter habitat selection, nutritional requirements, and stress hormones (**relatively low** **priority, moderate probability of execution**)

7. TAC Update

* 1. Meadow assessment and restoration strategy. The TAC is developing a sub-group to establish a strategy to inventory, assess, and prioritize meadow restoration efforts and to monitor mesic resource changes over time. Sebastian Tsocanos, a GBI employee working in the Bishop BLM Field Office, has started compiling tools and mapping products to run a pilot study in the Bodie Hills PMU
  2. Invasive weed assessment and management strategy. The TAC is interested in developing a strategy to map invasive weeds and prioritize restoration sites in the Bi-State. The group will convene a sub-group to identify existing tools and logical partners for the development of this strategy.

8. Additional Partner Updates

1. H-T: Working to renew interagency agreements with NDOW, USFWS, and the Bridgeport Indian Colony. 5,000 acres of conifer treatment is planned for this year.
2. USFWS is still working on filling the Supervisor position.
3. NDOW: ESLT, working in cooperation with the NRCS, has garnered potential federal funding for a conservation easement on the Desert Creek Ranch. NDOW is working to establish state matching sources for this project.
4. Bishop BLM: Received $900,000 for the first phase of a land acquisition project involving multiple parcels near Mormon Meadows.
5. CDFW: Recently learned that USGS’s proposal for Bi-State funding not eligible for Section 6 funding. Scott noted that the proposal was great and needed to go for an alternate funding source.
6. LADWP: Working on acquiring funding for USGS, specifically for work in Long Valley. The proposal has been presented to the board and LADWP hopes to have a complete funding package by July 1.
7. USGS: The updated IPM report will be released within a couple of weeks.
8. Bi-State Coordinator: 2019 Accomplishment Report is complete and will be released this week. Bi-State partners have been asked to participate on the Native America Calling radio show. This show is part of our monthly animal series exploring animals’ relationship to tribes and their cultural, environmental, and scientific importance. The show will air on April 30th, 1:00 MT.

**NEXT MEETING TBD**