

WESTERN BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

Newport Beach, California

July 13, 2009

Chair – Ken Mayer, Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Vice-Chair – San Stiver, WAFWA

Welcome, Announcements and Introductions

Ken Mayer, Director of Nevada Department of Wildlife, called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm, introduced himself and asked for introductions of the attendees. Approximately 25 people were present at the start of the meeting and an additional 10 individuals circulated in and out during the course of the meeting.

Mr. Mayer introduced San Stiver, Sage-grouse Coordinator for WAFWA as the Vice-chair of the committee. Mayer indicated that he and the Secretary had determined that Stiver was eligible to be appointed as a vice-chair.

Mr. Mayer reviewed the agenda and added a discussion on the Local Working Group Needs assessment report as requested by Terry Messmer, Utah State University.

The order of the agenda was revised to allow the sage-grouse discussions to be heard first to allow for Director Remington's participation.

WAFWA Wind/Sage Grouse Research Initiative with Industry

John Emmerich has been working to develop a research collaborative focusing on the impacts of wind energy development on sage-grouse. The need for this work is time sensitive and urgent. Emmerich has been consulting with industry, academia, and Kearns & West Consulting, to determine interest for the research and participation from these groups. Industry and individual states have expressed interest in joining the Cooperative. The Cooperative is modeled after the GS3 process for prairie chickens in Kansas.

The proposal calls for the establishment of a science board with 3-5 members from WAFWA, 3-5 members from industry and 2-3 members from academia to guide the research effort. The composition of the board should provide good science and a balance between perspectives. The Cooperative has obtained funding to retain Kearns & West, Inc., from now until the fall when a Department of Energy grant kicks in to help facilitate the formation of the Cooperative.

Emmerich reported that this Cooperative will tier with and be compatible with the Comprehensive Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy's, Research Advisory Board.

Emmerich requested that the WBCC ask the Directors for their support of the process and provide personnel to serve on the Board if qualified. Discussion that followed asked why not include species besides sage-grouse? Emmerich indicated that sage-grouse were the species that brings money to the table, but other species could fit within the framework of the various study sites.

Motion by Emmerich: Ask the Directors for support of the Wind Energy Research Cooperative and provide resources as available. Seconded by Remington. Approved

Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee (TC) Report

Tom Hemker, Chair of the TC, provided the Committee with Recommendations, Informational Notes and Subcommittee Reports generated by the TC. The report consists of 3 recommendations, 3 informational notes and a Population Subcommittee Report. Hemker further reported that Scott Gardner (CA) is the outgoing Chair and Tony Apa (CO) is the incoming Chair. Chairmanship is a two year obligation.

Hemker reported that the TC has been conducting meetings and workshops since the 1950s. Workshops are held every two years and committee meetings are now held annually. The TC has developed the report package to formalize input to the Directors through the WBCC. The TC met in June with Director Mayer, to develop the report package.

Recommendation 1: Interim Guidelines for Evaluating the Impacts of Energy development.

Hemker reported that sage-grouse biologists are receiving many requests for guidelines regarding energy developments. The TC developed the guidelines to answer some of these questions. The guidelines are not a know-all, end-all for evaluating impacts of energy development, but should provide guidance in the short-term. Deb Hahn suggested that the TC consult with AFWA for the National guidelines that are being formulated. The TC requests that the Directors adopt these guidelines.

Recommendation 2: Sage-grouse habitat mapping.

The TC has identified a need for consistent mapping protocols across the range of the species. Additionally, a need for the delineation of areas of high conservation concern has been identified. Wyoming has used a core area approach that has gained significant understanding and application. Montana, Colorado and Oregon have also developed "Core" maps. Idaho, as well as other states has been working on similar maps as has the BLM.

Emmerich indicated that Wyoming is working Drs. Aldridge, Naugle, and Doughtry to complete the project. He said that it is still a work-in-progress. The TC requests that the Directors reiterate to their staff to work collaboratively in the development of consistent mapping protocols.

Recommendation 3: **Fire Management in Xeric Sagebrush Habitats.**

Hemker presented the position statement regarding fire in xeric sagebrush habitats. Considerable discussion was generated regarding absolutes presented in the position statement. The Committee discussed wordsmithing to address these concerns and Emmerich, Hemker and Mayer volunteered to clean the position statement. TC requests that the Directors adopt the position statement as amended.

Informational notes:

Info note #1: NASECA-legislation. Hemker reported that WGA and WAFWA have a team which is drafting language. The team expects to have a draft available for the Directors before the midwinter meeting. There is a need for congressional support and folks we can bounce language off. Dave Smith (IWJV) suggests working with Bob Davison who was the primary staffer for the NAWCA legislation.

Info note #2: Studies in Avian Biology (SAB). Group discussion.

- The 2008 WAFWA population chapter, requested by the Department of the Interior, was completed on time with considerable effort from WAFWA members. This document, peer-reviewed, but unpublished was delivered to the USFWS in July 2008.
- Committee members understood that the SAB would address population trends with a retrospective analysis, when the ESA finding deadline was extended.
- Several members expressed their understanding that analysis would build upon the 2008 WAFWA document and were surprised that it didn't mention the 2008 document.
- WAFWA states provided permission to use their lek data for a population retrospective analysis, but some members felt they did not have permission to use these data for a projection of population extinctions.
- During a WAFWA review of the SAB population chapter, several major concerns regarding the analysis method and datasets were identified. These concerns were transmitted to the editors. Concern persists that the chapter will not be adequately peer-reviewed, given the short-timelines for submittal to the USFWS.
- Several people had concerns that WAFWA has been put in a terrible position on this issue. WAFWA supports the use of good science in decision making and does not want to be viewed as manipulating the scientific process, but conversely wants adequate scientific review of the issue.

Motion by T. Remington: Request USFWS to allow the deadline to slip for adequate review. Request that USGS complete an additional independent review of the population chapter. Second by Emmerich. Considerable discussion ensued regarding the wording of the letter to USGS. Mayer, Hemker,

Stiver, Remington and Emmerich volunteered to work on the letter before the Business Meeting. Approved.

Info note #3: Habitat Assessment Framework. The HAF is out for review, the TC has been asked to comment.

Population Sub-committee Update on Proposal and Budget of Continuation of Lek Counts as a Method of Assess Sage-Grouse Population. The TC has produced a report summarizing the status of population assessment and data collection across the range of sage-grouse. Remington indicated that CDOW has recently found that they are only counting about 50% of the leks in an area where they believed they were count 100%. He concluded that we have to continue to plug away at developing better techniques.

Interagency Sage Grouse Implementation MOU

Stiver reported that the Memorandum of Understanding for sage-grouse conservation strategy implementation is now in effect. The Range-wide Interagency Sage-grouse Conservation Team (RISCT) is now operational. The first meeting of this group occurred in June. Stiver is working on developing a charter and operating procedures for the team. The RISCT determined that their annual report and meeting with the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) should take place at the North American where there is a higher likelihood of having most of the EOC members present. The RISCT will develop a task list from the Strategy and present it to the EOC at their first meeting.

The Conservation Strategy calls for the appointment of a Research Advisory Board (RAB) to help guide research priorities and protocols. The Strategy called for the RAB to be established one year from the adoption of the Strategy. Stiver requested that the WBCC request him to develop a process for and to nominate 6-8 Board members and present them to the Directors at the midwinter meeting.

Motion by Brittell: Request Stiver to develop a nominating process and nominees to the Directors at the midwinter meeting. Seconded by Gould. Approved.

Intermountain West Joint Venture Update

Dave Smith presented a powerpoint detailing activities of the Intermountain West Joint Ventures (IWJV). Smith reported that IWJV has been very active since their last report. Randy Gray and Terry Mansfield are working hard with Farm Bill opportunities and outreach to state wildlife agencies. IWJV and partners completed an outstanding guide in April entitled, "Field Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill for Fish and Wildlife Conservation. Gray is the author of the guide and it is an outstanding resource for bird conservationists. The guide can be found at the following: <http://www.iwjk.org/doc/FBGuide8.pdf>.

Smith introduced Terry Mansfield who spoke about coordinating IWJV activities with State Wildlife Action plans. Both Smith and Mansfield encouraged people at the meeting to contact IWJV for partnerships and services.

Proposal to Establish WAFWA Western Quail Working Group

Bob Broschied was not able to make the meeting.

AFWA Update

Deb Hahn reported on a number national bird programs. Hahn reported on the Southern Wings program implementation and participation. The program was kicked off in March. This program allows states to participate in conservation efforts in Latin America. WAFWA has been collecting and accounting for the funds for working south of the border. Contact Hahn for additional information.

State of the Birds report was released by Sec. Salazar on March 19th. The report is a significant body of work that provides a snapshot in time of birds in the US. The report can be downloaded at http://www.stateofthebirds.org/pdf_files/State_of_the_Birds_2009.pdf.

Hahn reported on several legislative items: HR1916 – increases in duck stamp cost in a two phase process. The bill proposes an increase to \$25 from 2010 to 2016 and \$35 after the 2020 hunting year. HR 2188 – authorization of JV has passed the House (July 16, 2009) and is moving to Committee in the Senate.

AFWA is working on the reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, support for NAWCA and support for the State Wildlife Grant program. Additionally, they are working to increase funding for the Joint Ventures and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

Hahn reported that the North American Bird Conservation Initiative is working updates and a strategic plan for the next 3 to 5 years. NABCI is celebrating its ten year anniversary! Hahn provided three handouts: Southern wings, State of the Birds, NABCI decade of integrating bird conservation.

Lesser Prairie Chicken Conservation Playa Lakes Joint Venture

Emily Jo Williams reported on the activities of the PLJV regarding lesser prairie chickens (LEPC). One of the highlights of the presentation was the discussion regarding the release of “A Spatially-Based Planning Tool Designed to Reduce Negative Effects of Development on the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) in Oklahoma”. The techniques used in this planning tool offer significant application for a host of species. The PLJV in partnership LEPCIWG with funding from NFWF is implementing a conservation plan for the LEPC using the GIS tool. PLJV and LEPCIWG developed the business plan and submitted it to NFWF. Williams also mentioned that Kansas had received \$6 million in mitigation for wind power projects.

Sage-grouse Local Working Group Needs Assessment

Terry Messmer, (Utah State University and Berryman Institute) reported on the Sage-grouse Local Working Group Needs Assessment study conducted by USU with funding from NRCS. They developed a questionnaire that asked members of local working groups their opinions about their experience with local working groups. The study addressed how effective LWGs were in addressing sage-grouse conservation needs. Some of the interesting findings suggested that people obtained their information from other folks. A subject matter expert attending a meeting was a much preferred information exchange compared to a web-based expert system. The Local Area Working group conference held in Reno several years ago was a great success. Local working group members liked money to do projects. They were outcome driven. It appears to be important for people to have a physiological ownership of their LWG and they are more successful if they have administrative support for their efforts. The report is available at the following: <http://sswa.usu.edu/reports.html>. Stiver asked Messmer what actions could further the LWG effort. Messmer said he presented this presentation to the WGA in June and received favorable comments. WGA is interested in having another LWG conference and he suggested that a letter from WAFWA to WGA supporting a workshop in 2010 would move the concept along. Messmer volunteered to write a letter and have the WBCC move that letter to the Directors.

FY 2011 Federal Budget Priorities

Time was short and the group did not have a list of budget priorities for 2011. Stiver will send out list with deadline for suggestions.

Other Business

- Hemker reported they are having a CCAA in Idaho out for comment in the next several weeks.
- Kirk Nelson, had USGS model some ground water issues. Once Kirk was challenged, USGS said they would not defend their analysis. Need to find out if this is system wide?
- Dave Smith – let's make an effort to invite all the bird folks to this meeting.

Identify/Finalize Committee Activities and Projects for the Coming Year

The Committee felt the need to meet only once a year. Several members were concerned about sustained conservation efforts for the Lesser Prairie Chicken

Action Items for Business Meeting

- Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee
 - Interim Guidelines for Evaluating the Impacts of Energy Development
 - Encourage collaboration for sage-grouse habitat mapping
 - Fire management in Xeric sagebrush habitats(Tom to work on additional comments)
- Letter to USGS requesting additional peer review on SAB chapter 19. (Wordsmithing needs to be done)
- Sage-grouse implementation – RAB nomination process
- Wind-energy Research Collaborative – request support.
- Encourage Southern Wings participation
- Letter to WGA encouraging Local Working Group workshop.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02pm

Respectfully Submitted,

San Stiver, Vice-chair

**WESTERN BIRD CONSERVATION COMMITTEE ATTENDEES
JULY 13, 2009**

Tom Hemker	Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game	tom.hemker@idfg.idaho.gov
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