



SAGE SENSE

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CHANGES AT THE TOP



During the July 2005 WAFWA Annual Meeting in Kananaskis, Alberta, Bruce McCloskey (pictured here), Director of the Colorado Division of Wildlife, was named as WAFWA's Lead Director for sage-grouse conservation. Bruce replaces Terry Crawforth, Director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife, who has championed sage-grouse conservation and the Sage-grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team since it was organized in 2000. Director Crawforth mentored the Team through its development and completion of the National Assessment

of Sage-grouse Populations and their habitats. The Team takes this opportunity to thank Director Crawforth for his enthusiastic and untiring efforts on behalf of sage-grouse conservation.

Director McCloskey's career is the classic example of a professional working his way through a variety of different jobs over a lengthy tenure. He began his career as a district wildlife manager in Kremmling, CO in 1974, and became the hunter education coordinator in 1978, an area wildlife manager in Lamar in 1979, a regional manager in Colorado Springs, CO in 1983, and a state wildlife manager in the Denver office in 1984. In 1988, he was selected as one of two assistant directors, and in 1989 became the agency's deputy director.

When he was selected as Director in Colorado earlier this year Director McCloskey said "It was my goal to be a wildlife officer when I graduated from Pueblo East High School in 1970". He kept that goal in sight as he earned a degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University in 1974 and later a master's degree in public administration from the University of Colorado.

"Even with all the success we've had over the years, I don't want to stand in the same place. I want to encourage people to come up with new ideas. Not every new idea is going to be a good one. But everyone needs to be encouraged to bring ideas forward so that the best of them can be considered and adopted..." McCloskey admits the challenges are daunting, with growth, energy development and habitat loss all combining to put more pressure on wildlife managers.

“We have innovative, new cooperative programs to work with private landowners and others and we’ve had great success with species conservation. But there is much more work needed on species conservation and to protect habitat. We need to work together; there is so much for us to do in the future. We can only be successful if all of us unite behind our common goals for wildlife.”

Director McCloskey is well positioned in the world of avian conservation. In addition to his important positions in WAFWA as lead director for sage-grouse conservation and chairman of the newly formed Bird Conservation Committee, Director McCloskey is very active with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies bird conservation committees and work groups. The Team looks forward to working closely with Director McCloskey to complete and implement the strategy for conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush.

SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PLANNING FRAMEWORK TEAM

Tony Apa, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Chair
Joe Bohne, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Patricia Deibert, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Scott Gardner, California Dept of Fish & Game
Mark Hilliard, Bureau of Land Management, Vice Chair
Clint McCarthy, U.S. Forest Service
Michael Schroeder, Washington Dept of Fish & Wildlife
Bruce McCloskey, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Director
Dwight Bunnell, Coordinator
San Stiver, Wildlife Coordinator

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GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION STRATEGY UPDATE

The Sage-grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team (Team), as a result of actions and directions received in January, has been working on the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Strategy. Specifically, the Team has been gathering funding, recruiting personnel, updating the timeline and fine-tuning the process and budget for the strategy. Work on state and local planning and on-the-ground projects is continuing to move forward. Implementation of local and state plans is beginning in earnest in some areas.

The Team reported at the WAFWA Annual Meeting in July. Following the Teams report it was apparent that due to the importance and complexity of sage-grouse conservation it would be beneficial to have additional time for discussion. In order to provide more time for discussion and consideration a meeting was scheduled in Salt Lake City on August 15, 2005. A brief summary of the meeting follows:

Sage-Grouse/Sagebrush MOU and Conservation Strategy Meeting

Salt Lake City, UT

15 August 2005

INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The first matter of discussion was the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by WAFWA, the BLM, USFS and FWS in August, 2000. The MOU includes a five year review provision, "at which time it (the MOU) will be subject to review, renewal or expiration."

All states and agencies participated in a discussion of the original MOU signed in 2000 and a draft of a revised MOU which proposes expanding the MOU to include additional agencies and provides more emphasis on biome level considerations.

After a very open and positive discussion, the group agreed:

- 1. That the immediate need is to move forward on completion of the Conservation Strategy; to keep the focus primarily on the Comprehensive Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy and; to insure that this thinking is reflected in the MOU.**
- 2. There is a future need to address other broader species/ecosystem issues among the western states.**
- 3. To renew the original MOU verbatim and route it to USGS and NRCS post-signature to ascertain their interest in formally participating.**
- 4. Renewal time-frame should coincide with completion of Conservation strategy August, 2005 through July 31, 2007 would be an appropriate renewal period. This time frame would allow for review/ renewal/expiration of the MOU at the 2007 WAFWA Summer Meeting.**

PROCESS PROPOSED FOR COMPLETING THE SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The group reviewed sage-grouse conservation efforts from 1995 to the present time including the early WAFWA MOUs, the 2000 Interagency MOU, local working group planning, state planning efforts, the need for a rangewide plan to support local and state planning efforts, and the agreement between WAFWA and the Fish and Wildlife Service to produce a conservation status assessment and a conservation strategy for sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats.

The group then reviewed preparation of a rangewide comprehensive conservation strategy to include sections dealing with:

- Implementation
- Monitoring Effectiveness – insure process is adaptive and PECE compliant
- Monitoring Implementation – ensure implementation and accounting
- Communication
- Research
- Funding

Key points of the discussion were:

- State and Provincial Strategies, Local Strategies, and the BLM Strategy will be combined into a Comprehensive Strategy using a range-wide science issue team for collating, guidance and consistency. The process will recognize autonomy of existing conservation planning efforts, but emphasize the need for a range-wide perspective in conservation planning.
- A large majority of the work has been done under the state, local and BLM strategies. The range-wide strategies team will use these as the basis for the range-wide conservation strategy along with the conservation assessment and other science documents that were produced under Phase I,
- Other components (funding, monitoring, research and technology) are in support of the range-wide strategy; not an end in themselves.

The Team clarified that there will be no need for additional staff to complete the Strategy. The Team will form “teams or work groups” to assist with the strategy process and the work group’s tenure will be short term in nature and involve a limited number of people. Overall, the Team expects to request the assistance of approximately 15 Federal and/or State Agency personnel to participate.

It was agreed that a Rangewide Conservation Strategy will be the overall document that holds the state/local plans together. The Conservation Strategy will help prioritize these plans from a national perspective and act as a road map for sage-grouse conservation. The Framework Team and Technical Committee will continue to be resources for the states in developing and implementing state and local plans.

Funding for Strategy implementation was also discussed. The Conservation Strategy will not dictate where funding will go, but will make recommendations for prioritization of conservation efforts across the species’ range. The need for the strategy to address monitoring for both implementation and effectiveness and the need for standard monitoring metrics and processes was also discussed.

The proposed Strategy budget was discussed. The Team estimates that the Strategy will require approximately \$500,000 to complete. These funds will be dispersed over 3 calendar years (2005, 2007 & 2007). Funding for completing the strategy will be provided by the BLM, FWS, USFS and WAFWA. The team has also received a Multi-state Grant from IAFWA. The participating WAFWA Directors and other Federal agency representatives agreed to support the proposed Strategy process and budget but advised simplifying tasks and reducing costs where feasible.

White House Conference on Community Conservation



Display sponsored by the DOI-BLM and Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team at the White House Conference on Community Education. St Louis, MO, August, 2005.

Sage-grouse Conservation along the Mississippi River -- in Missouri!

Multiple Federal and State partners sponsored an exhibit on sage-grouse conservation that was presented at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation. The poster was titled “Sage-grouse: a new dawn for conservation in the West,” and this exhibit emphasizes the importance of cooperative conservation planning to reverse long-term declines in sage-grouse populations and habitats, and the central role of local working groups in that effort. Pat Deibert (USFWS) and Mark

Hilliard (BLM) lead the display development. Several representatives from sage-grouse local working groups were among the 1,100+ conference attendees. Conservation Planning Framework Team representatives San Stiver and Mark Hilliard staffed the exhibit during the conference.

The conference theme was titled, “Strengthening Shared Governance and Citizen Stewardship” and, of all the conservation initiatives and projects represented at the conference, the sage-grouse conservation effort clearly spans the broadest geographic area. With over 3,000 participants directly involved in some capacity in 11 states and more than 50 local working groups across the West, the sage-grouse effort also appears to represent the largest citizen-based planning network engaged in any species or associated habitat conservation program in North America.

The exhibit, features a background photo of a male sage-grouse at first-light (courtesy of Mark Gocke), and was prepared by the BLM Branch of Publishing Services at the National Science and Technology Center (Denver). It will be made available in the near future for use by other agencies and organizations (after logistics for scheduling and handling have been completed). A notice of availability will be provided at that time. Exhibit components include a 6’ x 10’ single-piece mural, two table-top information panels, a sage-grouse conservation fact sheet, and bookmark with contact information for participating state wildlife agencies and the Framework Team.

WEST NILE VIRUS UPDATE

Dr. David Naugle reports that Dr. Todd Cornish, Wyoming State Vet Lab, has confirmed that 10% (5 of 50) of blood samples from female greater sage-grouse have tested positive for antibodies to West Nile virus in the Powder River Basin (PRB). Blood samples came from birds that were captured during spring 2005. SN ratios in titers were admittedly low with 1:8 in 4 birds and 1:64 in one bird. This news comes on the heels of the deaths of 2 radio-marked sage grouse so far in the PRB—well behind mortality rates from 2003 but comparable to what we saw in 2004 to date.

Dr. Stanley Anderson

Our Condolences

Dr. Stanley Anderson died Thursday, September 1, 2005 following a lengthy illness. Stan was the leader of the Wyoming Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Wyoming, which he established in 1980. During his career he advised 100 graduate students and published over 200 papers and books on wildlife biology and related subjects. Many of his recent studies revolved around the greater sage-grouse, particularly in their response to land management activities, such as energy extraction and habitat alteration. Additionally, Dr. Anderson was also involved in research on pygmy rabbits, passerine birds associated with sagebrush habitats, ferruginous hawks, and antelope. His contribution to our understanding of sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems was significant. He will be sorely missed, not only for his scientific contributions, but also for his unwavering support of wildlife and wildlife habitat. We are fortunate that Stan mentored so many people, both students and peers, so that his legacy will live on.

Upcoming Meetings

Framework Team Meeting

- Salt Lake City, UT December 7-8, 2005

Framework Team Meeting

- Phoenix, AZ January 31 – February. 2, 2005

2006 Western Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop

- Spearfish, SD, June 25-29, 2006