



Thunder Basin Collaborative Learning Workshop

Convened by the Ruckelshaus Institute, University of Wyoming

Session 1 - January 28, 2016: History and Values

Eastern Wyoming College, Multi-Purpose Room

Agenda

- 1:00 pm Introductions
- 1:15 Welcome, Dennis Jaeger
- 1:20 Purpose and Overview of Workshop Series
 Purpose and Overview of this workshop.
- 1:30 Jewel Reed: History of homesteaders and grazing associations on the Grassland
- 1:45 Bob Mountain: History of the Forest Service on the Thunder Basin National
 Grassland
- 2:00 Discussion regarding the History of the Thunder Basin National Grassland
- 2:30 Break-Out Groups: Discuss – What is important to you about the Thunder Basin
 National Grassland?
- 3:30 Report Back
- 3:50 Next Steps and Wrap-Up
- 4:00 Adjourn

Minutes

Present:

Name	Organization
Frank Eathorne	Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association
Denis Langley	Member, Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability
David Pellatz	Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association
Bob and Jean Harshbarger	4 W Ranch

Gary and Cheryl Jacobson	Member, Rochelle Community for Working Sustainability
Justin Binfet	WGFD
Amanda Withroder	WGFD
Jewel and Tom Reed	Member, Thunder Basin Grazing Association
Donley Darnell	
Jennifer Hinkhouse	District Manager, Campbell County Conservation District
Rusty Bell	Campbell County Commissioner
Tony Lehner	Converse County Commissioner
Rick Grant	Converse County Commissioner
Brad Rogers	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Aaron Voos	USFS
Jay Francis	
Shannon Anderson	
Cheryl Schwartzkopf	Converse County Weed and Pest District
Quade Schmelzle	Campbell County Weed and Pest District
Shane Walker	USFS
Jess Butler	Converse County Weed and Pest District
Dennis Jaeger	USFS
Gail Mahnke	Niobrara County Weed and Pest
Representatives from Senators Barrasso and Enzi, and Congresswoman Lummis.	
Individuals from Campbell County Weed and Pest District and Weston County Weed and Pest District	

Jessica Clement, who is with the Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming, welcomed participants. This was followed by a welcome from Forest Supervisor Dennis Jaeger who introduced himself, outlined the purpose of the Collaborative Learning Workshops and thanked participants for coming.

Jessica then discussed the process that will be used in the Collaborative Learning Workshops and that the ultimate purpose of these workshops is to provide meaningful community input to a chartered multi-stakeholder working group that will provide recommendations to the US Forest Service regarding prairie dog management and other wildlife issues, grazing, recreation and other subjects. Her powerpoint can be seen at the Ruckelshaus Institute Thunder Basin National Grassland website:

<http://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/collaborative-solutions/thunder-basin/>

Jewel Reed then provided an account of her relationship with the Thunder Basin National Grassland:

Her parents homesteaded in 1917-1918, then got married. Most people at that time came out as farmers. There were many more people in the area then. As those who remained could afford, they bought more land. There have been many changes over the years. For example in the marketing of livestock, now they are trailed to railheads. Now there are video auctions – there is immediate knowledge of markets. Now there are improved transportation systems, in the past trails and roads lead through deep creeks where there are now bridges. There was a lot of WPA work in the 1930’s, they built lots of small reservoirs which has reduced flooding events. Fences have gone from 2 to 3 wires to 4

and 5 wires for sheep grazing. There are sheep herder monuments the purpose of which is unknown, perhaps out of boredom. Schools consisted of one room, and children would go to high school in Douglas. In 1929 there was some consolidation and bus routes. The Bill Post Office was started in 1918 and the reason why the town received its name was because there were many Williams who lived in the area. Jewel was born in 1930 and her father raised corn, oats and rye. Jewel remarked how transportation has changed a great deal. She also mentioned how sage chickens would visit residents' gardens. She ended by remarking that government is more fair now. There are more regulations and there is more governed by local people.

Bob Mountain (USFS) provided a photographic presentation regarding the USFS history related to the Thunder Basin National Grassland (see <http://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/collaborative-solutions/thunder-basin/>). In 1897 The Organic Act was passed that identified the two main objectives of what is now the USDA Forest Service: conserve timber and conserve water. The first National Forest was established in 1905. Nearly all grasslands have some remnant timber. Some are rugged and not very well watered. They tended to be the last areas to be homesteaded. Many homesteaders came as farmers and brought with their practices with them, e.g. from the East and from Iowa. However precipitation differences made this difficult. The 1910's and 1920's saw them successfully making a living but the Dust Bowl of the 1930's brought this to an end for many. In 1937 the dust clouds got the attention of Washington DC and many lands were bought back for back taxes – the Bankhead Jones Act. The management of these lands was delegated to the Soil Conservation Service, later the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and in 1954 to the Forest Service. In 1960 they were officially designated National Grasslands, of which there are now 20. National Grassland lands are intermingled with private lands, and many of the Grasslands pay tribute to those who came before by carrying the names of American Indian tribe names. The Forest Service tries to pay tribute to the many values that people have in relation to Grasslands, including factors such as water delivery systems, which still provide a challenge.

After Bob Mountain's presentation Jessica facilitated a discussion regarding the history of the Thunder Basin National Grassland. Jean Harshbarger related some of her memories of experience in the Thunder Basin including trailing yearlings to South Dakota in the late 1930's and the challenges of schooling in those days. Bob Harshbarger and others provided information regarding the 4W and Fiddleback ranches and how they were homesteaded. Dave Pellatz remarked that the Native American tribes were present in the Grassland before the homesteaders and that water determined in many cases where the ranchers could be established and how they were managed. Justin Binfet said that his agency served conservation, agriculture and wildlife interests and so the Thunder Basin National Grassland as a contiguous landscape was important to WGFD. The conversation shifted to the role of coal in the Grassland and the initial finding and use of coal deposits by homesteader. This resulted in split-estate issues for surface owners and the entrance of the railroads.

Jessica asked participants where the name "Thunder Basin" comes from. Participants informed her that thunder and lightning form a significant and often spectacular presence in the area.

The participants were then split into break-out groups. A list of values that could be used, but could also be added on to or changed, was handed out. Participants discussed which of these values were important to them and why. The following shows the results for each group.

○ Aesthetic value (A) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because I enjoy the scenery, sights, sounds, smells, etc.
○ Biological diversity value (B) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they provide a variety of fish, wildlife, plant life, etc.
○ Cultural value (C) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they are a place for me to continue and pass down the wisdom and knowledge, traditions, and way of life of my ancestors.
○ Economic value (E) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they provide grazing, fisheries, minerals, and/or tourism opportunities such as outfitting and guiding.
○ Future value (F) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they allow future generations to know and experience Sagebrush areas as they are now.
○ Historic value (H) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they have places and things of natural and human history that matter to me, others, or the nation.
○ Intrinsic value (I) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas in and of themselves, whether people are present or not.
○ Learning value (L) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because we can learn about the environment through scientific observation or experimentation.
○ Life Sustaining value (LS) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they help produce, preserve, clean, and renew air, soil, and water.
○ Recreation value (R) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they provide a place for my favorite outdoor recreation activities.
○ Spiritual value (S) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they are a sacred, religious, or spiritually special place to me or because I feel reverence and respect for nature there.
○ Subsistence value (Sb) — I value sagebrush areas because they provide necessary food and supplies to sustain my life.
○ Therapeutic value (T) — I value Wyoming Sagebrush areas because they make me feel better, physically and/or mentally.

Breakout Group Results

Group 1

Values	Number of Participants who felt the value applied to TBNG, and the reasons why	
Aesthetic *	3	Visual value, peaceful, aesthetic value is self-explanatory, it is who I am, viewshed.
Biological *	2	Evidenced by tracks in the snow, large numbers, astounded at the diversity
Cultural	2	Not sure what to say, things change but need learned skills, presentation of history, history of how people lived, community connections
Economic *	4	Self-explanatory, provides a living, wants to live on a ranch, supports everything else (foundation), supports Wyoming (important statewide)
Future	4	It is not as it was, it needs a future, tied to history (continuation), acknowledged that everyone came here from somewhere but worries about change from influx
Historical *	3	These are things we value, landmarks, different for each group (i.e. settlers and native americans), humanistic connections, connections to the past.
Intrinsic	2	Is a problem – represents views without presence, didn't like the statement "people or not" Tied to non-locals.
Learning	2	Very much, many things learned that parents didn't know (shows evolution of practical knowledge), academic importance (i.e. dinosaurs, fossils etc.)
Life Sustaining *	4	Open spaces, well managed, critical to water, water doesn't renew in urban areas, air not as clean as once was (coal mining), need space to renew resources like air and water, Wyoming is a headwaters state so others depend on our stewardship.
Recreation	2	Has personal impacts, a priority, take walks, dollar value to local economies, friendship and social connections
Spiritual	1	Good feelings, definitely there, hard to explain
Subsistence	2	Same as economic value, have to have to continue to exist.
Therapeutic	1	Same as Spiritual values.

Group 2

Values	Number of Participants who felt the value applied to TBNG, and the reasons why	
Aesthetic *	4	Unlike other areas of Campbell County. It is unique. A hidden gem
Biological *	4	Preservation of open space. Spring Creek area is a healthy system. More diversity than most places in Wyoming. Wildlife abundance. Rich in resources.
Cultural	3	Related to historic value. Small communities. Activities for gathering.

	Influence on the land.
Economic *	5 Everything here relates to the Wyoming economy. Mining, Ag, tourism, recreation. There is a dollar multiplier.
Future	3 Obligation to share way of life with next generation and the land itself – leave it better than the way I found it.
Historical *	4 Fascinating stories. People here make it a <u>living</u> history.
Intrinsic	2 Like to see it stay open as open space.
Learning	3 So much here to learn and share with next generation. Perfect outdoor classroom.
Life Sustaining *	4 Contribute to welfare of the nation – food and fiber. We depend directly on the land and clean water. Closely connected to Subsistence value.
Recreation	3 Good place to get away. Still good place to go to large block of land that public can enjoy.
Spiritual	1 Connected to Therapeutic value. Peace found here.
Subsistence	4
Therapeutic	3 Ties to recreation value. Wide open spaces. Can see forever. Think about times past. Find peace there.

* Highest ranking value for this group

Group 3

Values	Reasons participants felt the value mattered on the TBNG
Aesthetic *	Solitude. Open space (clear air). Sky – horizon to horizon. Pristine.
Biological *	
Economic *	Livelihood. Diversity of income types related to surface, minerals and vegetation types.
Future	Uniqueness is important to pass on. This is home and there is intrinsic knowledge and important ties.
Historical *	The story is important. Includes lessons learned and a history of working together. There is also important natural history.

Life Sustaining *	Because we live here. There are valuable resources e.g. carbon sequestration and grasslands.
Subsistence	We live here and work here. See Economic Value.

Group 4

Values	Reasons why participants felt values mattered on the TBNG
Aesthetic *	Diverse topography and vegetation, the colors.
Biological *	The wildlife on the Grassland was important, but there were pros and cons to wildlife issues.
Cultural	Location where participants were born and raised.
Economic *	Access for multiple users
Future	Balance
Historical *	More to it than participants realized.
Intrinsic	Participants appreciate knowing it's there.
Learning *	Mattered to participants but was also a source of controversy – conflict of goals and outcomes.
Life Sustaining	The value of having a working ecosystem.
Recreation *	Wildlife and scenery
Spiritual	A place where one is surrounded by nature, one can get a way, it is peaceful.
Subsistence	Multiple uses support many people.

* Highest ranking value for this group

Group 6

Values	Reasons why participants felt values mattered on the TBNG
Biological *	Maintaining good biodiversity is important to sustain multiple use activities. Maintain healthy wildlife diversity and rangeland health to perpetuate proper land use into the future.

Economic *	<p>Multiple use is most important to sustain agriculture, mineral development, recreation which will perpetuate proper management into the future.</p> <p>Multiple use benefits everybody, both locally on a county-wide basis, statewide and nationally.</p> <p>Sustain livelihood of local ranches for grazing.</p>
Historical *	<p>Multi-generational local ranch families want to preserve family history and perpetuate it.</p> <p>Important that we learn from history so we do not repeat failures and are better prepared for the future.</p>

One group reported verbally only. Their results were very similar to the other groups whereby the economic, historical, biodiversity and life sustaining values were considered the most important to participants.

After a general discussion of these results, participants asked Supervisor Jaeger and District Ranger Walker a few questions regarding current prairie dog management strategy and whether there was room for change. Shane Walker responded there was, within certain sideboards. Participants asked the USFS to explain the sideboards at the next meeting. Participants then discussed next steps.

Next Meeting

Participants provided the following input to be considered for the next meeting on March 16 in Newcastle in the Weston County Senior Center:

- Local people willing to share knowledge with others.
- Need to focus more than on a single-species, prairie dog approach.
- There are too many prairie dogs.
- Need to look at biomass and vegetation information.
- Also need to look at other related species such as bird guilds.
- Need to look at prairie dog distribution in combination with disturbance dynamics and fire.
- There is data from the 4W ranch.
- Need to have clarification regarding the USFS sideboards within which changes to management can be considered.
- It is important for environmental organization representatives to be present to hear local residents’ testimonials to share information. Jessica explained that invitation had been sent and had not received any word from these representatives. They will be invited again.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 pm.