

Notes

Thunder Basin Collaborative Learning Workshop

Convened by the Ruckelshaus Institute, University of Wyoming

Session 2 – March 16, 2016: Current Conditions and Issues

Weston County Senior Center, Newcastle, WY

Present:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>
Nancy McFarland	McFarland land & livestock
Jewell Reed	TBGPEA
Hans Hunt	WY Legislature
Jay Francis	Campbell County Weed & Pest
Wanda Burget	TBGPEA
Dave Pellatz	TBGPEA
DeAnna Kay	Sen. Enzi
Tracy Pinter	BLM
Dennis Jaeger	Forest Service
Aaron Voos	Forest Service
Tom Wright	Rancher
Rusty Bell	Campbell County
Matthew Jones	Congressman Lummis
Holly Kennedy	Wyoming Farm Bureau
Carolyn & Vern Johnson	
Jackie King	Congressman Lummis
Riata Little	Sen. Barrasso
Jim Darlington	Inyan Kara G.A.
Randy Oleson	IKGA
Marline Geier	IKGA

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>
Frank Eathorne	TBGA
Tom Reed	Rancher
Jenelle Garber	Senator Enzi
Donley Dornell	Weston Co Weed & Pest
Hale Redding	Weston Co Weed & Pest
Todd Bennington	News Letter Journal
Scott Sewell	Ranch
Todd Caltrider	WGFD
Barbara Crow	none
Matt Avery	Campbell Co Commissioner
Jean Harshbarger	4w Ranch
Robert Harshbarger	Asst National Grassland 4w Ranch
Jaime Jakes	DEQ-LQD
Debra Hepp	Campbell County Conservation District
Christi Haswell	SWCA
Cheryl Schwartzkopf	Converse County W&P
Jackie Ott	South Dakota State University
Steve Smutko	U of Wyoming
Brad Rogers	US Fish & Wildlife Service
George Ewins	Elk Mtn. sheep station
Lauren Porensky	USDA ARS
Greg Stark	Niobrara County

1:00 pm Introductions

1:15 Welcome, Dennis Jaeger, USFS Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest and Thunder Basin National Grassland, Supervisor.

Dennis introduced himself and discussed the purpose of the workshop series, the role of the Ruckelshaus Institute and the decision to create a working group which he will charge with a task. The Ruckelshaus Institute will consult with stakeholder groups on candidates for the working group.

1:20 Purpose and Overview of Workshop Series

Jessica Clement explained the outcomes of the situation assessment, which resulted in this collaborative learning workshop series. Its purpose is to provide meaningful input to the Working Group which will be established during the spring and summer of 2016 and will be convened in the fall of the same year.

Purpose and Overview of this workshop:

Jessica explained the purpose of this workshop is to explore current conditions related to the Grassland. To that end Lauren Porensky and Dave Pellatz gave presentations on current research activities after which all participants would discuss the two questions below.

See powerpoints for Jessica Clement and Lauren Porensky on the Ruckelshaus Institute website at

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

- 1:30 Lauren Porensky, Ecologist, USDA Agricultural Research Service: Presentation regarding USDA Research on the Thunder Basin National Grassland.
- 2:00 David Pellatz, Thunder Basin Grassland Prairie Ecosystem Association: Current Grassland Research Efforts.
- 2:10 Discussion regarding Current Issues on the Thunder Basin National Grassland

The group discussed additional information needs:

- Hairy Woodland Brome present on TBNG- to what extent, where?
- Prairie 3-AWH
- Bulbous Bluegrass
- Medusa Head
- Work on Reclamation land – O+G, Coal for comparison w/ undisturbed land eg biomass production
- Need denuded ground for plovers?
- Info re. aerial photography

In response to a question regarding the situation assessment, Jessica explained that in that report the answers that are reported in the assessment are those of participants, not the Ruckelshaus Institute. The Institute attempted to ensure complete transparency and reflected all opinions. Readers may disagree with those opinions but they will have had an opportunity to become acquainted with all viewpoints.

2:30 Break-Out Groups Discuss:

1. What issues should the Working Group focus on regarding the TBNG?
2. What are the gaps in knowledge regarding conditions on the TBNG?

Summary of Break-Out Groups

1. What issues should the Working Group focus on regarding the TBNG?

Subjects that were raised in multiple groups:

1. Prairie dog related issues:

- Prairie dog control methods, control areas and boundaries economic factors

- Get an answer a.s.a.p. as to whether black footed ferrets will be reintroduced or not. Based on that answer, continue discourse regarding prairie dog management. mounds.
- Methods for revegetating prairie dog mounds and towns.

2. Regulations, rules, policies, laws: What are USFS rules, regulations and “hard lines” regarding prairie dog management, how are staffing decisions made, consistency with decisions among staff members and other subjects?

3. Sage grouse related issues: grazing patterns and usage possible, recreational use, sage grouse life cycle areas, consequences of SG core designation (private property rights) sage grouse and predation dynamics.

4. Energy related issues:

- Federal moratorium
- Socio-economic impacts
- Reclamation
- Gaps in Bonding
- Sage grouse and split estate

5. Other Grassland Issues

- How to maintain, improve and reduce fragmentation
- Emphasize riparian areas
- Focus on the cottonwood region
- Determine existing range and grazing communities
- How to improve conditions on the grasslands?

6. Recreation Issues

- Maintain hunting opportunities
- Off-road damage from ATV's.

2. What are the gaps in knowledge regarding conditions on the TBNG?

1. Prairie Dogs:

- Economic impact of prairie dog populations
- What is the prairie dog overpopulation trigger and other population dynamics aspects.
- How many prairie dogs are there on the Grassland (Population density)
- What are the prairie dog colony structures.
- Predator populations and distribution.
- Conditions that attract colonization.

- Interaction of prairie dogs and sagebrush
- Effects of prairie dog dusting on plovers and other wildlife.
- Accurate mapping of colonies and private lands.

2. Existing reclamation research:

- Access data and technology from mines, DEQ, state and federal institutions.
- Comparison of reclaimed vs. undisturbed areas.

3. The Thunder Basin National Grassland:

- Economic contribution of the Grassland in terms of grazing, recreation, mining, oil and gas, etc.
- What are the uses on the Grassland?
- The purpose of the Grassland.

4. Predation:

- Raptor seasons
- Economic impacts/structure of predator vs. prey dynamics (e.g. coyote vs. sheep)

5. Communications

- Gap in communication between landowners and others based on differences in knowledge and experiences.
- Better sharing of knowledge and information
- Media accuracy

3 :30 pm The group discussed the results of the breakout groups and adjourned at 4 pm.

The next meeting will take place on May 19 (not May 18) in Gillette, location to be decided.

APPENDIX

The following flipchart notes were recorded for all breakout groups:

Group 1

Issues Working Group should focus on:

Stakeholder representation, NGO's? * Local input

- P Dogs
 - Control-areas
 - Methods
 - mgmt across public/private boundaries
 - Payment

 - Private property rights within TBNG boundary
 - reclamation of old towns
 - economic link to grazing
 - Diverse methods/tools for control
- Ferrets
 - Cost to state/counties associated w-reintroduction
 - Restriction/10j
- Grazing
 - Lifestyle protection
 - Economic Link w-pdogs
- Energy development
 - Federal moratorium *Local input /info on impacts
 - Socioeconomic impacts
 - Reclamation
 - Pipelines & dogs
 - Obtaining data from mines technology & knowledge
- Public access
 - Maintain hunting opportunities
 - Roads
- Wildlife habitat
 - Maintain
 - Improve
 - Emphasis on Riparian
 - Cottonwood region
 - Reduce Fragmentation
- USFS
 - Limitations
 - Flexibility

- Hard lines
- Rules/Regs
- Consistency w-staff decisions
- Communication
- Split estate
- Overall Cost sharing
 - Fire
 - Wildfire
 - Etc....
- Possible land trades (all issues) 4
 - Multiple ownership w-in TBNG
 - Make process easier (fed restrictions)
 - Outside group involvement IE Remf

Gaps 5

- Reclamation research
 - Tech transfer
 - Data sharing
 - DEQ, mines, state & Federal
- USFS “hard lines”
 - Rules, regs, etc....
- Research results wet vs. dry yrs
- Transparency regarding ferrets
 - What is true
 - Plans?
- Communication w-land managers
 - +within WYO G&F
 - St. Weed/Pest in Model
- Multiple Landowners-w/multiple objectives
 - NGOs
 - Weight of local input

Group 2


#1 Issues for working group to Focus on

- Prairie Dog Control (&Boundaries)
- Prairie Dog Overpopulation
 - & Damage to private & Public surface
- Range Condition ignored on Prairie dog towns
- Split Estate & Sage Grouse Management
- Reclamation Bonging Issues with current market

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- **Grazing Impacts to Sage Grouse**
 - State & Legislative Involvement (need more)
 - Grazing Patterns & usage
 - Approx... 100 permittees
 - Recreational Conflicts w/ multiple use (state lands), (Permittees)
 - Transparency with F.S. (ex. Changing category boundaries)
- **Gaps in Knowledge regarding Conditions**
 - Discussion around density measurements that are economical
 - What is the economic impact of Prairie Dog overpopulations
 - What is the overpopulation trigger?
 - Sage Grouse Life Cycle Areas (not enough info)
 - Are there Gaps in Bonding?
 - Potential for severe invasive, infestations. (vs. great basin) cheatgrass

Group 3

What issues should the group focus on?

1. Economic impacts of the TBNG
 - a. P Dogs (forage loss)
 - b. Mineral development
 - c. Range/Grazing (communities)
 - d. Recreational-Who pays? And the impacts

Trickle down economic impacts on the whole communities.
2. Take/Keep a holistic or big picture of all the resources and how they interact. (don't forget this)
3. What are the gaps in knowledge regarding conditions on the TBNG
 - a. How many P-Dogs are on the TBNG (Population density)
 - b. P-Dog colony structures
 - c. P-Dog Populations dynamics
 - d. Real economic impacts to agricultural community, industry and state, international
 - e. Predator Populations and distribution (raptors, fox, ravens, coyote)
 - f. Predator (raptor) seasons
 - i. Are there more here in the winter? Yes
 - g. Economic impacts/structure of predator vs. prey dynamics (i.e. coyote vs. sheep)
 - h. Transference of economic risk (costs primarily)

i. Recreationist Contributions

Group 4**Issues**

1. Sage Grouse
 - a. In depth

Q2- Need data on SG predator effects on populations
2. Revenue lost to P.g.s
3. Length of time for veg. recovery on old p.d. mounds
4. Off-Road damage from public use (recreation) Atv.s etc. (research)
5. F.S. directives- who follows?
6. Inter-seeding for forage on grassland
7. How can we improve the grasslands
8. What is the purpose of the TBNG

Data Gaps

1. SG Predators
 - a. Effect on S.G. populations
 - b. Change in Predator Pops
2. Loss of revenue due to P.D.s
3. Length of time for veg recovery on P.D. towns
4. Comparison of reclamation land to undisturbed areas
5. Effect of disturbance > Go-back arid

(Mechanics, fire, spray, etc) on veg
6. Interaction of P.D. and sagebrush
7. Effects of P.D. dusting on Plovers and other wildlife
8. Incidence of swift fox on grasslands

Group 5**Issues**

1. Realistic Principles of on-site Conditions (Bare ground in towns)
2. Defined methods of control & data of effectiveness (Prairie dog)
3. Ability to impact ESA rules & rulings & economic consequences of listing
4. Accountability of management decisions, actions & Non-actions
5. Consequences of SG core designation (private property rights)
 - a. Future species in addition to sage grouse

6. Prioritization of interests (livelihoods vs species)
7. Better mapping & representation of private lands w/in TBNG
8. Education & Outreach
9. Healthy rangelands & ecosystems
 - a. What makes/maintains
10. Consistency w/in agencies
 - a. Transfer of knowledge
 - b. Personal bias
11. Synthesizing research done in relation to sagebrush and SB ecosystems

Knowledge Gaps

1. Diverse uses of TBNG & Public knowledge of
2. Gap in communication between landowners & others based on differences in knowledge & experiences
3. Sharing of Knowledge & information
4. Ecological site description (vs 7" stable height) Baseline research
5. Accurate mapping of colonies & rate of expansion & conditions that attract colonization

Group 6

Focus Items

1. Prairie Dog Control
2. Please bring more Rain!
3. Better productive communication
4. The general public likes to focus on prairie dogs being good, but grazing is not. Educate folks—it's the opposite.
5. The F.S. & the WG&F, F&Ws need to make the decision about b.f.f re-introduction. Yes or No, then move on
6. TBNG economic benefits need to be stressed, especially with downturn of coal and oil and Gas, and railroading as well.
 - a. Roads, schools, tax base all effected. Time to tighten our belts.
7. Funding can't always be the reason on why we can't get things done
8. Respect private property rights-especially for prairie dog control
9. Coordination is a key focus issue of coordination and cooperation
10. How does the WY Trespass statute affect the "3-C's" and data collection
11. Use sound science in decision-making
12. Is there going to be more emphasis on LEXs and funding in the future?
13. Resolve location & solutions of "shooting signs"

Knowledge Gaps

1. Those who live here & those who read about it or study it have different knowledge and opinions
2. Do we have study evidence of P.D.
 - a. Densities (Per Ac.) on TBNG
 - b. At what age do they breed?
 - c. How & when & why do they disperse? How far?
3. -Interpretation
-Translation
-Sharing information
-Media accuracy

All essential for the working group to get solutions