

# Thunder Basin National Grassland Collaborative Learning Workshop

April 12, 2017

Overview and happenings - Shane Walker (USFS)

- TBNG and Med Bow/Routt = 2.9 million acres
- Douglas Range District manages all of TBNG
  - This district is distinctive in having largely intermingled private-FS lands
  - Workload: primary focus is energy (especially coal on TBNG)
  - Year-round grazing (unlike many other FS lands)
  - Controversy managing sage-grouse, prairie dogs, and T&E species (> 40 sensitive and threatened species in TBNG)
  - Fires managed with direct control (immediate extinguishment)
- Prairie dog colony management
  - See 2015 BT Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Strategy (available on Ruckelshaus Institute website)
  - Have started mapping colonies through the TBG Prairie Ecosystem Association
  - Contracting out control using lethal and non-lethal methods (contract fell through on latter)
  - Looking at grassland/prairie restoration projects
  - TBGPEA CCAA covers eight species, voluntary program
- Questions
  - What determines public domain lands in TBNG?
    - BLM maps(?)
  - Will non-lethal contract be renewed?
    - Will probably try to reallocate funds

History on acquisitions of the grasslands – Bob Harshbarger

- Original congressional intent – land utilization projects
- Funds to purchase sub-marginal homesteads in 1934/5
- “Control erosion, produce more forage, ensure economic stability for rural residents”
- 1937 executive order: withdrawal of public domain lands for agriculture
- All vacant lands were temporarily withdrawn from sale, reserved for Department of Ag
- 1937-1953: Soil Conservation Service managed land utilization projects
- 1953: management turned over to USFS
- Bankhead Jones Act: conservation/restoration, multiple use introduced in amendment
- BJA: “Balanced rural urban growth”
- 1978: US Supreme Court case – federal lands must be managed for original use

Presentation on collaboration by Jessica Western (available on Ruckelshaus Institute website)

Questions and comments

- Are ferrets in fact not being reintroduced?
  - Not up to the USFS, decision lies with UWFWS and WGFD

- USFWS delegated authority to WGFD as the lead regarding reintroduction
- Current status is that ferrets won't be reintroduced(?)
- Is there a way to get quicker reactions from FS? For example, regarding reseeding
  - This is in a sage-grouse core area, but should be able to do no-till
  - Need to do archaeological surveys
  - Executive order doesn't preclude no-till reseeding
  - USFS: falls under surface-disturbing activity because this area hasn't been farmed
  - USFS: asking for more time, but supports plan
- Permittees are raising additional money for bait, Peabody and conservation districts looking to provide money too
- Has northeastern Wyoming done any cloud seeding?
  - No
- Aren't enough official reporting stations for weather
- Conservation perspective – TBNG is an important area, ferrets can provide control and incentives for landowners, interested in some areas of no control or non-lethal control, interested in collaborating on revegetation

#### Information needs

- Cloud seeding
- Toolbox of control methods
- Prairie dog data (densities)
- How to leverage existing resources for restoration
- Emergency funding for ranchers in trouble
  - FSA insurance program based on NDVI
  - Can enroll in FSA even if you're leasing
- WGFD regarding ferrets