

Thunder Basin National Grassland Collaborative Learning Workshop October 11, 2017

Introductions and Updates:

- Shane Walker
 - Introduce Carolyn Upton, Deputy Forest Supervisor for Medicine Bow
 - New Forest Supervisor: Russ Bacon, beginning Nov. 13
- Hale Redding:
 - Started management efforts this week
- Update from conservation groups: Chamois Anderson (DoW) and Kristy Bly (WWF)
 - What does it look like if we agree that Category 1 is a place where forage can't be produced? Can we manage boundaries opportunistically
- Bob Harshbarger: TBNG is specifically for agriculture; livestock grazing is the fundamental purpose of the lands out here under the Bankhead-Jones Act.

Results from Meeting in September:

- Jessica Western presents collaborative learning progress so far
- Presented PowerPoint
 - Tammy Hooper (Congressman Cheney): When will there be progress made and implementation?
 - Jean Harshbarger: Reseeding requires an archaeological survey, and there is no staff to do it.
 - Chamois Anderson: Cactus abatement will occur soon. Defenders of Wildlife will contribute to reseeding in the spring.
 - Conservation district staff and others explained that much implementation has already taken place but needs to be documented.
 - Jessica passed out TBNG Implementation Survey, to be completed by the Ruckelshaus Institute by December (may put on website) which will document the implementation that has taken place by all stakeholders since June 2016.
 - Tony Lehner: USFS must address long-term solutions and determine a minimum population baseline.
 - Jim: Not good to let the prairie dogs "bunch up." Management is important.
 - Bob Harshbarger: Agree that USFS must provide viable population data for prairie dogs. Three prairie dogs per acre is sustainable.
- Hand out "Thunder Basin CL and CWG: Options for Solutions"

Shane Walker Presentation:

- Plague update on NFS land and grassland:
 - Began monitoring in June
 - Estimated 11,000 grassland acres affected in August, 2017
 - Now (October, 2017) 37,000 acres affected
 - Last spring, estimated 43,000 acres of prairie dog colonies
 - October 2017 authorizations:
 - TBGA's Seebaum cactus spraying project
 - TBGA's Fiddleback cactus spraying project
 - TBGA's 4W restoration project

- Use Centennial Woods to build prairie dog fences (Laramie)
- What about shooting ban?
 - Chamois: Data sheet should additionally capture information on what decisions were *rejected*. Absence of a decision should also be captured.
 - Were there any proposals for management that were expressly rejected?
- Bob Harshbarger: The 2001 Plan ended and is no longer relevant

Nicole Bjornlie: Black-footed ferrets presentation

- Endangered Species Act discussion
 - No critical habitat § 10(j) designation for ferrets in Wyoming; ferrets would only be considered endangered on USFWS (refuge) land
 - Recovery of ferrets: An achievable goal, with invasive plague the biggest obstacle. Not an immediate concern with TBNG.
 - Current estimate for ferrets: 2 populations in Wyoming; 300 nationally
- Inter-Agency effort incorporates involvement from:
 - WGFD (lead agency)
 - FWS
 - APHIS Wildlife Services
 - BLM
 - USFS
 - NRCS
 - DoA
 - Conservation Districts
 - Wyoming Weed and Pest
 - State Lands
 - Tribes
- Information relevant to landowners:
 - Site-specific management plans
 - Adjacent landowner cooperation
- Questions:
 - Poisoning restrictions in 10(j)-designated areas, specifically anti-coagulants?

Flipchart Notes:

Outline of Discussion:

What is happening now? Why, where, when, and how? → What's working, what isn't, and where is nothing happening? → Can density be a way to tackle acres? → Strategy → Plan

Group Ideas for Consideration: Options for Solutions

- Collectively fundraise/ create a grass bank/ savings fund for offsetting forgone forage in Category 1
- Eliminate all prairie dogs (proposed by Harshbargers)
- Use Centennial Woods (Laramie company) to build prairie dog fences
- Finish documenting group suggestions and related actions/ inactions
- Gather more information on prairie dog population dynamics and behaviors.
- Create ad-hoc group to tackle habitat restoration projects: Dave, Cheryl, Chamois
 - Include timelines, location, methods, spring meeting, summer implementation schedule

- Consider working with UW on grass banking with support from private landowners—create a “model farm”
- Group Goal: Determine how many prairie dogs and acres we need to sustain them, and where this should be? Related questions...
 - Consider prairie dog density per acre
 - Consider differences between white and black-tailed prairie dogs (invite Pam Wanek, prairie dog expert)
 - What is the future of the shooting ban in 2018?
 - Has 2001 Plan ended?