

**Learning from the Past
and Looking to the Future:
Sage-grouse Conservation in Idaho**

Workshop Summary

**November 2 and 3, 2007
Sun Valley, Idaho**

Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future: Sage-grouse Conservation in Idaho

Workshop Summary

Overview

On November 2 and 3, 2007 the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) convened a workshop titled, *Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future: Sage-grouse Conservation in Idaho*, in Sun Valley, Idaho.

In 1997 the IDFG completed the first statewide sage-grouse management plan, in 1998 the first Local Working Groups were formally initiated, and in 2006 Idaho completed an extensively revised and collaboratively developed management plan titled, *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho*. The Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC)¹, in coordination with IDFG conceived of and developed the idea for a workshop designed to foster a review of sage-grouse conservation efforts in Idaho during the last decade, reflect on what has been learned, and identify areas that warrant focused attention and resources in the next ten years. A corollary purpose of the workshop was to assemble Local Working Group (LWG) representatives from throughout the state of Idaho in order to encourage an active dialog and provide opportunities for these unique individuals to meet with one another. The agenda for the workshop is provided in Attachment A.

The workshop was funded through the cooperative efforts of Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Land Management, the Office of Species Conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Specific workshop objectives included:

- Review of the aggregate actions of LWGs, land management agencies, individuals, and others, to increase sage-grouse populations and enhance sage-grouse habitat during the last ten years;
- Share lessons learned among LWG members and other participants;
- Learn about Idaho's habitat restoration emphasis areas;
- Learn about the state of Idaho's plans for conserving sage-grouse and their habitats;
- Learn about the range of potential sage-grouse conservation funding sources; and
- Identify needs and priorities for the next ten years in Idaho.

Approximately eighty individuals including LWG members from throughout Idaho, private citizens and landowners, non-governmental organizations, and state and federal agency representatives participated in the event. A list of all participants including their contact information is included in Attachment B (this information is provided at the request of, and with the permission of, the workshop participants). The following document summarizes the workshop presentations, discussions, and group process outcomes.

¹ The SAC is an Idaho state level advisory body comprised of representatives of most of the state's LWGs (representatives of LWGs started in 2006 have not been formally appointed to the SAC at this time), representatives of a variety of non-governmental organizations, industry, and technical representatives from a variety of state and federal agencies. Sage-grouse Advisory Committee members were appointed by IDFG in 2003, their purpose at that time was described as "...helping all Idahoans, and especially LWGs, by making sure they have the funding, support, and information they need to put meaningful sage-grouse conservation on the ground."

A note on the development of this workshop summary document: *This meeting summary is intended to provide an accurate record of what transpired at the workshop. However, the content of this document presents a summary of the event, and is not intended to represent verbatim minutes of the workshop. In developing this summary, a preliminary draft was distributed to workshop speakers and they were asked to review the summary and provide any clarification and/or correction necessary to accurately portray their presentations and/or responses to questions. The workshop planners hope that this document will be of interest and value to LWGs and others.*



Photo by Gene Gray

NOVEMBER 2, 2007

Poster Session and Social

The workshop kicked off on Friday evening, with an opening reception and poster sessions.

Poster titles included: *Curlew National Grassland Vegetation and Sage-grouse Seasonal Habitat Use*; *Employing Citizen Scientists to Expand Sage-grouse Lek Surveys in the Magic Valley*; *Jarbidge Sage-grouse Local Working Group Projects*; *Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances – a Novel Approach to a Local Working Group Conservation Plan*; *Seasonal Movements of Greater Sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus) in an Isolated Population in West-Central Idaho*; *Owyhee County Local Sage-grouse Working Group Projects*; and *North American Grouse Partnership*.²

Banquet, Keynote and Award Ceremony

Workshop participants enjoyed a banquet dinner after which Jim Unsworth, the Wildlife Bureau Chief for IDFG, welcomed everyone and conveyed IDFG Director Cal Groen's regrets that he was not able to attend in person due to an unforeseen scheduling conflict.

Mr. Unsworth expressed admiration and appreciation for the hard work and dedication shown by the LWG members throughout Idaho. He commented that extensive efforts are ongoing rangewide to identify, develop and implement, effective planning tools and conservation actions to protect and conserve sage-grouse and their habitats. He pointed out that Idaho had consistently been a leader in these efforts. In closing, Mr. Unsworth stated that from his perspective, the *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho* was one of the best of the state plans developed to this point.

Nate Fisher, the Administrator of the Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC), was the keynote speaker for the evening. Administrator Fisher spoke about the importance of the LWG's efforts to develop local sage-grouse conservation plans, and also of the SAC's work in completing the state conservation plan. He also complimented the LWGs for their on-the-ground work in implementing specific projects and actions to benefit sage-grouse populations and their habitats and noted the importance of getting credit for all of these efforts.

Administrator Fisher stated that Governor Otter is very committed to sage-grouse conservation and that the Governor had taken a uniquely active role in working to ensure timely rehabilitation work on the recent Murphy Complex Fire. Administrator Fisher spoke at some length about the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the varied challenges associated with the Act. In particular, he noted the top down nature of the ESA and highlighted Idaho's desire to find a balance between the bottom up efforts of the LWGs and the top down nature of the ESA.

² Note the conference organizers overlooked assembling a list of all the posters presented, so this list is incomplete. Apologies to anyone who presented a poster that is not listed here.

In closing, Administrator Fisher said that he was looking forward to the presentations and discussions scheduled for the second day of the workshop. He explained that he also hoped to share OSC's concerns about the legal status of sage-grouse and engage with the participants in a discussion here, and then later at individual LWG meetings, about the best approaches for moving forward.

At this point Tom Hemker, the IDFG sage-grouse coordinator, and Jim Unsworth presented canvas tote bags embroidered with the image of two sage-grouse to representatives of each LWG. The bags were presented as a token of the IDFG's appreciation for each LWG's unique efforts to develop local conservation plans and implement the conservation actions identified in those plans. Tom Hemker individually singled out each of the LWGs and noted their specific accomplishments. Representatives from each LWGs were given a set of canvas totes to distribute to members of their LWGs.

Photos by Gene Gray



NOVEMBER 3, 2007

Welcome and Introductions

Jim Unsworth welcomed all the participants to the second day of the workshop and introduced the two facilitators, Wendy Green Lowe with P2 Solutions, and Alison Squier with Ziji Creative Resources.

Wendy Green Lowe reviewed the day's agenda and workshop objectives with the participants and invited each participant to introduce him or herself. Based on suggestions from the participants, the group agreed to the following ground rules for the workshop:

- Turn off cell phones
- No personal attacks
- One person speaks at a time
- No speeches
- Respect
- No one dominate

Presentation I. State of the Sage-grouse in Idaho

Tom Hemker started off the workshop with an overview of Idaho's sage-grouse conservation efforts from 1996 through 2007. He identified the following key dates and associated actions:

- 1997 – First Idaho state plan was completed
- 1998 – First LWGs established
- 1999 – First sage-grouse ESA petition filed
- 2002 – OSC appropriation
- 2003 – Sage-grouse Advisory Committee formed
- 2005 – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “not warranted” decision
- 2006 – Revised Idaho state sage-grouse conservation plan completed
- 2007 – Rangewide strategy completed

Tom explained that the sage-grouse occupy a very large range, which includes 11 states and 2 provinces. There are a variety of conservation efforts occurring at the rangewide, state and LWG scale. Important to these efforts was the completion in 2004, of the *Conservation Assessment for Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats* was completed (see http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/Docs/Greater_Sage-grouse_Conservation_Assessment_060404.pdf); and in 2007 of a national strategy titled, *Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy*, (<http://www.wafwa.org/pdf/GreaterSage-grouseConservationStrategy2006.pdf>). Tom noted that presently there are over 70 LWGs rangewide.

In Idaho, LWGs are the heart of Idaho's conservation strategy. The LWGs provide a forum to discuss local issues, provide local knowledge necessary to do local planning, and build support for local projects. There are currently 13 Sage-grouse Planning Areas and 10 LWGs in Idaho. Tom presented the following summary of the start dates for each of Idaho's LWGs:

- Shoshone Basin – 1994
- Owyhee – 1998
- Greater Curlew – 1998
- Upper Snake – 1998
- Jarbidge – 1999
- Challis – 2002
- West Central – 2004
- East Idaho Uplands – 2006
- Big Desert – 2006
- North Magic Valley – 2006

Tom also spoke briefly about the role of the SAC, which he described as improving statewide communication, helping write/revise the state plan, helping prioritize activities, recommend projects for funding, and helping to locate resources needed to get conservation actions and projects implemented.

In 2006, Idaho completed a revised state plan titled, *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho*, which includes a Memorandum of Understanding between the state of Idaho by and through the state Department of Agriculture, IDFG, Department of Lands, OSC, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.³ The goal of the state plan, is to “Maintain, improve, and, where possible, increase sage-grouse populations in Idaho while considering the predictability and long-term sustainability of a variety of other land uses.”

Tom noted that the state plan was designed to provide guidance and a toolbox of conservation measures that can be used and/or adapted by LWGs in the development and/or revision of their own local plans. The state plan includes descriptions of 19 threats and a suite of conservation measures for each threat. Completed LWG conservation plans are included as appendices to the plan.⁴ As additional LWG conservation plans are completed they will also be added to the state plan.

Tom moved next to a summary of some of the conservation efforts that have been accomplished in the last decade. Since 2002, 118 sage-grouse conservation projects have been approved, approximately \$1.2 million has been spent implementing those projects, and another \$200,000 is currently committed. The types of

³ The completed state plan is available at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/hunt/grouse/conserves_plan/

⁴ The completed LWG plans to date are available at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/hunt/grouse/conserves_plan/local_workgroups.cfm

projects include: habitat improvement (52), inventory (31), LWG support (18), state plan support (4), educational (5), and disease related (2).

He also talked about the efforts and resources associated with monitoring populations and habitat in Idaho. In order to establish the status of sage-grouse in Idaho, IDFG uses lek counts/routes, lek surveys, wing data, chick:adult ratios, nest success, mortality data, and other data. Tom reported that mapping and monitoring has improved a great deal over the years. For example, the number of leks counted has increased significantly over the last 20 years. In 1986 178 leks were counted; in 1996 387 leks were counted; in 2006 660 leks were counted; and in 2007 827 leks were counted.

Tom provided the following summary of trends in hunting data, which in combination with other information is important to tracking population trends:

- 1986 – 11,200 hunters hunt 35,700 days, harvest 37,900 grouse
- 1996 – 12,000 hunters hunt 45,100 days, harvest 21,000 grouse
- 2006 – 8,900 hunters hunt 18,000 days, harvest 12,500 grouse

In closing Tom pointed to some of the coming challenges noting that finding adequate resources to implement plans, implementing the existing LWG plans, and monitoring outcomes were among the top priorities for the coming years. He also commented that he looked forward to hearing what the workshop participants would identify as their top priorities at the end of the workshop.

A copy of Tom Hemker's presentation is presented in Attachment C and will be posted on the IDFG web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>.

Questions and Answers on Presentation I

Question: Chapter 6 states the following in regard to implementation:

Following are specific conservation measure related milestones identified in this Plan. At present this state Plan does not identify specific milestones for a number of the statewide threats including: infrastructure, livestock impacts, human disturbance, West Nile Virus, prescribed fire, seeded perennial grassland, climate change, conifer encroachment, isolated populations, predation, urban/exurban development, sagebrush control, insecticides, agricultural expansion, Mines, landfills, and gravel pits, and falconry.

That seems like a long list of threats for which no actions are identified. When will you assign implementation dates for all the rest of the threats?

Tom Hemker Response: You're right that there are quite a few threats for which we have not yet identified a specific implementation milestone. That prioritization is part of what we hope to begin to address this afternoon in the working sessions.

Presentation II. Wildfire and Sage-grouse: Challenges and Opportunities in Idaho

Paul Makela, a wildlife biologist with the Idaho state office of the BLM gave a presentation titled, *Wildfire and Sage-grouse: Challenges and Opportunities in Idaho*.

Paul explained that wildfire was identified as the number one threat in the state plan followed by infrastructure development and annual grasslands. He showed a map of southern Idaho showing wildfire areas between 1970 and 2003, which indicated that much of the Snake River Plain and Jarbidge area has experienced wildfire at least once over the past 35 plus years. He noted that many of those burns occurred in sage-grouse habitat such as the Big Desert, Minidoka Desert, and Jarbidge.

The BLM's wildfire suppression approach, Paul indicated, includes using District Fire Management Plans, which incorporate resource values such as sage-grouse habitat maps, and other similar tools; active use of resource advisors; and in some cases (e.g., approaching storms) pre-positioning equipment where and when it is possible. Because suppression resources are limited, the BLM must prioritize their approach to wildfire suppression.

The BLMs prioritization is: 1) attend to human life risks first; 2) protect private property such as homes and other structures; 3) address key resource concerns such as sage-grouse habitat, big game winter range; and then 4) consider other factors. However, Paul explained, in the event of multiple starts fire crews may be stretched thin until additional resources become available. For example one July 16, 2007 storm led to 22 fires in the south-central Idaho zone and six of those grew to become the Murphy Complex Fire.

Paul remarked that from 2003 to 2006 Idaho BLM was involved with 1,400 wildfires. Of those 87% were less than 300 acres, and 93% were less than 1,000 acres. Overall, he explained, the majority of fires are successfully suppressed. He pointed out, however, that, according to fire managers, the intensity and severity of Idaho's fires is increasing. Also, the magnitude of recent fires are such that sage-grouse habitat lost due to wildfire is far outpacing the ability to implement recovery and restoration efforts.

He went on to say that an important question is why some of these fires are getting so large. The BLM uses fire/fuel models to indicate the relative wildland fire risk. Relative wildland fire risk is the likelihood that a given area will burn based on several factors including: 1) a higher ignition probability, 2) a higher frequency of extreme fire weather, and 3) fuels having a higher rate of spread. For example areas rated as having a high wildland fire risk are likely to have more fire ignitions, higher rates of spread, and relatively hotter, drier, and windier conditions in August. The wildland fire risk is currently high or moderately high in much of the Snake River Plain.

Paul pointed out that ignition probability, which is the number of starts per four kilometers square per 20 years, derived from all ignitions recorded from federal and state lands (both human and lightning caused) is generally low in much of southern Idaho. However, the relative rate of spread is high in much of the same southern Idaho area. So fires, when they occur under the right conditions, can get large very quickly. The relative rate of spread is estimated based on the predominant surface fuel model, which is keyed on fuels that would be the primary carriers of wildland fire (e.g., grass, brush, timber, and logging slash).

The 2007 fire year, Paul said, was the worst fire year on record – possibly since 1910. The 2007 fire season was characterized by record high temperatures, low fuel moistures, and windy conditions. Over 2 million acres burned statewide in 2007. Paul explained that of those 2 million-plus acres, the number of acres of sage-grouse

habitat potentially affected, recognizing that some areas within fire perimeters did not burn or may only have burned lightly:

- 390,000 acres of key habitat (about 4% of the total key habitat)
- 287,000 acres of perennial grass (about 10% of the total perennial grass)
- 32,000 acres of annual grass (primarily cheatgrass)
- 26,000 acres with conifer encroachment (juniper)

To address such a large scale need for action, the BLM is using several approaches including: 1) emergency stabilization, 2) burned area rehabilitation, 3) restoration (e.g., Healthy Lands Initiative), and 4) fuels management (e.g., fuel breaks, cheatgrass control, etc.)

Paul noted that Idaho has one of the largest emergency stabilization/burned area rehabilitation programs in the entire BLM, and that in busy fire years, it constitutes a major workload to Field Office staff. For example, this summer and fall BLM staff are involved with 99 Burned Area Rehabilitation Plans and 61 Emergency Stabilization Plans inclusive of this year's (2007) fires as well as those with work remaining from 2005 and 2006 fires.

Emergency stabilization funding and activities, Paul explained, address immediate effects of the fire as related to human health, safety and property concerns (e.g., removing hazard trees, erosion control structures, certain seedings, protective fencing, etc.) to prevent unacceptable degradation of natural resources. For fiscal year 2008, BLM requested over \$5.6 million in emergency stabilization funding for Idaho fires. This request included funding for emergency stabilization actions from fires that occurred in 2005, 2006, and 2007. The Murphy Complex Fire comprises 72% of the total request. It is important to note, Paul said, that current implementation is contingent on dollars being allocated in the Continuing Resolution.

In contrast, Paul explained, burned area rehabilitation addresses the longer term needs of wildlife habitat and is intended to: 1) repair or improve fire damaged lands that are unlikely to recover naturally, and 2) to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. For fiscal year 2008, Idaho BLM requested \$15.8 million for burned area rehabilitation actions; although it is probable the state will get much less than the full request. Notably, over half of the fiscal year 2008 request is attributable to the Murphy Complex Fire.

Funding shortfalls in emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation requests will present challenges, and as a result it is possible that some burned area rehabilitation projects will not occur this year. Aside from emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation efforts, Idaho BLM's fuels program is actively involved with various fuels management projects, such as juniper management, cheatgrass control, and creation of fuel breaks, that complement and contribute to habitat rehabilitation/restoration efforts. To accomplish needed rehabilitation, Paul explained, the BLM will need to engage partners and also possibly tap into other funding sources such as Healthy Lands Initiative.

A copy of Paul Makela's presentation is presented in Attachment D and will be posted on the IDFG web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>.

Questions and Answers on Presentation II

Question: How successful have the burned area rehabilitations that have gone on so far been?

Paul Makela response: It varies. There are many factors that must be taken into consideration. For example, vagaries of the weather, such as drought, often influence the success and effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts, in spite of the use of appropriate seed mixtures and planting techniques. Alan Sands may be able to address that issue in additional detail during his talk.

Presentation III. Sage-grouse Habitat Restoration Program: An Initiative to Facilitate Landscape-scale Sagebrush Steppe restoration

Alan Sands, who is employed by The Nature Conservancy, but is currently working on sage-grouse issues under contract for IDFG, gave a presentation titled, *Sage-grouse Habitat Restoration Program: An initiative to facilitate landscape-scale sagebrush steppe restoration*.

Alan has been hired by IDFG to identify Restoration Emphasis Areas for the state of Idaho. Alan began by outlining the habitat restoration program elements that provide a context for the identification of Restoration Emphasis Areas, these include:

- Building coalitions (e.g., agencies, organizations, individuals);
- Working across boundaries (private, tribal, state, federal);
- Designing and implementing restoration projects;
- Ensuring restoration monitoring;
- Improving restoration science;
- Disseminating information;
- Obtaining cooperative funding; and
- Identifying and focusing work on important grouse habitats through identification of Restoration Emphasis Areas.

Alan explained that most sage-grouse habitats in Idaho have been altered. There are many degrees of alteration, and there are many more areas to restore than we have resources available to address. Additionally, not all areas are, or were, equally valuable to sage-grouse. Therefore there is a need to prioritize restoration efforts – which is the purpose of identifying Restoration Emphasis Areas.

Restoration Emphasis Areas are areas of former or low quality habitat. They include:

- Degraded key habitats;
- Perennial or annual grass invaded habitats;
- Conifer invasion habitats;
- Areas that will build on existing intact habitat; and

- Areas that if improved and/or restored will result in significant positive sage-grouse population response.

In order to identify Restoration Emphasis Areas a number of approaches and tools are being used. These include: expert knowledge; use of 1:100,000 topo base maps with sage-grouse habitat and sage-grouse lek information overlain on them; and consultation with knowledgeable people to identify the areas where restoration efforts will realize the greatest benefits to sage-grouse.

Alan reported that he is currently working to coordinate this mapping work with other related efforts (e.g., Healthy Lands Initiative, Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative, and the Mule Deer Initiative) in order to prepare relatively comprehensive draft Restoration Emphasis Area maps. Once the draft maps are complete he plans to schedule visits with each of Idaho's LWGs to present the draft maps and ask for additional input and help verifying the information contained in them. The information collected as a result of the LWG visits will be incorporated and then the maps will be finalized and used to help guide the prioritization and implementation of restoration work.

Alan pointed out that once the maps are "finalized" they are still not "final." The "final" maps will be constantly modified with new information (e.g., when a project is completed, or conditions change, or new population or habitat data is available). Nevertheless, IDFG anticipates that the maps will provide a valuable tool to LWGs and others in prioritizing restoration efforts. In the coming months, Alan said he looks forward to visiting with LWGs throughout the state to review the draft maps.

A copy of Alan Sand's presentation is presented in Attachment E and will be posted on the IDFG web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>.

Questions and Answers on Presentation III

Question: When you go to the LWG to show them the draft Restoration Area Emphasis maps will you give them criteria to use in evaluating the maps?

Alan Sands Response: We're looking for local knowledge and expertise. For example, when we showed the folks in the West Central the draft map, there was an area on the map that we'd identified as an emphasis area, but Joe Hinson pointed out that that sagebrush was coming in well on its own. Then we went out on the ground and we saw that was the case and ended up modifying the map to incorporate this more accurate information. That's the kind of local knowledge we'll be looking for. Its important to remember that information will continue to be updated over time too, so the maps will never be static.

Presentation IV. Sage-grouse: Legal Status and Next Steps

Office of Species Conservation's Administrator Nate Fisher, and the Office of Species Conservation's attorney, Tom Perry gave a presentation on the current, and potential future legal status of sage-grouse. They also talked about OSC's vision of possible alternatives for moving forward.

Nate Fisher started out by stating that sage-grouse are a priority for Governor Otter. “You’ve all worked hard and we really appreciate what you’ve done,” he said adding that, “The Governor strongly believes that the bottom up approach is the most effective.” Administrator Nate Fisher commented that each LWG has its own unique characteristics and he applauded the participants saying, “You’re getting projects on the ground! If we can do anything to empower you – we will do so.” However, he also said he wanted to share the OSC’s concerns about the future of sage-grouse relative to the outcome of the Western Watershed Project lawsuit and possible future listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Tom Perry gave a presentation on behalf of the OSC titled, *Sage-grouse: Legal Status and Next Steps*. He began with a background overview, explaining that in January 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined sage-grouse did not warrant federal protection under the ESA. Tom noted that the USFWS did not rely on state conservation measures in reaching their decision. However, they did evaluate the various states’ plans (this was before the Idaho state plan was completed) and determined that 20 measures range-wide met the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE).⁵

In July 2006, Governor Risch signed the *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho*. Also in July 2006, Western Watersheds Project filed suit in federal court seeking to invalidate the USFWS decision not to list. Tom pointed out that this litigation challenges the entire range-wide decision not to list; therefore, an adverse court ruling would force the USFWS to review the status of the species both in Idaho as well as the other ten western states that are part of the sage-grouse range. Judge Winmill has had this case under advisement since mid-July. Regardless of whether the judge upholds the USFWS decision, Tom Perry pointed out, the sage-grouse issue is not likely to wane in intensity and presents substantial uncertainty for the eleven states the species inhabits – including Idaho.

Tom Perry pointed to a number of uncertainties that impact that state’s ability to plan for the future. These included:

- Uncertainty about when Judge Winmill will rule;
- Uncertainty regarding how long the USFWS will have to evaluate the status of the species if the Judge rules in favor of plaintiff; and
- Uncertainty regarding who will occupy the White House beginning in 2009.

Tom outlined two different scenarios based on possible outcomes of Judge Winmill’s decision. In one scenario, in November 2007 Judge Winmill rules in favor of the plaintiff initiating a 6-month Status Review. This would result in a new decision from the USFWS in May or June of 2008. If the USFWS finding was “not warranted” again, there would probably be a new lawsuit filed with a decision due by the end of July 2009. This would result in yet another decision by a new Administration. In another scenario, in November 2007, Judge Winmill rules in favor of the defendant. By December or January 2007 it is probable that new petitions to list would be filed. Then by about January 2009, a new decision regarding listing status made by a new Administration could be expected.

⁵ To learn more about PECE see: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/listing/pece-final.html>. To learn more about the Endangered Species Act in general go to: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/policy/index.html>.

Regardless of Judge Winmill's decision, Tom said, the OSC believes there will be another status review of sage-grouse. One of the challenges presented by the ESA is it requires the USFWS to make a difficult biological prediction (foreseeable future 30-100 years) within a very narrow timeframe (1 year) based on the information available. Because the status of the species has not dramatically changed since the last review (2005-2008), it is probable that there will be increased attention on the states' plans.

On October 4, 2007 Administrator Fisher met with Governor Otter concerning the sage-grouse issue. The Governor's direction was for OSC to assemble a Task Force to explore all alternatives. The OSC believes that we need to seriously consider and/or implement the following:

- Make current and future investments in sage-grouse conservation;
- Reexamine the state plan to create or modify existing measures in order to provide more certainty of implementation and effectiveness;
- Ensure that the state plan has adequate flexibility to make the case for precluding listing, but also account for post-listing; and
- Ensure that LWGs are getting proper credit under the ESA for their dedicated work.

Tom Perry presented a possible suite of alternative actions:

- No action (keep the state and LWG plans just as they are)
- Modify chapters 4 and 6 of the State Plan
- LWGs and/or others write individual Candidate Conservation Agreements⁶/ Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances⁷, ancillary to the State Plan
- Other alternatives?

He also outlined the next steps proposed by OSC to begin to address these uncertainties:

- November and December – OSC would like to meet with individual LWGs to discuss how to resolve the bottom-up/top-down tension facing Idaho.

⁶ Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) are formal agreements between the USFWS and one or more parties to address the conservation needs of proposed or candidate species, or species likely to become candidates, before they become listed as endangered or threatened. The participants voluntarily commit to implementing specific actions that will remove or reduce the threats to these species, thereby contributing to stabilizing or restoring the species so that listing is no longer necessary. The USFWS has entered into many CCAs over the years, primarily with other Federal agencies, State and local agencies, and conservation organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy. Some of these have successfully removed threats to species and listing was avoided.

⁷ Private property owners may face land use restrictions if species found on their lands are listed under the ESA in the future. Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) are intended to provide some certainty about the future for private and other non-Federal property owners. Under a CCAA non-Federal property owners who voluntarily agree to manage their lands or waters to remove threats to candidate or proposed species receive assurances that their conservation efforts will not result in future regulatory obligations in excess of those they agree to at the time they enter into the agreement. Property owners may protect and enhance existing populations and habitats, restore degraded habitat, create new habitat, augment existing populations, restore historic populations, or undertake other activities on their lands to improve the status of candidate or proposed species. The management activities included in a CCAA must significantly contribute to eliminating the need to list the target species. In return for the participant's voluntary management, the USFWS will provide assurances that, in the event a species covered in the agreement is subsequently listed as endangered or threatened, the USFWS will not assert additional restrictions or require additional actions above those the property owner voluntarily committed to in the agreement.

For an overview description of CCAAs go to: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/pdfs/listing/cca.pdf>.

To see the handbook for developing a CCAA go to: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/candidates/ccaahandbook.html>.

- November and December – Assemble the Governor’s Task Force to explore the alternatives to better assist the State/LWGs in developing a path forward.
- January – Governor’s Task Force reports back to SAC detailing the progress made and to finalize the path forward for the State/LWGs.
- Tom Perry concluded his presentation by saying that the key to resolving the bottom up/top down tension that is brought about by the ESA is ongoing communication between OSC, the SAC the LWGs and other key parties.

A copy of OSC’s presentation is presented in Attachment F and will be posted on the IDFG web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>.

Questions and Answers on Presentation IV

Note on process: *An hour and a half was allotted on the agenda for this topic because the workshop planners anticipated there would be a large number of questions from the audience. In order to ensure that all participants had a chance to ask their question(s) and receive a response from the OSC, the facilitators passed out sheets of paper and asked participants to write down their questions. The facilitators proposed to read the questions to OSC and receive answers to as many questions as possible. If the allotted time ran out before all of the questions were answered, the questions from workshop participants would be forwarded to OSC and responses to all questions would be provided in the final workshop summary.*

One of the workshop participants objected to this process saying that he’d come because he wanted a dialog and that the proposed process did not foster a dialog. In response to this concern, Wendy Green Lowe asked everyone who had a question to raise their hands. Approximately 10 people raised their hands. Since the concern about having enough time did not seem to be as large an issue as planners had anticipate, Wendy suggested that those people who wished to ask the question from their seat do so, and those who felt more comfortable writing down their questions could also continue to use that approach.

Question: Do CCAAs [Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances] only apply to private lands?

Nate Fisher response: CCAAs only apply directly to private and state lands. This presents an obstacle to the State because sage-grouse habitat in Idaho is approximately 75% federal. Currently, we’re trying to develop CCAAs for private landowners in the West Central LWG and link those measures to federal permitted lands as well. Trying to develop a single program for conservation on private land and for conservation on public lands is challenging because while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can give solid assurances on private land, the Service cannot give the same level assurances on federal land. The difference ultimately lies with the mandates of section 7 of the Act.

Question: How would making the state plan PECE compliant meet Section 7 requirements for agencies should the species be listed?

Nate Fisher response: We're proposing some alternatives. We come humbly before you today with these alternatives. We want to come and talk with you about them. There's a difference between the public and the private we'll have to work out these details as we go forward. We understand the PECE policy has given a lot of folks cause for concern as it relates to modifying the State Plan. One of our efforts is to begin conversations with the Service and the BLM and reach a better understanding of the policy. The issue is not whether making the State Plan or LWG Plans PECE compliant will meet section 7 requirements because the PECE policy is only intended to apply to section 4 listing decisions. The real issue is whether modifications to the existing regulatory mechanisms (e.g. State or LWG Plans) prior to listing would affect the section 7 consultation process by giving landowners credit/assurances for the voluntary actions they undertook prior to listing. The only way the Service or BLM would provide these "assurances" is if landowners were willing to make commitments within their Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) or permits that reduces or mitigates threats to the species. This may already be taking place, but may not be package correctly or cataloged. That's part of the effort we want to undertake with you all.

Question: How are you prioritizing meeting with the LWGs? For example, the Jarbidge LWG has been impacted largely from the Murphy Complex fire.

Nate Fisher response: We recognize that the LWGs are unique. I think we should come and talk to you more about what we're thinking. Some groups have already talked to us. We're looking for opportunities for conservation and cooperation.

Tom Perry response: In terms of the question on priority – its like water rights, first in time is first in right. We'll work with you to do everything we can to adjust our schedules to come and meet with you. Each LWG will need to invite us if they want us to come and meet with them – we're not in the business of telling folks what to do.

Question: How are we going to get the USFWS to give us credit for the sage-grouse conservation infrastructure that has already been established across the West and particularly here in Idaho, including the 118 conservation projects that we have already completed?

Nate Fisher response: You're asking for the answer to the PECE riddle – how do you balance between the LWG and the federal responsibility? PECE has been around for a while, but PECE is pretty new in terms of its application. The answer is to get "credit" under the ESA you need both conservation actions and to undertake measures that will reduce or mitigate the impact of activities on the species. It's about putting rocks in the box. Some of those measures may already be underway in LWGs, but have not been properly cataloged or packaged in way to get "credit" under the ESA. That's part of the discussion we want to have with the individual LWGs.

Question: Sage-grouse recovery to avoid listing will require thinking outside the box. This means giving consideration to concepts that may not be universally popular. Establishing sanctuaries has been successful in restoring populations of non-migratory species. Sanctuaries can form the core, the anchor for a recovery program. Is it feasible to establish sanctuaries for sage-grouse? The question of feasibility is important because significantly large areas will have to be set aside.

Nate Fisher response: I think we should talk about that. Whether we call it a sanctuary or a conservation easement...we need to look for priority areas for habitat and funding to make those.

Question: We need other options than making the state plan PECE compliant. Due to a wide variety of interests represented the current plan is a product of compromise that is likely not possible under PECE. What are the options?

Nate Fisher response: We need to look at how conservation measures translate if the species were to be listed. How would it work in a Section 7 world?

Tom Perry response: The ESA doesn't have an analog between private and public lands otherwise individual CCAAs would be the easy answer. On public lands we have to think more carefully about PECE as a tool rather than a bar to doing good things for species. How you make the transition is an unanswered question no one is saying we'll take every conservation measure and make it mandatory. We want to look at appropriate site-specific conservation measures and then show an example of this to the USFWS to see if they think that would be adequate.

Question: We have 15+ projects that have been approved by the SAC and no funding to get these on-the-ground conservation projects done. What can the Governor's office and OSC do to increase the flow of money from the Federal level to the state (OSC) to get these projects funded? These are projects proposed by LWGs and already reviewed and approved by the SAC.

Nate Fisher response: These are important projects; they're good, they're reasonably priced. We're getting clamped down on as well in terms of funding. In the last appropriation we had funding for wolves, sage-grouse, snails, etc. Sage-grouse is an issues that is rising to the top of the heap. We're hopeful for additional funding. We're still in the delisting process for wolves. You have to get the best bang for the buck.

Question: What are the OSC and the Governor doing to provide funding for sage-grouse conservation?

Nate Fisher response: We pulled back dollars to go to the Murphy Complex Fire rehabilitation. There are lots of needs right now. These are important projects. We want to do everything we can.

Question: Fire is identified as the number one priority in the state plan. How do we get additional funding to deal with this?

Nate Fisher response: We're talking to the Congressional delegation, we're doing everything we can.

Question: I'm interested in the response by OSC to the Murphy and Jarbidge fires – I don't see OSC's presence at all in influencing how these things are being dealt with.

Nate Fisher response: One of OSC's missions is to coordinate with our sister natural resource agencies. Folks from the IDFG are the biological experts in these situations just like we are the policy and legal experts on the ESA. We coordinate closely with these folks to ensure that the Governor's message is getting through.

Question: You've suggested possible modifications to chapters 4 and 6 of the state plan, what do you have in mind?

Nate Fisher response: Yes, but we don't want to get ahead of all of you. We want to check on the level of specificity and see if it reaches the bar.

Question: It seems obvious that to conserve sage-grouse you have to conserve sage-grouse habitat with a no net loss philosophy. To accomplish that the level of funding and political resolve has to be way beyond what it has been so far. What are you going to do to address this?

Nate Fisher response: The funding issue is one of the office's top priorities and we are doing what we can. We're going to try to receive federal funds, leverage Farm Bill funds, and look for other sources.

Question: Listening to you, I'm starting to get the feeling that we're drifting away from bottom up management to top down management. Is that the way this is headed?

Nate Fisher response: You're not incorrect. We're facing a dynamic process. The ESA is the single most punitive piece of federal legislation ever crafted. Its very unfortunate, it looks at species by species, not by ecosystem. The great thing is that we've got this great energy on the ground. We support you 110%. We've got to figure out how to balance the top down nature of the ESA with the good bottom-up grass roots efforts of the LWGs. That's why we came up with the alternatives we're presented to you here today.

Question: How do we increase certainty on federal lands? Does this require new/amended land use plans?

Tom Perry response: You're right. We need to explore with USFWS how you meet PECE or as I stated earlier using it as a tool rather than a bar to doing good things for species. We have to look at putting more rocks in the box. Our endeavor is to ensure that those rocks provide more certainty in this uncertain situation. Natural resource and ESA issues are tough because if you look at the range and recent population trend of the species its difficult to imagine why federal protection under the Act is warranted.

That said, this is going to be the public lands use debate of the decade. We need to prepare for the short- and long-term. A model of lasting natural resource collaboration is emerging in the roadless issue. Roadless fights have been going on for forty years. Recently, the Secretary of Agriculture created a national advisory group to evaluate the different management recommendations of the separate states. So far it has worked very well. We hope that the Department of Interior would try something like that on this sage-grouse issue. It could end up saving a lot of money in litigation so that we could put the funds on the ground to restore sagebrush habitat.

Question: Threat to the species have dramatically changed since 2005, especially with oil and gas exploration (i.e., habitat fragmentation) on federal land in Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Western Colorado). A new status review will have to examine these threats regardless of population status. How can Idaho address these threats occurring regionally – outside our borders – without addressing regional population status and threats?

Nate Fisher response: We understand this is an 11 state issue. When you go back to the notion of putting together a collaborative group regionwide or nationwide, this would hopefully ensure the Act is being consistently interpreted from one region to the next. Without a cohesive strategy we will not achieve conservation and predictable levels of land use.

Question: Without listing grouse, how can local and state grouse plans have enough “teeth” to really protect habitat? For example, keeping occupied sage-grouse habitat from being developed by subdivisions?

Nate Fisher response: That's going to be a big issue. Historically land use development has had an impact. You all probably know more than I do about this. There's a group that's been getting together to talk about conservation easements called, "Working Farms and Forests" this is a good approach. This is going to be an ongoing issue and we're going to have to work together to address it.

Question: I have a comment on the PECE approach. I was involved in forming the West Central group. We created the LWGs and got people involved by telling them this is not a top down approach. We gained their trust, got the groups working but for them to go back to their LWGs and tell them this is going to happen – I feel like the trust they put in me has been violated. You'll need to come to each of the LWG and talk to them about this decision.

Nate Fisher response: We agree. We'll be there. As you know there have been attempts to reform the ESA. We know the bottom up is best, but we have to be mindful of the top-down nature of the Act.

Question: Every now and then the state has a budget surplus. Can OSC or the Governor's office do something to direct that surplus towards sage-grouse issues?

Nate Fisher response: As you know the primary source of funding for IDFG is license fees. They have limited resources. The OSC's original mandate was to work on listed species. In 2004 our mandate was changed to also incorporate rare and declining species. This will hopefully help us to protect more species from falling under the harrowing and punitive nature of the ESA or to get ahead of the ESA "listing" curve. If we can get more monitoring information early in the process, we can better ensure that the appropriate management response takes place. Species-by-species is short-sighted because someone will go after pygmy rabbits or something else. Currently there's no money specifically dedicated to dealing with the rare and declining species.

Question: Is it possible to have a conservation stamp for sage-grouse? Is this a way that we might raise some additional funds? Is this something OSC could look into?

Nate Fisher response: In the state of Idaho we have non-game license plates. However, that only brings in about \$500,000 a year, and you can't match Federal funds with that money. The dynamics of the Idaho Legislature concerning general funds going to IDFG has not gained traction. Montana came up with agreement to use a very small percentage of their general funds for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, which makes a big difference.

Question: How about measures such as water tap fees for wildlife?

Nate Fisher response: Sure, I invite you to come up with these ideas.

Question: Putting a bird on the ESA list doesn't do anything to conserve the bird. In fact, it could be worse to have it listed. Is it OSC's approach to do everything possible to conserve the species so that it won't be listed?

Nate Fisher response: We want to do everything we can. And we support what you've done 110%. Our goal has always been to conserve the species while maintaining Idaho's way of life. Implementation is contingent on funding. There's never enough money for anything. We're shooting for Congressional funding. Sage-grouse is a top priority for Governor Otter.

Question: You've alluded to the fact that USFWS doesn't have enough funding. It's been my experience in the past that they don't have enough scientists to determine if the species really warrant listing. With the funds you have, is there something dedicated to make sure good science is used?

Nate Fisher response: You've got this huge range. In some areas there are very abundant populations. In other areas they are close to winking out. The problem is the same as with bull trout. Some populations are doing really well others are not doing as well. Unfortunately, with the ESA you're guilty until proven innocent. This is no way to manage the species. There will never be enough money to do the science.

Tom Perry response: I'd like to add something to that. We've got some good folks like Jeff Foss (USFWS) who go out of their way to work collaboratively with other agencies and scientists to make sure they have the best information possible.

Question: These working groups have worked hard and compromised a great deal to come up with plans. Why hasn't the Governor's Office of Species Conservation been actively involved with these groups in developing these plans all along? Perhaps by having a Governor's representative in each group to participate in the plan development process.

Nate Fisher response: We've relied on the IDFG to be there. As Tom said earlier, part of our mission is to coordinate with our natural resource agencies to ensure that the Governor's voice is being heard of these important issues. We don't want to tell you what project you need to do.

Question: What commitment will you make to this group today to secure funding for implementation of LWG conservation projects during the next 12 months.

Nate Fisher response: We support the work of the LWGs. You've done a lot of really good, hard work. We recognize that. We'll do everything we can to secure funding. This is Governor Otter's number one priority.

Question: Many people believe that there needs to be change at the National level before Idaho invests a lot of energy in anything. What is your sense of momentum in Washington?

Nate Fisher response: This is a rangewide issue. Many people are talking to each other at different levels. It's hard to predict what will happen in Washington. We have a great opportunity right now to provide a lasting solution to this issue. Secretary Kempthorne, Steve Allred, Jim Caswell and others understand this issue, the West and Idaho. We need to tap into their expertise.

Presentation V. Funding for Sage-grouse Conservation

A panel presentation which included: Frank Fink (NRCS), Tom Rinkes (BLM), Tom Hemker (IDFG), John Romero (talking about CSI), Nate Fisher (OSC), and Kendra Womack (USFWS), presented potential sources of funding for sage-grouse conservation efforts. Each panelists discussed the types of funding available, identified the purposes of various funding sources, cost share requirements, deadlines, and other pertinent information.

Contact information for each of the presenters follows:

Name	Funding Source	Phone	Email
Frank Fink	NRCS	208.685.6986	frank.fink@id.usda.gov
Nate Fisher	OSC	208.334.2189	nfisher@osc.state.id.us
Tom Hemker	IDFG	208.334.2920	themker@idfg.idaho.gov
Tom Rinkes	BLM	208.373.4045	earl_rinkes@blm.gov
John Romero	CSI	208.250.4104	jwhiskeymt@aim.com
Kendra Womack	USFWS	208.685.6951	Kendra_womack@fws.gov

A summary of the available State, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), BLM, USFWS and other funding programs follows:

State Programs

Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC)

Web site: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/>

Purpose:	Implement sage-grouse conservation efforts in Idaho.
Land ownership:	Private, public, tribal
Amount or limit:	N/A
Cost share:	Matching funds are not required, but projects with match will rank higher.
Deadline:	July 1, 2008

Habitat Improvement Program (HIP)

Web site: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/hip/>

Purpose:	Provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners and public land managers who want to enhance habitat for upland game birds and waterfowl.
Land ownership:	Private or public
Amount or limit:	\$10,000 project limit; \$20,000 lifetime limit
Cost share:	Usually 75% paid for 10-year agreement.
Deadline:	Continuous sign up

Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)

Web site: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/lip/>

Purpose:	Provide incentives to landowners to protect or enhance habitat for at-risk species.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	None
Cost share:	Requires non-federal match at least 35%.
Deadline:	February 1, 2008

State Wildlife Grants Program (SWG)

Web site: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/grants/>

Purpose:	Provides third party grants to fund projects which benefit at-risk species with actions that have been identified in our Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.
Land ownership:	Private or public
Amount or limit:	Up to \$30,000, but usually \$10,000 per year for 3 years
Cost share:	Requires 25–50% non-federal match, depending on type of project.
Deadline:	Spring and fall each year

Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Web site: <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/index.html>

Purpose:	Seeks to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on private land. Agreements can be 10-year restoration cost share; 30-year conservation easements; or permanent conservation easements.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Conservation easement limit \$1,500/ac
Cost share:	Perpetual easement 100%; 30 year easement 75%; 10 year contract 75%.
Deadline:	Continuous sign up.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Web site: <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/index.html>

Purpose:	Emphasizes that agricultural production and environmental quality are compatible. EQIP provides incentives to landowners that implement conservation practices on their land, including wildlife habitat management.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Funding is allocated to counties or special projects (e.g., species of concern).
Cost share:	Usually 50% on general EQIP projects. Up to 75% paid for species of concern. New for FY08 payment rate schedule
Deadline:	November 23, 2007

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Web site: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/>

Purpose:	Provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect and enhance wildlife habitat.
Land ownership:	Private landowners, tribal, state, and local governments
Amount or limit:	None
Cost share:	75% cost share rate
Deadline:	Continuous

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

Web site: <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index.html>

Purpose:	Rewards good stewardship on private land. In 2006, CSP in Idaho focused on the Clearwater and Lower Bear River-Malad watersheds. Please visit the NRCS website for eligible watersheds in 2007.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Payments to landowner based on level of stewardship
Cost share:	50% for practices, up to \$10,000 per contract.
Deadline:	Varies based on timing of funding from national office.

Conservation Innovative Grants (CIG)

Web site: <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/state.html>

Purpose:	Development and adoption of innovative conservation technologies.
Land ownership:	Private landowners, tribal, state, and local governments
Amount or limit:	\$75,000
Cost share:	50% federal limit.
Deadline:	Varies based on timing of funding from national office.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

Web site: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP/>

Purpose:	Protects, enhances, and restores grassland, rangeland, pastureland, and shrubland on private lands. GRP supports livestock grazing while protecting important grasslands from conversion to croplands or other uses.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Minimum of at least 40 contiguous acres.
Cost share:	10, 15, 20, or 30-year contract with annual payments \leq 75% of the grazing value of the land; up to 75% of restoration reimbursed; also 30-year or permanent conservation easements.
Deadline:	Continuous sign up

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Web site: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=crp>

Purpose:	CRP provides annual rental payments to landowners that practice soil conservation, primarily through conversion of highly erodible lands to resource-conserving vegetative covers, such as native vegetation.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Dependent upon acres enrolled and conservation practice applied.
Cost share:	Annual payment on contract; cost-sharing on plantings.
Deadline:	Varies based on timing of funding from national office.

A copy of Frank Fink's presentation is presented in Attachment G and will be posted on the IDFG web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>.

Bureau of Land Management Programs

BLM Challenge Cost-Share Grants (CCS)

Web site in development

Purpose:	Provides funding for a wide array of projects on BLM-managed public lands and adjacent private lands. The following activities are funded through the CCS program: monitoring and inventorying resources; implementing habitat improvement projects; and developing threatening and endangered species recovery plans.
Land ownership:	Federal/ adjacent private/state
Amount or limit:	BLM contribution up to \$40,000 per project
Cost share:	50% non-federal match for each project is recommended but not required. However, the statewide overall total, across all CCS projects, must meet or exceed 50% non-federal match
Deadline:	Federal FY 2008 – Nov. 5, 2007 Federal FY 2009 – Dec. 31, 2007

BLM MLR and Other Funding Programs

Includes: Sage-grouse/sagebrush funds, Healthy Lands Initiative, National Landscape Conservation System, Land and Water Conservation Fund

Purpose:	Provides funding for a wide array of inventory, monitoring and habitats projects on BLM-managed public lands. Projects can include easements / acquisitions. Coordination should be through BLM's LWG representative.
Land ownership:	Federal
Amount or limit:	Variable
Cost share:	Recommended but not required.
Deadline:	Continuous

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Programs

Partners for Wildlife

Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/idahoes/partners.htm>

Purpose:	Provides technical and financial assistance for habitat conservation projects on private land, especially those that benefit migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and other sensitive species.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	Up to \$25,000
Cost share:	Requires 50% state, private, or other federal match.
Deadline:	Continuous

Private Stewardship Grants Program

Web site: http://www.fws.gov/endangered/grants/private_stewardship/index.html

Purpose:	A competitive grants program that provides assistance to groups working on local conservation efforts, including those on private lands, for threatened, endangered and at-risk species. The funds go straight to the landowners without the state as a pass through.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	None
Cost share:	Requires 10% non-federal match.
Deadline:	2008 deadline not set

Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants

Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/grants/section6/index.html>

Purpose:	Provides funding to States and Territories for species and habitat conservation actions on non-Federal lands.
Land ownership:	Non-federal
Amount or limit:	None
Cost share:	States and Territories must contribute a minimum non-Federal match of 25%, or 10% when two or more States or Territories implement a joint project.
Deadline:	2008 deadline not set

Other Programs

Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV)

Web site: <http://www.iwJV.org/about.htm>

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited

Purpose:	Long-term conservation of bird habitat through partnerships; provide project “seed” money to applicants developing conservation partnerships for “on-the-ground” bird habitat conservation. Note: the IWJV mission statement includes, “...fosters the protection, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands, riparian habitats, and the widely diverse <i>uplands</i> characteristic of the region...”
Land ownership:	Public or private
Amount or limit:	Up to \$100,000
Cost share:	None required, but partnerships are emphasized.
Deadline:	2008 deadline not set, but potentially July 2008.

Grouse Habitat Restoration Fund

Web site: <http://www.grousepartners.org/landowners.htm>

Source: North American Grouse Partnership

Purpose:	Provides landowners with financial assistance, seeds or plants to enhance sage-grouse habitat by planting forbs.
Land ownership:	Private
Amount or limit:	None
Cost share:	Landowner is responsible for cost of the seeding or planting; can be used to supplement other conservation programs.
Deadline:	Continuous

Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative (CSI)

Web site: <http://www.sandcounty.net/programs/cbcn/sagewise/>

Source: Fund established by investors and leveraged with private and public funds

Purpose:	A regionwide program to provide, leadership, coordination, and funding for sagebrush conservation and recovery.
Land ownership:	Public or private
Amount or limit:	In 2007 accepted proposals requesting funding of <\$500,000, \$500,000-\$1 million and >\$1 million.
Cost share:	None, but collaborative efforts are preferred.
Deadline:	None, but collaborative efforts are preferred.

Interactive Dialog I. Lessons Learned in the Trenches

In the afternoon workshop, participants were asked to participate in two interactive dialogs. The first interactive session, *Lessons Learned in the Trenches*, was designed to share participant’s knowledge and experience about LWG and agency responses to threats to sage-grouse and their habitats in Idaho.

This interactive session was structured around 18 threats⁸ that were identified and described in the 2006, *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho*.⁹ Workshop participants were invited to rotate through

⁸ The state plan includes 19 threats, but for the purposes of this workshop activity two of the threats, Hunting and Falconry, were combined as one threat.

a series of discussions occurring at different stations throughout the room. Each station focused on one of the threat categories as identified and defined in the state plan. At each station participants were asked to respond to two questions:

- What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?
- What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?

Each of the 18 threats were addressed during three separate sessions, outlined as follows:

Session One	Session Two	Session Three
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conifer Encroachment • Infrastructure • Predation • Prescribed Fire • Mines, Landfills, and Gravel Pits • Seeded Perennial Grassland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Grassland • Climate Change • Insecticides • Sport Hunting and Falconry • Urban/Exurban Development • Wildfire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Expansion • Human Disturbance • Isolated Populations • Livestock Impacts • Sagebrush Control • West Nile

The responses of workshop participants were recorded on flip chart paper at each station. Those responses are presented in the following table (the threats are listed alphabetically).

Photos below by Gene Gray.



⁹ On February 1-2, 2005, an Idaho sage-grouse *Science Panel* was convened in Boise to assist with identifying and ranking statewide threats and in estimating extirpation risk by geographic areas within Idaho. The panel consisted of six Idaho scientists with acknowledged expertise in sage-grouse, rangeland, fire and landscape ecology. The Science Panel identified and ranked 19 threats to sage-grouse in Idaho. The statewide rankings were designed to serve as a tool for LWGs to consider as they identify and prioritize threats at the local level.

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Agricultural Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of funding for reenrollment in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Higher commodity prices Lack of interest in CREP
Annual Grasslands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chubby Spain and Kershner reseedings (Owyhee Sage-grouse LWG) Early season grazing (two seasons) to help depress the seed bank on private land Fall treatment with Round-Up™ and follow-up has been effective (Shoshone LWG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable chemicals (Round-Up™ is labor intensive; Plateau™ cannot be used everywhere due to its impacts) Lack of adequate seed source Repetitive fires Scale and scope of grasslands Can't use non-native vegetation for fire breaks On federal land – cannot change rotation schedules to allow two season/early grazing due to policy/perceptions Funding restrictions – doing something about annual grasslands is expensive Global warming may contribute to the spread of cheatgrass and increase the impact of fires Time involved to move the vegetative threshold up to native species
Conifer Encroachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agricultural Research Service studies are underway to provide the science on the effects of juniper encroachment on watershed, prescribed fire use, and cattle distribution before and after Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Idaho Department of Lands completed some prescribed burns – more are scheduled or planned BLM South Central and Forest Service (FS) – hand cutting has been done and more is scheduled BLM South Central – Jim sage chaining is done and more identified Owyhee LWG – experimental mastication project underway BLM completed mastication project in Burley Field Office Cooperative projects with private and public landowners for juniper control have been completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boise District BLM – litigation to prevent fire and mastication on BLM land Burley BLM-potential for litigation related to chaining IDL – needs funding to conduct cuttings, chaining, and fire Intense fire season results in diversion of resources (\$ and people) to do planned proactive work Significant impediment – the process on public lands is too cumbersome (\$s and time) No product incentive to get private companies to remove juniper and other conifers from public land Need for agencies to take multi-species approach when planning for conifer treatment
Isolated Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Central LWG - Stimulated research to determine population and use area, dispersion, etc. This information was very valuable in identifying crucial habitats and linkage habitat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land management agencies can't say no to wind farm approval, potentially impacting isolated populations Lack of data to identify linkages and providing protection to reconnect isolated populations Inability to influence County commissioners on exurban development Fires fragmenting and isolate populations, increasing the threat of local extinction
Global Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different grazing practices have improved water supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information, scientific studies addressing Scale Lack of local weather data in remote areas Addressing desertification is not a priority

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Human Disturbance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road closures BLM is encouraging wildlife photographers not to disturb leks When SG are using roads for lekking, physically creating an alternative lekking area off the road FS and IDFG have worked cooperatively on enforcing travel restrictions (Upper Snake) Some important habitat (lekking areas) have been protected in conservation easements (Square Lake) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobbying by OHV groups Timeframe between travel plan development and the public comment periods are too far apart Lack of staffing to enforce travel plan, lack of enforcement Public perceptions/expectations about what the public can and should be able to do on public lands Conflicting uses on public lands Critical habitat areas not identified
Infrastructure Development¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burial of power-line in the Upper Snake planning area Let-down fences in breeding areas (in the Resource Management Plan in Jarbidge BLM) Dialogue with Planning and Zoning (started after a mistake was made) in West Central SG planning area Idaho Power provided a map of key habitat areas to local operations centers Formation of inter-agency teams to address mitigation and monitoring for wind energy development (BLM) Perch deterrence on power-lines during new construction and retrofitting BLM stipulations for reseedling with native seed mix after ground disturbance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for flagging of fences Conflicts in policy within the Department of Interior/BLM related to wind energy development and SG conservation Lack of data to show that infrastructure development is a problem for SG Some “temporary” fences never go away Resistance on the part of ranchers to fence flagging (they don’t want to set a precedence) Lack of communication with other states regarding the success of fence marking Not enough has been done to discourage new infrastructure development in critical habitat areas Lack good (approved) method for fence marking Lack method for identifying where fence marking is needed Lack of timely information when developing new infrastructure Interagency teams may not be responsive (fast) enough in identifying alternatives – they are limited to time and place alternatives Lack of knowledge regarding how far out infrastructure development has an impact Lack of identified areas where development could occur without hurting habitat Lack mechanism for interstate dialogue about energy corridors Not enough options have been identified for energy corridor siting The Statewide SG Conservation Plan does not address oil and gas leasing
Insecticides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no environmental documentation (NEPA) in place for BLM and FS to do spraying for mosquitoes (not approved on federal land) Difficulty in testing, evaluating, and approval for new products Potential mortality issue for sage-grouse on private, irrigated agriculture which is not being addressed

¹⁰ Note: In the State plan, fencing as a threat to sage-grouse, was discussed in the context of Livestock Grazing

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Livestock Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of cooperative relationships and plans • Use of supplements to reduce pressure in sensitive areas • BLM's rangeland health process is working • Agencies have implemented grazing management and standards • Monitoring to allow adaptive management • Adapt new grazing strategies to address habitat needs • FS has forage reserves available to allow grazing to occur even if displaced by wildfire (to allow rehabilitation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to change • Multiple land ownerships – inability to broker changes that will affect multiple parties • Agencies don't understand seasonal grazing (i.e., suggest spring grazing before snowmelt) • Failure to reach agreement on whether there is – or is not – a problem • Politics drive, instead of science • Lack of adequate knowledge to determine conditions on the ground • Emotional issue leads to blaming • Outdated land use plans • Old grazing permits that need updating • Policy • Public and agency perception that grazing has only one response (negative) on plant communities – when can actually have positive impacts
Mines, Landfills, and Gravel Pits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stipulate weed-free gravel pits • Timing of mining activities (lekking) • Influence location of new gravel pits • Reclamation of old gravel pits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of weeds at gravel pits issue • Demand for decorative rock pits and new landfills • Lack of funding • Lack of enforcement of stipulations
Predation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red fox study • Pete Coates study (using cameras in SG nests) • Nevada study on ravens • Provide high quality habitat • Density-dependent mitigation • Elimination of perching sites (i.e., burial of powerlines in the Upper Snake SG Planning Area) • Conservation easements to prevent structures and other facilities related to development and infrastructure • Perch deterrents on new construction and retrofitting of old structures to deter predator perching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for more control of fox and raccoon • More area-specific studies of raven and other predators • Separate non-native predators from native • Generalization of all predators as opposed to site-specific, predator-specific • Litigation • Conflicting solutions (e.g., removal of fences to prevent predators versus the need for fencing to restore riparian habitat) • Resistance from agencies in terms of implementing actions • Agencies are not able to implement predator control activities on large enough scale • Existing predation studies are not easily available • State versus federal jurisdictions (e.g., ravens are protected at the federal level) • Inter-relationships of predators (e.g. if one is removed, another increases)

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Prescribed Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of potential issues associated with use of prescribed fire • Work done to mitigate issues • Curlew National Grasslands season habitat and use maps • Using SAC funded projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many agencies biologists, not enough range ecologists • Getting IDFG and public comfortable with the use of prescribed fire in Mountain Big sagebrush • Liability – cost of managing fire and training for qualified personnel • Sprouting brush species become greater component of total brush load at late seral stage • Lack of seasonal habitat use maps and habitat characteristics of seasonal habitats • Lack of clear objectives for use of prescribed fire • Lack of long-term objectives
Sagebrush Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New technologies and herbicides available to reduce over-dense sagebrush stands • Lawson aerator in West Central LWG planning area) was used to reduce sagebrush cover and invigorate understory • Improved education and appreciation for sagebrush ecosystem • Better habitat maps available for planning • Better information on SG leks and habitat • Develop management strategies to enhance diverse and healthy sagebrush ecosystems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of success in re-establishing native grasses and forbs in degraded sagebrush (need tools and willingness to treat sagebrush) • Adversity to treat any sagebrush since so much has been lost to wildfire • Wildfire
Seeded Perennial Grasslands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeded perennial grasslands help prevent or minimize cheatgrass and serve as an intermediate step in restoring good SG habitat • West Central and Curlew did vegetative classification – there are other wildlife values to consider • Crested Wheatgrass can be used for soil stabilization and can be grazed early • How to get sagebrush back in? Trials are being conducted on this now in the Curlew • All Crested Wheatgrass is not equal – some varieties are more wildlife-friendly • People are using more natives in the mix. • Sometimes in dry areas it is hard to get native vegetation to come back in after a fire or other disturbance - Crested Wheatgrass usually has a higher success rate • On the Idaho National Laboratory, a study showed that grazed Crested Wheatgrass seedings had more forbs and sagebrush than un-grazed seedings did 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies policy and direction • USFS may soon be allowed to use only natives, which may limit options • Public perception may not match research findings (those from the INL study) • Objectives for grazing of Crested Wheatgrass should be very clear • Forage utilization can be restrictive • Need more research into how to get rid of mono-culture • Cost • Need better planning (e.g., agency staffing is sometimes inadequate) • Need monitoring to see what works • Need better inventories to start with • Agencies need more flexibility to use different varieties • Need to define a long-term objective if using perennial grasslands as an intermediate step • Need more availability of native seed sources

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Sport Hunting and Falconry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jarbidge recognized this possible threat, but the lack of falconers reduced this threat • IDFG closed the season from Owyhee County line to Bruneau River in response to the Murphy Complex Fire • Not as many hunters statewide as in the past • In 1995 reduced the season to 1 day, 1 bird South of Snake • In 2007 reduced season to 1 week, 1 bird north of Snake • Closure of West Central and Curlew • Increased data collection (lek surveys and wing barrels) to assess hunting effects • Mandatory SG permit • Established good hunting conservation measures in the State Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of larger season closure • State mandated hunting • Lobby groups • Funding mechanisms for Fish and Game are tied to hunting/fishing • Lack of data on additive effects of hunting
Urban/Exurban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Central LWG has talked to Washington County Planning and Zoning and the County requested lek information for use in planning • Camas County has also had conversations with biologists • Blaine County 20/25 planning process • Blaine County recently turned down a development based on adequate information provided by IDF&G so that a sound decision could be made • Easement and tax incentive programs • Owyhee County LWG is under the auspices of the Owyhee County Natural Resource Committee – engagement over SG is constant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of regulatory mechanism, but there are also tricky issues with private landowners’ rights • Lack of communication among agencies and landowners • Need money/incentives to encourage easements, habitat protection and conservation • Lack of long-term site-specific data sets that can be used for planning
West Nile Virus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced mosquito vectors – larvacide • Monitoring – testing and radio-collaring birds, tracking during season, and lek counts (Monitoring gives an idea of the impact – it does not reduce the threat) • Use of gambusia in stock ponds and tanks not connected to waterways and fisheries • Public education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing stock ponds • Restrictions on insecticides • Poorly designed/maintained livestock water developments • Improperly functioning riparian areas

Threat (listed alphabetically)	What have the LWGs and/or agencies been able to do to reduce this threat?	What has impeded the LWGs and/or agencies effectiveness in addressing this threat?
Wildfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed the response in dispatch centers to place higher priority on SG habitat areas • Decreased response time by having engines and dozers go immediately to wildfire starts in SG habitat areas • Full suppression in SG habitat areas • Several new fire stations (i.e., in Dubois, Idaho) • Dispatching of qualified resource advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency and public unwillingness to accept the use of non-native fire-resistant vegetation in fire breaks • Urban interface causes a change in priorities, compounded by failure to reduce fuels around private property/structures • Lack of maintenance of fire breaks • Lack of resources to deal with multiple starts at one time • Budget process provides a conflict of interest – firefighters don't respond quickly and the fire gets away • Agency unwillingness to take advantage of private equipment (requirements for training, certifications, etc.) • Increase in cheatgrass and the probability of ignition • Lack of understanding of how livestock grazing effects fuel loading • Lack of ability to set guidelines in the urban interface (fire insurance fails to require) • Firefighters lack understanding of the importance of sagebrush (fail to protect islands) • Public doesn't allow firefighters to do their job

Interactive Dialog II. Call to Action

In the final session participants were asked to respond to the question, “Where should IDFG, the LWGs, and the land management agencies focus their attention over the next ten years?” The purpose of the exercise was to identify those areas that are being overlooked, or underemphasized, in the context of current efforts. Or to put it another way, “If we just keep doing what we’re doing, what are we overlooking that should be an area of focus?”

Each participant was given one sheet of paper and asked to write on it the number one priority, from their perspective, and then post it on wall. Participants were also asked to group their suggestion with other similar categories of action or area of focus. The picture below illustrates the process of posting and sorting the recommendations.



Photo by Wendy Green Lowe

Participants identified ten categories and their recommendations were grouped under each of those categories. The following table lists all the recommendations and the category they were grouped under (listed alphabetically by category name):

Category	Recommended Area for Focusing Attention
Fire:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve and fund fire-fighting to protect the remaining habitat • Advance rehabilitation and fire prevention techniques • Minimize extent of wildfire • Pre-fire management to minimize wildfire – we'll not catch up otherwise • Minimize loss of habitat due to wildfire • Fire
Habitat:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve/preserve existing habitat • Be more aggressive and proactive (opportunistic) with range restoration in critical sage-grouse habitats • Habitat • Keep stewards on the land or endure subdivision • Conserve and improve key habitats • Zero habitat loss • Protect existing habitat • Protecting existing sage-grouse habitat • Private land conservation • Enhance rather than protect sagebrush ecosystem • Maintain strongholds
Infrastructure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep wind turbines out of critical sage-grouse habitat • Avoid/minimize infrastructure and development in remaining sage-grouse habitat • Controlling siting of infrastructure development • Some agreement on infrastructure
Livestock Impacts:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock impacts • Make livestock water sources more grouse friendly
Public Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in cooperation to increase awareness of sage-grouse issues with the public, in particular, the youth • More local involvement • Keep communicating • Expand existing participation to other groups: private agricultural, industry interests, etc. • Increase public understanding of issues • Education of land users on shrub steppe ecosystems
Quit Using Fossil Fuels:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quit using fossil fuels
Regional Planning:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reshape land use planning laws • Collaborative process • Collaborative relationships for habitat • Coordination with local government • Region-wide conservation
Science-based Policy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policy • Quantify the effect of conservation measures • Determine if efforts work, and if not, what must be done (adaptive management) • Help develop good, reasonable policies • Science-based politics • Develop adequate local conservation measures to allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to defend its listing decision
Travel Management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel management
West Nile Virus:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Nile Virus • Continue monitoring for West Nile Virus

In the next step participants were asked to rank the categories using a dot polling method. Each participant was given two dot stickers and was invited to place their dots on the categories that they felt to be most important.

The following picture illustrates the results:



Photo by Wendy Green Lowe

The results of that ranking were (listed in rank order):

- Habitat – 36 dots
- Fire – 22 dots
- Science-based Policy – 18 dots
- Regional planning – 11 dots
- Infrastructure – 10 dots
- Public Education – 7 dots
- Livestock impacts – 2 dots
- Travel Management – 2 dots
- West Nile Virus – 1 dot
- Quit using fossil fuels – 0 dots

In the closing discussion participants noted that it was interesting that funding was not listed as a category. Some participants commented that it was too obvious and too necessary to list. Participants also noted the fact that Habitat, Fire and Science-based Policy were the top three.

Wendy Green Lowe asked that the LWG members in attendance share the results with their colleagues when reporting on the 2007 Idaho Sage-grouse Workshop.

Jim Unsworth closed the workshop by thanking all the participants for their efforts on behalf of sage-grouse, and for their willingness to actively engage in the workshop. He invited all participants to focus their attention during the coming decade on the priorities they'd identified in the last exercise.

**Thank you to everyone who helped make
the November workshop possible and
a special thank you also to all of those
Local Working Group members
who have given so much of their time and energy!**



List of Attachments

Attachment A	Workshop agenda
Attachment B	List of all participants and their contact information
Attachment C	State of the Sage-grouse in Idaho (Tom Hemker)
Attachment D	Wildfire and Sage-grouse: Challenges and Opportunities in Idaho
Attachment E	Sage-grouse Habitat Restoration Program: An Initiative to Facilitate Landscape-Scale Sagebrush Steppe Restoration
Attachment F	Sage-grouse: Legal Status and Next Steps
Attachment G	Conservation Program Options for Idaho Farmers & Ranchers