

Twin Falls District  
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES  
6/26/2012  
BLM - Shoshone Fire Conference Room

**Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members present:**

***Category One – Commodity Interest***

- Debbie Dane
- Michael Henslee
- Gerald Orthel
- Jeffrey Williams
- James Wills

***Category Two – Non-Commodity Interest***

- Denise Alexander
- Scott Boettger
- Hank Mayland
- LaMar Orton
- Peggy Stanley

***Category Three – Public Interest***

- Charles Howell
- Afton Patrick
- Katie Shewmaker
- Yvette Tuell (*arrived at 9:32*)
- Todd Wadsworth

***Quorum Present:***  Yes     No

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representatives present:**

Holly Hampton, Acting Shoshone Field Office Manager  
Danelle Nance, Shoshone Natural Resource Specialist  
Dave Freiburg, Acting Craters Monument Manager  
Codie Martin, Jarbidge Assistant Field Office Manager  
Paul Makela, Idaho State Office Wildlife Biologist  
Joe Russell, Shoshone Natural Resource Specialist

Michael Courtney, Burley Field Office Manager  
Heather Tiel-Nelson, Twin Falls District Public Affairs  
Jessica Gardetto, Idaho State Office Public Affairs  
Jenifer Arnold, Acting Twin Falls District Manager  
Meghan Sorensen-Pereira, Shoshone Contact Representative

**Public Attendees:**

Brad Lowe, Idaho Fish and Game Wildlife Biologist  
AJ Church, Representative of Senator Mike Crapo  
Joey Martin, KMVT-TV

*Note to readers: A copy of each attachment listed in the text of, or at the end of these minutes, is on file with the official copy of the minutes in the BLM Burley Field Office. Persons desiring to view attachments should contact Meghan Sorensen-Pereira at (208) 677-6627, or by email at [mpereira@blm.gov](mailto:mpereira@blm.gov).*

*Copies of certified minutes are posted on the Idaho BLM website at:  
[http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/res/resource\\_advisory/twin\\_falls\\_district/meeting\\_minutes.html](http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/res/resource_advisory/twin_falls_district/meeting_minutes.html)*

*Meeting called to order by Chairman Mike Henslee at 8:58 a.m.*

**Item I: Introductions**

The group went around the room and made brief introductions including their names and titles.

*Public comment period opened at 9:00 a.m.*

*No public was present, so the meeting continued, but the public comment period remained open to any public should they arrive and wish to comment.*

**Item II: Sage-grouse Presentation by Brad Lowe, Wildlife Biologist, Idaho Fish and Game**

Brad Lowe gave a presentation titled Greater Sage-Grouse Basic Biology, which described characteristics of the species, including their distinctive physical features, migration patterns, habitat guidelines, brooding and chick rearing, and characteristics of the different sexes, including distinguishing markings, mating rituals and physical differences.

These topics led to discussion about sage-grouse leks and changes in habitat. Sage-grouse, especially the females, do tend to return to the same sites, despite disturbances to the historically used areas. However, prolonged or extreme disturbances can cause sage-grouse not to return to the area.

In the winter, sagebrush provides the only food for sage-grouse. They survive by eating sagebrush leaves high in protein. Sage-grouse are one of the only species of birds that actually

can gain weight in the winter. They have a very low mortality rate in the winter compared to other birds; their mortality rate is highest during lekking.

There has been a steady decline of sage-grouse over their years. Historically, wildfires have had the most devastating effects on sage-grouse distribution and abundance in Idaho. After a wildfire burns an area, it can take 15-25 years for the sagebrush habitat to recover to the size needed for nesting. Successful post-wildfire rehabilitation efforts can play an important part in making sage-grouse return to habitat destroyed by fire.

West Nile poses a big threat to sage-grouse as well. Only about 1% of infected sage-grouse survive. Other threats include predators such as Golden Eagles, ravens, and badgers. Coyotes will prey on the occasional chick or weak grouse, but are not a common predator.

Efforts to domestically raise sage-grouse have not been very successful.

*Public Comment period closed at 9:34 with no public comment.*

### **Item III: Sage-grouse Habitat Presentation by Paul Makela, Wildlife Biologists, BLM Idaho State Office**

Paul Makela discussed the methods used to determine valuable sage-grouse habitat. Habitat is categorized into priority and general habitat. This has been mapped for different states. Makela's presentation provided a brief overview of the methods used to determine preliminary priority habitat (PPH) and preliminary general habitat (PGH) and their findings and comparisons of this data with adjoining states.

The first version of mapping the habitat was used by analyzing sage-grouse lek density data sets, and ranking the leks, and then using the top 75% in the model, with a four mile radius buffer, which was thought to encompass 80% of the leks in the area. However, there were some concerns with the modeling data for version 1. In 2012, additional data was gathered regarding missed leks, telemetry data was used to identify movement, migration, connectivity corridors, and important winter and breeding habitats. The US Forest Service also provided data for areas of general habitat that were previously unmapped. The current map, updated April 2012 (Version 2), removed overlap of agricultural and timber lands, and further categorizes sage-grouse habitat with habitat subclasses showing sagebrush, perennial grasses, and conifer encroachment.

The summary statistics shows that BLM manages about 65% of the PPH, and about 39% of PGH. The data encompasses about 95% of leks. According to Shroeder et. al. (2004) Idaho had about 27,337,000 acres of sage-grouse distribution historically. The current modeling shows that PPH+ combined with PGH is about 56% of what it was pre-settlement time; PPH only is about 39% of the historic range.

### **Item IV: Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) Overview by Danelle Nance, Shoshone Resource Management Specialist**

Habitat Assessment Framework inventories are being conducted on four different levels; from large scale to small scale they are: Statewide, Regional, Field Office, and Focus Area levels. The area we are viewing today within Craters of the Moon falls within the focus area level.

Inventories are conducted based on three different types of assessments: point cover, line intercept, and belt transects. These inventory methods will establish a baseline so at a later date the BLM may return to these sites and monitor them and derive a trend from the data they collect.

A specialist assesses the selected sites, and then technicians collect data from those sites. The information is put into a database which will produce habitat qualities.

Right now this is in a preliminary stage, but they are working to produce the results spatially.

#### **Item V: Field Tour of HAF Inventory within Craters of the Moon National Monument**

After the brief discussion from Nance, the group set out to Craters of the Moon to begin their field tour of the area. The first stop was at Snowdrift Crater, where the group ate lunch.

The first site visited was just west of Snowdrift Crater (*designated at Stop #2 on handout 4*). The area burned approximately 30 years ago, and was allowed to rehabilitate naturally. The area now contains very tall bunchgrasses, about one dozen sage-grouse-preferred forbs, and proximity to sagebrush. This habitat provides both food and coverage for sage-grouse, and is good habitat for brood-rearing, and for the late fall and winter seasons. However, it would be better habitat if there were more sagebrush cover on the immediate site.

On the route to the next stop, the group passed by an old landing strip which is used as a lek. A slide of this was also shown in the presentation from Brad Lowe.

The next site visited was north of Laidlaw Park (*designated as Stop #3 on handout 4*). At this stop, three biological technicians demonstrated the inventorying techniques that Nance mentioned during the morning meeting. The first method that they demonstrated was the belt transect, which incorporates a measurement of a 50 meter by 1 meter area in which all of the forbs are recorded in order to sample the abundance of forbs at the site. The next method demonstrated was the point cover, where a measuring stick is dropped at every meter mark along the 50 meter measuring tape, and the types of forbs at that point are recorded from the top downward. The last method demonstrated was the line intercept (also known as the gap intercept) method. With the line intercept method, horizontal cover is recorded by measuring the centimeters of coverage by shrub species.

Nance explained that the project area for the Habitat Assessment Framework was composed of 324 sites on 250,000 acres of the 750,000 acre Craters of the Moon National Monument. The data will be shared among many programs and be useful for more than just assessing sage-grouse habitat, but could also be used for grazing, vegetation, riparian, and wildlife monitoring.

Just across the road from Stop 3, was an area of about 270 acres that had burned in 2006. Russell explained that when deciding whether or not to reseed an area after a burn, or whether to let it rehabilitate naturally they look at adjacent vegetation to determine the need. That particular area had plenty of three-tip sagebrush, which will re-sprout after a burn, as opposed to other

types of sagebrush that will not grow back after a fire. The size of the fire must also be taken into consideration when considering rehab. Larger fires often require rehab because the adjacent vegetation cannot help facilitate natural regrowth. Facilitated rehabilitation is also used when burns occur at or near key habitat areas.

The Twin Falls District is working on an Environment Assessment for the use of herbicides in relation to rehabilitation of burned areas, and the preparation of areas to be reseeded.

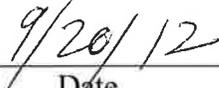
The last site (*designated as Stop #4 on handout 4*) was at Paddleford Flat which provided good habitat for sage-grouse in the late fall and winter due to the abundance and height of sagebrush to provide food and cover even with snowfall. This site is also in close proximity to leks. At this site, the group also saw bird flight diverters placed on the top wire of barbwire fences. These are reflectors placed near flat areas within 2 miles of leks where fences occur to increase the visibility of fences to sage-grouse, who are prone to fly lower over flat areas.

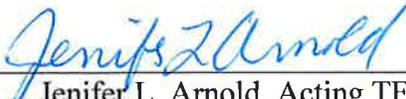
**Handouts Provided:**

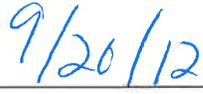
- 1) Sage-Grouse Habitat in Idaho, A Practical Guide for Land Owners and Managers (*Jeffrey K. Gillan and Eva K. Strand, May 2010*)
- 2) Craters of the Moon Travel Map
- 3) Map: Craters of the Moon Recent Fuels/ESR Projects (1 p)
- 4) Untitled handout of Photos, Maps, and descriptions of stops for RAC Tour (2 pp)

Minutes certified by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mike Henslee, Chairman, TFD RAC

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jenifer L. Arnold, Acting TFD District Manager

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Minutes recorded by:  
Meghan Sorensen-Pereira, SFO Contact Representative