

Wildlife Monitoring Task Group Minutes
Evening Meeting, July 12, 2005
Lovatt Room, Sublette County Library
Pinedale, Wyoming

Attendees

Steve Belinda, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Pinedale
Ron Hogan – Questar, Pinedale
Bob Barrett – Pinedale Anticline Working Group (PAWG), Pinedale
Rollin Sparrowe – Daniel (Wildlife Task Group Chair)
Dan Lamoreux – Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Jackson
Aimee Davison – Shell, Pinedale
Matt Anderson – BLM, Pinedale
John Dalke – Wyoming Wildlife Consultants LLC, Pinedale
Linda Baker – PAWG, Pinedale
Craig Thompson – National Wildlife Federation, Rock Springs
Bettina Sparrowe – Daniel
John Michalak – University of Wyoming, Boulder
Dale Woolwine – University of Wyoming, Laramie
Rusty Kaiser – University of Wyoming, Laramie
Matt Holloran – University of Wyoming, Laramie
Michelle Hosler – Pinedale
Dean Clause – Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Pinedale
Elaine Crumphy – Pinedale
Tom Christiansen – Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Green River

The purpose of this public meeting was to hear a briefing by Matt Holloran of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Wyoming, Laramie. This update on the status of research and monitoring of sage grouse provided background for a second public meeting the following day of the Wildlife Monitoring Task Group. The Task Group considered mitigation effectiveness and alternative mitigation measures for sage grouse based on monitoring data collected so far on the Pinedale Anticline and adjacent areas. Reference was made in the briefing to results of past sage grouse work on the Anticline and elsewhere in Wyoming.

Researcher Holloran discussed a wide array of analyses of data to date. He acknowledged, and the participants noted in questioning, that long-term population effects were not yet fully documented. Examples of analyses and preliminary conclusions included:

- 1) Lek attendance on six study leks declined from 1999 – 2004, with one lek going to extinction.
- 2) Negative responses by sage grouse expressed in reduced lek attendance were shown for:
 - a) Distance to drilling rig – effects occur out to 6.2 kilometers, being most pronounced in the first years of development at lesser distances.
 - b) Direction from the lek to the active drilling rig showed negative impacts up to 3 kilometers from the rig. This suggests there are noise impacts on lek attendance, an important research need.
 - c) Over one well per section negatively affected lek attendance from 1998 – 2000.
 - d) A main haul road within 3 kilometers negatively affects lek attendance.
 - e) Traffic over one vehicle per day before 7:30 am negatively affects lek attendance.
 - f) Multiple impacts (distance + roads + etc.) have a greater impact, with 3 separate influences resulting in a high rate of lek desertion.
- 3) The broad conclusion was that impacts of drilling activity at least caused a shift in male breeding activity out of a developing gas field.

Participants and researcher Holloran discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the data and the many questions that arise from these results

- Are males displaced to other leks?
- Do they breed at other leks elsewhere or not at all?
- How is nesting success and survival of young affected?

Holloran and Rusty Kaiser, another researcher studying nesting success and survival, discussed emerging evidence of effects of development on these key parameters of grouse population sustainability. Dean Clause of Wyoming Game and Fish noted that fall wing collections showed less than one chick per hen during drought years. A ratio of 1.5 chicks per hen is considered high enough to sustain the population – 2004 production met that level.

Holloran noted that sage grouse declined during recent prolonged drought years (not solely due to gas field development), but stated that evidence of negative effects from development leads him to conclude that over time at current development intensity, sage grouse will not exist on the Mesa.

Discussion of nesting success data, possible increased evidence of nest predation, shifts in nesting sites by hens after 5 years, and brood survival are all currently under study and conclusions must await study completions.

Management alternatives were discussed with participants. Acknowledgement that current levels of development negate current mitigation (such as one-half mile lek buffers) leads to the conclusion that sage grouse will decline further in new areas if they are developed in the same manner as Jonah or the Pinedale Anticline. Using well site characteristics that produce lesser impacts and planning a field accordingly were discussed as an alternative.

Respectfully submitted,
Rollin Sparrowe
July 27, 2005