

Executive Committee Meeting
January 12, 2011
WGFD Headquarters Cheyenne

The meeting was held in the WGFD Headquarters in Cheyenne with video-conferencing in Pinedale, Green River, and Casper. Teleconferencing was also available. Introductions were made in all offices and the agenda was approved with one change: John Christensen was unable to attend to give the Support Subcommittee report, so Renee Dana discussed their status and progress.

NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative

The Natural Resources Conservation Service program coordinator for the sage-grouse initiative gave a presentation on the basics of the program. Highlights of the presentation included discussions relating to the primary funding sources (EQIP and WHIP), types of projects, ranking criteria, and accomplishments. Last year about 63,000 acres were placed under contract as part of the program. The program covers 11 western states. A question was asked why Wyoming does not receive the most funding when 54% of the sage-grouse population resides in the state. The presenters did not have information on how the funding is distributed, but noted difficulties in developing plans in the checkerboard area. NRCS programs work mostly on private and state lands. Federal lands are not excluded in the project plans but the federal regulations are more restrictive and it is more difficult to administer the program on federal lands. It was stated that WLCI should take advantage of the funding opportunity and utilize the EQIP and WHIP monies. It was also asked if program funds could be used for predator control. The funds in Wyoming cannot be used for this purpose and presenters were unaware of the specific rules in other states. Presenters explained how local landowners can use the program. A brief review of the requirements and benefits were given. Conservation easements can be considered as part of the program; however, the goal is to maintain working ranchlands. Questions about the monitoring component of the project were also asked including who does the monitoring and who receives the data? It was noted that monitoring is done by the landowner and the landowner is paid for doing the monitoring. Data are provided to the local program administrator before payment is made. NRCS is the data holder. A brochure on the NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative and a flyer about how the Fish and Wildlife Service's Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances can be used in conjunction with that initiative were included with the packet materials.

Science Presentations

Development of Assessment Methods in Support of USGS Integrated Science – This presentation was an overview of the mineral assessment work being done by USGS. The assessment will provide information and improve the understanding of the potential environmental issues associated with mineral occurrence and evaluate the scalability of watershed studies to a regional scale. Work highlighted in the presentation included bioaccumulation of contaminants in the Muddy Creek (Carbon Co.) watershed and soils analyses in the Green River Basin.

Energy Resources of Southwest Wyoming – This presentation focused on the status of USGS energy development assessments within the WLCI area, how current and future energy developments can affect the conservation work done within the WLCI area, and how the assessment could be used to predict potential areas to focus conservation projects. The presentation included oil, gas, shale oil and uranium potential. There is a large deposit of shale oil in the WLCI area; however, it is currently not economically viable to do the extraction. The oil/gas datasets used in the presentation will be available by the end of the year.

Pine Beetle Data

The Forest Service had not completed compiling information about the pine beetle infestation at the last Executive Committee meeting. Data from Bridger-Teton National Forest and aerial flights are now available. The Forest Service will provide a follow-up briefing paper that includes the missing information. The infestation has increased and will have drastic impacts on the forest and conservation work. The Forest Service will implement 3 key programs to mitigate the impacts of the infestation, including treating campground areas, planning for long term management for diversity, and utilizing biomass. The Forest Service will work primarily with industry on the biomass projects. A summary paper will be provided for the meeting notes.

GNLCC

Frank D'Erchia and Yvette Converse presented information on the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC) Eco-Forums. The purpose of Eco-forums (or partner forums) is to provide a mechanism with which GNLCC can identify specific conservation needs and facilitate information sharing within the GNLCC area that leads to improved conservation by groups such as WLCI. The GNLCC would like to have a framework for these forums by April 2011. A GNLCC Steering Committee conference call will be held on February 1 to finalize the draft Eco-Forum process and Funding plans for FY2011. These draft documents can be found on the GNLCC website (<http://www.nrmsc.usgs.gov/gnlcc/busines>). Discussion included how the United States and Canada will work together and schedule project funding. The GNLCC will work through existing channels for international projects and concerns. The 2011 project proposals deadline is tentatively scheduled for March 1, but will likely be extended. Partnership groups and individual agencies can submit proposals for the March deadline and partners agencies associated with WLCI will work to develop one or two proposals this year. WLCI will develop a more structured approach to submit science proposals next funding cycle. Funding guidelines will be shared once they are developed.

Ruby WHF

Craig Showalter from Wildlife Heritage Foundation reviewed the reason for changing banks and stated that funds were transferred from First National Bank of Laramie to First Interstate Bank on December 20, 2010. A decision from the Executive Board will be needed before the April Executive Committee meetings to be made concerning investments from the WLCI/WHF account. Currently expenses outweigh the earnings. The advice was to decide what the expected expenses are for the next year and have parameters on risk management levels so First Interstate Bank can recommend investment options. The WHF governing body meets in April; the EC will need to have a decision by the first of March. The Coordination Team is working with the Ruby Pipeline Conservation team to provide insight for the WLCI Ruby project criteria. The Coordination Team will also make recommendations about funding/project schedules by early March. This information will be based on input by LPDTs and by direct discussions with agency staff involved with the implementation of the conservation agreement. The recommendations and funding/project schedules by the Coordination Team will be used by the Executive Committee to inform expected/investment expenses and investment portfolio.

Team Reports

Science Team– the Integrated Assessment (IA) is progressing. Information was presented on the uses of the IA. The Coordination Team will meet with USGS Scientist on setting up additional meetings with planners and resource specialist to provide additional input with the development of the IA.

The Science Team is working with the data management team to develop an “uploader” to view the map layers. It was mentioned that the TNC Socio-geographic Study is available. An electronic version will be sent to EC members

STAC – The team has been working on developing criteria to evaluate science projects that do not go directly through USGS to support the science strategy. The team will be working with the Science Team on the IA. They have approved the Monitoring Team charter.

The USGS long term monitoring team wants to coordinate with STAC and WLCI Monitoring Team. The USGS Long term monitoring team will present results of their analysis of potential long-term monitoring in the WLCI area at the July EC meeting

Monitoring Team- The team will have a conference call in January. They will discuss FAQ monitoring questions. They are also working on enhancing the monitoring protocol database. The intent of the database is to educate/assist LPDT’s when designing monitoring protocols for projects.

Communication Team – The team would like to focus on internal communication as well as external communication and how WLCI can benefit other programs. Serena Baker, Team Lead, is willing to attend agency employee meetings to promote WLCI.

Coordination Team (CT) – A summary of the CT annual accomplishments for 2010 was included in the meeting handouts. They are working on the 4 year review (State of WLCI), which should be completed by the April EC meeting. Work on the Conservation Action Plan is continuing, and a draft should be ready for review at the July EC meeting. The team will work on the criteria for projects that qualify for Ruby monies. An aspen summit workshop will feed into the IA and is being planned for late winter. The team is working to engage the Forest Service at a more local level. The next round of LPDT meetings will be in February. They will be discussing new projects. Agreements for projects are being prepared for when a budget is set.

Support Subcommittee – The Support Subcommittee is being rejuvenated. A conference call is set for Feb. 17. They plan to meet with the CT after each EC meeting for review. The IA, CAP and Support Subcommittee roles and processes will be discussed at the February meeting.

EC Roundtable

Mary Thoman – Mary was thankful for the opportunity to use videoconferencing for the meeting and was grateful for the packet materials. It enabled the video participants to follow along. She also stated that the severe winter will have impact on wildlife in the area.

John Linn – John reiterated Mary thoughts on videoconferencing.

Don Simpson– Rawlins Field Office will have new field manager within the next couple of months. BLM has made reforms in oil and gas leases. They will be going to quarterly sales and rotate between northern and southern areas; each area will have two lease sales per year. BLM is working on master leasing plans. There will be five master plans for Wyoming. Comments for implementation for the Wilderness Management Areas is due by June 24

Randy – USGS, like many other federal agencies, may have severe budget reductions. He would like to continue to have USGS presentations at the EC meetings.

Mark Sattelberg – Mark is new to the area and is looking forward to working with WLCI.

Cheryl Chatham – The proposed National Forest Planning proposal is in review and Cheryl will let everyone know when it is available.

Steve Ferrell – During the first year of Wyoming’s Aquatic Invasive Species Program 4300 boats were inspected , and 23 high risk boats were decontaminated. Watercraft inspections were conducted on 36 lakes and surveillance was done on 52 lakes. The AIS decal program generated less revenue than expected; John Emmerich – WGFD will present training to BLM and WGFD personnel on the stipulations for implementing projects in the Sage- grouse Core Areas on Jan 25-28. The training will be provided to other agencies and NGOs later this year.

Next meeting – April 21 in Rock Springs; Social on the evening of April 20
July 12-13 full day tour and meeting in Pinedale

Action Items

- *Send Electronic copy of PowerPoint presentations to participants
- *Develop time line for funding sources and applications/regulations
- * Ruby Expenditures and investments - need by first of March. A conference call may follow.
- *send out TNC socio-geographic study
- *USGS long term monitoring presentation at July mtg.