

Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI)

Executive Committee Meeting (EC)

Wyoming Game & Fish Building Video Conference Room

5400 Bishop Boulevard, Cheyenne, WY

10 a.m. – January 24, 2012

WLCI - Executive Committee (EC) members/alternates present: Mary Thoman, Chairman (Conservation Districts); John Linn (County Commissioners via teleconference-Pinedale); Cheryl Chatham (Capital City Coordinator-Forest Service); Scott Talbott and John Emmerich (Wyoming Game and Fish Department); Ruth Welch (Bureau of Land Management); Frank D'Erchia (US Geological Service); Mark Sattleberg (US Fish and Wildlife Service); Jason Fearneyhough and Doug Miyamoto (Wyoming Department of Agriculture); John Keck (National Park Service) and Steve Ferrell (Governor's liaison).
Absent: Randy Updike (US Geological Service); Don Simpson (BLM)

WLCI – Coordination Team (CT) members: Renee Dana, Retiring Lead (Bureau of Land Management); Michele Windsor, Team Lead (Bureau of Land Management); Carolyn Liedtke; Justin Caudill (Wyoming Department of Agriculture); Jim Wasseen (Wyoming Game & Fish Department); Amy Nichols (US Fish and Wildlife Service); Pat Anderson (US Geological Service); Mark Bellis (US Fish and Wildlife Service).

Others present: Craig Showalter, president (Wyoming Community Foundation); Adrienne Pilmanis and Dan Blake (US Fish and Wildlife Service); Kyle Geffee (First Interstate Bank); John Ruhs (BLM); Tyler Abbott (FWS); Brent Lathrup (TNC); Bonnie Cannon (Rep. Lummis office); Zack Bowen (USGS); David Mott (USGS); Natalie Latysh (USGS); Genevieve Skora (FWS); Temple Stevenson (WCCA); Pat Diebert (FWS); Geri Sullivan (NRCS) via video conference in Lander; Erik Norelius (BLM) via video conference in Green River

The meeting was called to order at 10:40 a.m. by Chairman Mary Thoman. Three video conference sites of Lander, Pinedale and Green River were connected.

The meeting began with the introduction of BLM's new Coordination Team Lead, Michele Windsor. It was announced that Carolyn Liedtke, Coordination Team Assistant, will become a regular WLCI part-time member of the Coordination Team. Justin Caudill, CT member, has accepted a permanent position with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture but will devote 25% of his time to WLCI. Legislative funding will be sought for a temporary WDA Coordination Team member.

Introductions were made.

NEW BUSINESS

Potential interface with pending land withdrawal – Chairperson, Mary Thoman, requested Cheryl Chatham conduct this portion of the meeting due to a conflict of interest. A background of the issue, and why this subject has come before the WLCI Executive Committee was given; the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) wishes to transfer some of their land around Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge to another government agency. A letter was written by several agency heads requesting the participation of agency staff. This letter also referred to WLCI as a potential participant in the evaluation of the exchange.

A US Fish and Wildlife spokesperson for the USDOJ land transfer committee stated that she realizes the issue is not within the scope of WLCI but may request NEPA support information from WLCI later. Individual agencies have already provided statements concerning this matter. Because of this issue, the Executive Committee was asked to clarify the role of WLCI within the political arena. The MOU implies the WLCI role but is not implicit. A subcommittee of John Linn, John Keck, and Jason Fearneyhough was tasked with formulating a draft policy and/or to clarify the existing language in the MOU.

Wildlife Heritage Foundation (WHF) Agreement – WHF has changed its name to Wyoming Wildlife-The Foundation and is now housed under the parent foundation Wyoming Community Foundation. The changes in name and parent foundation necessitated a new escrow agreement signature from WLCI. Craig Showalter, President of the Wyoming Community Foundation reviewed the document.

It was **moved** by Scott Talbott and seconded by John Keck to have Chairperson, Mary Thoman, sign the Assignment of Escrow Agreement. The motion was approved unanimously.

There are no other changes in the existing agreement and the governance board remains intact.
(Thoman signed the document)

El Paso – Ruby Pipeline Escrow Account - Kyle Geffe gave an accounting of funds in the escrow account. A Money Market fund of \$71,063.88 matured. This money needs to be reinvested or moved to an account with a lower fee rate and used during the year. The determination of funds needed for the Ruby projects will be available after the LPDT meeting in February. A statement of how funds are invested is available. It was recommended that the funds be moved to the lower fee account. Funds could be reinvested if it was determined the funds were not needed at this time. It was **moved** by Jason Fearneyhough and seconded by Ruth Welch to move the funds into the lower fee account. Voting was unanimous.

A conference call will take place at the end of February with the Coordination Team and EC to review the funds as needed for this year.

OLD BUSINESS

2012 Science Workshop (May 14-17) – Topic and session leads have been established. Abstracts are now being accepted. As per USGS policy, bids for facility use will be sent out. The estimated budget for the workshop is \$20-25,000. Mary Thoman is working with the Rock Springs Travel and Tourism Board for local tourism dollars. The grant is for up to \$4000; applications are due soon.

A discussion of a keynote speaker was held. Suggestions were for former Governor Dave Freudenthal, current Governor Matt Mead, and/or University of Wyoming Professor Indy Burke. All of the suggested individuals would be an asset to the workshop. It was **moved** by John Linn and seconded by Ruth Welch to ask Gov. Matt Mead to speak at the workshop. Frank D’Erchia will draft a letter to be sent to the Governor’s office. (Others could also be invited to speak at the workshop.)

A WLCI Teams business meeting will be held on Friday after the workshop, May 18. This meeting will be used to update each of the different teams on the various activities that they have implemented to

address WLCI goals and objectives. This may also be a good time to include the EC and have a short EC meeting.

It was requested that a list of session topics be made available to the EC electronically.

Partner Contribution Recognition – There is a need to recognize non-MOU partners and individuals who support WLCI for their contributions. Suggestions include letters of acknowledgement or thanks for support and/or public recognition in venues such as SRM or organizational conventions, or a WLCI recognition dinner. This recognition will allow entities/individuals to continue support and to show governing boards the collaborative efforts and individual outstanding contributions.

It was thought it might be best to pattern recognition after existing agency processes. The Communication Team will take the lead in this and recommend a process/method for recognition. Pat Anderson will draft a letter to acknowledge non-MOU agency support.

Vision Statement – The sample statements were reviewed. The first statement was accepted with some tweaking. *“The WLCI vision for southwestern Wyoming is to promote healthy habitats, open spaces, abundant wildlife populations and sustainable agriculture while maintaining a healthy economy for Wyoming and its citizens. WLCI will promote this vision using science-based evidence, with local expertise by developing partnerships to inform future actions balancing the needs of local, regional and national needs.”* It is to include the concepts of science based data and promoting information sharing. John Emmerich will make the changes and send out for review.

A discussion of how to move the Vision Statement forward will be put on the Fall EC agenda

Partnership MOU Update – The general changes for the MOU were approved. The Word Document changes will be accepted with some name and title clarifications and sent out for signatures, beginning with USFS.

Habitat Leasing – a sample of a proposed habitat lease was discussed. In the proposed project, the landowner would enter into a lease agreement for some number of animal unit months (AUMs) as non-use in exchange for a cash value while habitat restoration takes place and lease uncut cultivated forage left for wildlife on approximately 1250 acres, for example. The landowner is not interested in a perpetual conservation easement. A habitat lease would be the only way the owner could provide for the proposed ecological enhancements. Some members disagreed with paying a landowner annually for allowing restoration efforts on their property but did agree with paying for restoration project costs or AUMs for non-use during periods of habitat restoration. It was countered that agriculture producers are the only group of people expected to upgrade lands without pay and habitat leasing would provide another tool to enhance habitats. More inquiry is needed to fully implement this tool.

It was **moved** by John Linn to continue to move forward gathering information on Habitat Leasing with Justin Caudill as lead. The motion was seconded by Cheryl Chatham and approved unanimously.

TEAM REPORTS

Support Subcommittee – The SSC will meet Feb. 15, 2012, to review how to best provide support to the Executive Committee. They have also provided some input on the Science Workshop.

Science Update – Copies of *Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Management Ecoregional Assessment Tools and Models for the Wyoming Basin* were handed out. This information was provided to the BLM for management information.

The beta site for the Integrated Assessment was available for review. Comments are needed. Please contact Zach Bowen (970-226-9218) for more information.

The Science Team will review the Science Plan and revise as needed.

Science and Technical Advisor Team (STAC) – The STAC met for their regular meeting last week. They have assisted USGS with the 2012 Science Workshop planning and STAC members are session leads. They continue to work with the Monitoring Team. Conversations on how to be more aware of science efforts are being discussed.

Adrienne Pilmanis will take over as STAC lead with the departure of Dan Blake.

Data and Information Management Team (DIMIT) – The updated WLCI website will be ready for launch soon. It is currently in beta site for review. The DIMIT has provided the website for the Science Workshop. Workshop registration is open and weekly reports are available to keep track of numbers and abstracts. They have been working with WYNDD for data collection. This data is restricted to WLCI members and not for the public. The next meeting will be January 31, 2012

Communication Team – The team will begin working on the newsletter update. Any topic suggestions would be appreciated.

This team is very short on participation and would like more people willing to help. A communication background is not needed, just the willingness to provide ideas and support.

Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC) – There will be a workshop in British Columbia for the GNLCC. It will be held the same time as the WLCI Science Workshop. The draft funding guidelines are available at <http://gnlcc.org>. When the draft is approved there will be a call for proposals. The deadline for proposals is in March. This LCC has approximately \$1 million for proposals.

Ruby Focus Group – The group is incorporating the data from the mapping and monitoring collections and Dr. Conover's sage grouse project (raven predation) to inform management practices in the area. Their next step will be to determine which of the springs and seeps are in the most need of protection/restoration. Projects will go through the LPDTs.

John Christiansen, Kemmerer BLM, will act as lead for the Ruby Focus Group until Michele Easley's position is filled.

Preliminary discussions are being held on potential pygmy rabbit projects.

Projects and funding that qualify for Ruby dollars will be known after the February LPDT meetings.

Coordination Team (CT) – Michele Windsor is transitioning in to CT lead. Renee Dana will stay on until mid-February to assist with the transition. A list of team activities was included in the EC packet.

Local Project Development Team Meetings (LPDT) - Meetings will be held the first two weeks in February. Discussions during these meetings will include 2013 projects and the Conservation Action Plan (CAP).

The 2012 budget is expected soon. The CT is starting to align the budget with CAP priorities, streamlining the budgeting process.

Other accomplishments are listed in the handouts.

Executive Committee Round Robin

Scott Talbott (WGFD) – The WGFD is working on some large collaborative efforts for Mule deer and habitats (Platte River and Wyoming Range). Cheatgrass has become an important issue for Wyoming and efforts are being initiated to manage cheatgrass in a manner that will maintain healthy native habitats.

John Emmerich (WGFD) – The sage grouse seasonal range mapping project will soon be complete however, the product and tools will not be released until USGS completes their required peer review. As part of the Western Governors' Association's Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool project (west-wide crucial habitat and corridor maps), Wyoming plans to roll out its version, called WISDOM, for public use during Spring 2012. This information will be available to add to the Integrated Assessment.

Ruth Welch (BLM) – The BLM will release their Instruction Memorandum for sage grouse by the first week of February. Don Simpson is the chair of the Rocky Mountain Regional Team for sage grouse.

Frank D'Erchia (USGS) – The GS federal budget has been released, overall the agency will take a 1 ½% cut. WLCI funding should remain at about last year's level.

Mark Sattleberg (FWS) – Dan Blake and Mark Bellis were thanked for their service to WLCI. It is planned to replace these positions but cannot be advertised until after the hiring freeze.

Jason Fearnough (WDA) – Justin Caudill will be changing duties within WDA/WLCI. He was thanked for his work toward making WLCI a success. WDA and natural resource committee have made cheatgrass a high priority within the agriculture community. Discussion will continue on this invasive species.

John Linn (County Commissioners) – John expressed his best wishes to Dan Blake and Mark Bellis as they move on to different experiences in their careers. He also expressed his gratitude for WGFD in supplying the venues and equipment for the meeting's video conferencing.

Mary Thoman (Conservation Districts) – Conservation Districts, as part of the Coalition of Local Governments (CLG) , is working with the BLM on several projects/proposals and the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan.

Next Meeting – May 18th in conjunction with the WLCI Science Workshop. This meeting will include the annual change in Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

(Submitted by Carolyn Liedtke)

ACTION ITEMS

- Clarify role of WLCI – John Linn, John Keck, Jason Fearneyhough
- Review Ruby funds transfer/investment via conference call – EC and CT
- Draft letter to Gov. Mead for Science Workshop – Frank D’Erchia
- Send EC an electronic copy of the Science Workshop Topic Sessions – Pat Anderson
- Recommend process/method to recognize non-MOU partners – Communication Team
- Draft letter to acknowledge non-MOU partners – Pat Anderson
- Tweak Vision Statement – John Emmerich – Due Feb 15
- Include Vision Statement on Fall EC agenda – Carolyn Liedtke
- Accept/make MOU changes and send out for signature – Carolyn Liedtke
- Continue to gather information on Habitat Leasing – Justin Caudill