



AWA Sage-grouse Partnership Meeting

Date: March 4, 2013

Time: 13:00-3:30

Location: Manyberries Curling Rink

Participants:

Landowners and Leaseholders

- see end of notes for names of those in attendance

Alberta Wilderness Association

- Cliff Wallis Vice-President
- Christyann Olson Executive Director
- Wonnita Andrus, Conservation Specialist
- Sue Michalsky, Landowner, Observer

Nature Canada

- Ian Davidson, Executive Director

Welcome, overview of Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) and reason for meeting - C. Olson, C. Wallis

Sage-grouse partnership (SGP) concept - is a mechanism to facilitate communication and accelerate progress being made for recovery of endangered species, especially Greater sage-grouse, among landowners, leaseholders, interested individuals, oil and gas industry, conservationists and government.

AWA has met with ESRD, Chinook Energy, Medicine Hat Gas, the Minister Diana McQueen, ADM Matt Machielse, Northern Plains Conservation Network, Nature Canada and Canadian Energy Pipeline Association to discuss SGP and ways to move protection and recovery efforts forward. Defining conservation areas identified in the SSRP is an excellent opportunity for us to work together and develop a model for the government of how a conservation area can be defined and work on the ground.

Medicine Hat ESRD staff, Joel Nicholson declined AWA's invitation to be part of this landowner, leaseholders meeting.

Meeting Objectives - W. Andrus

- Provide an opportunity for AWA to meet landholders and listen
- Provide a forum for frank conversation regarding Sage-grouse decline and recovery efforts
- Review past and ongoing conservation initiatives
- Identify barriers or limitations to Sage-grouse recovery efforts
- Explore thoughts and opinions regarding these factors
- Identify progress made and ways to keep initiatives moving forward
- Improve communication and develop respect for everyone's roles
- Discuss impediments to partnership and ways to move past them





- Acknowledge important work undertaken by landholders, leaseholders, ESRD, Sage-grouse Recovery Team, conservationists, biologists and others
- Identify initiatives that assure protection of grasslands, wildlife and ranching communities
- Avoid redundancies or undermining existing efforts
- Acknowledge inherent role of ranching in grassland conservation
- Ensure ranching is supported and not undermined by conservation initiatives
- Identify common ground and determine willingness to meet and begin the work of the SGP

What we heard - discussion led by W. Andrus, C. Wallis, C. Olson

Discussion regarding issues, concerns, points made during telephone conversations with W. Andrus and questions expressed by attendees. The following is a review of points made:

- Public access of grazing leases has been abused
- Past hunting pressure and hunting still being allowed in Montana
- It takes years to realize impacts on sage-grouse or other species
- Need public education regarding access and impacts
- There are inconsistencies in what the science is saying
- Scientists were too late on the scene, changes had already begun
- Statutory property rights and the intent of off-set programs are unknown
- Long-term leases, and inherent long-term commitment needed
- AWA will include position statement that shows support for long-term leases in items sent to attendees
- Ranching is an important component in the long-term health of the grasslands
- Conservation or public policy objectives cannot be at the expense of land and lease holders
- Grasslands cannot be the off-set for oil sand developments
- Wildhorse Conservation Area is undefined and causes uncertainty
- Potential for devaluation of land, diminished land rights and restrictions are frightening
- Management of the area by Parks rather than ESRD is a concern
- Special interest groups are a concern
- One-size fits all approach is not wanted
- Creation of a park in the area is not a new initiative
- Previous designations for Kennedy Coulee, Heritage Rangelands reviewed
- Mapping in SSRP identified Cottonwood Consultants as the map developer; the maps are the same ones used in a number of publications - Cottonwood Consultants is C. Wallis personal company- the maps were developed years ago and are part of the government map database
- Cliff Wallis is totally unpaid for his volunteer work with AWA and does not "receive a cut"
- Bison in Grassland National Park did not keep up the grazing regime needed
- Grazing will take place this year in the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve
- A long-term vision of grassland conservation will be inclusive, supportive and protective of ranching communities
- Landholders need to be involved in defining and determining what Conservation Area means
- Alternative is someone else telling all of us what a Conservation Area means





- Public planning decisions and conservation objectives must not have detrimental effects on landholders
- Past biological studies may have been too intensive and led to declining numbers
- Success of recovery initiatives must be measured without causing adversity for Sage-grouse
- Can biological study resume without detrimental effects on recovered populations
- Past recovery initiatives for other species may have been problematic to Sage-grouse
- Installing hawk poles provided predator perches
- On some parcels of land ESRD are removing existing hawk poles
- Some feel hawk poles were helpful
- Swift fox successful reintroduction may be contributing to Sage-grouse decline
- Health of wildlife populations is reflective of the health of the land
- Management of both land and the species on it must consider the total ecology of an area and not be singularly focused
- Landholder observations suggest that the number of predators on the landscape has increased in recent years
 - Some felt gophers were not in the area in the 1960's
 - Gopher abundance contributing to increase in badger, coyote and hawk numbers
 - Disagreements by biologists about predation of Sage-grouse eggs by gophers
 - Historical evidence documents gophers present in the 1800's
 - The number of raccoons have increased
 - Some feel ESRD has been "been working against" them
 - Suspicions of deliberate introduction of cougars, elk and moose
 - On some parcels ESRD are removing abandoned buildings that are used by predators
 - Alternative methods for discouraging predator occupancy are wanted; pilot projects reducing grizzly bear/cattle conflicts with new carcass disposal methods was an example
- Avoid employment of methods known to cause predator population explosions
- External factors contribute to decline
- Blame on landholders and oil and gas, while other factors are often ignored, is not right
- Alberta Sage-grouse population is on the fringe of the species' range
- Population success is somewhat reliant on birds migrating north from southern populations
- Processes of drought, hard winters, natural population cycles and disease may limit the success of recovery efforts
- Select recovery efforts must address factors that are within our ability to influence
- What is a real and appropriate measure of success based on what we can influence
- Ensure the merit of efforts are not disregarded because of factors beyond our control
- Participation in a conservation initiative for Sage-grouse could put participants at risk
- Association with conservation initiatives may have unexpected consequences
- Past partnerships may not have been transparent enough
- Some have hidden agendas
- Need flexibility in approach or the ability to leave partnership without negative repercussions
- Some stewardship tools such as easements are perceived to have devalued land beyond compensation received
- Future initiatives must ensure the security of landowners if they are to be successful





- Cannot jeopardize participants or the sustainability of the ranching community, as this will negate the entire process
- Ensure that participants are not put at risk by involvement in chosen initiatives
- Ensure that initiatives and measures of success are flexible enough to be sustained as circumstance and participant needs change
- Create a transparent process that fosters bonds of trust
- Past communications from conservation groups have not always been appropriate or consistent
- Some landholders have had good interactions with conservation groups
- Conservation initiatives such as the installation of fence reflectors have reduced elk and deer destruction of fences
- Stories highlighting the success of habitat improvements projects, such as fencing reflectors, imply landowners were to blame for erecting fences in the first place rather than focusing on the landholder acting as a good steward. Some perceive this type of communication approach to be a “slap in the face” by conservation organizations
- Some landowners feel excluded by conservation organizations because they have smaller operations
- Some landholder’s feel conservationists are not really listening to what rancher’s are saying and instead proceed with processes and mandates that do not consider landholders
- Some landholder’s feel overwhelmed by the number of groups approaching them and are concerned about hidden agendas
- Some landholders would include other conservationists in this conversation
- Some landholders do not want to be forced into partnership with other groups
- Conservation initiatives can place a burden on landholders
- Ranching is a business and must be economically viable
- Some landholders feel that there is little acknowledgement of their ongoing contribution to grassland health and species’ success. Remaining native parcels only exist because of historic stewardship by landholders
- Some recommended or adopted conservation initiatives are financially taxing and are not a good investment for landholders trying to maintain a sustainable and profitable operation
- When financial aid is provided, landholders often do not have the required manpower or time
- What types of resource supports are required to off-set costs associated with adoption and implementation of conservation initiatives
- Incentives must exist to ensure conservation initiatives are sustainable over the long-term
- Compensation for providing “Ecological Goods and Service” is often talked about but no values or accreditation systems have been proposed
- Ranchers Stewardship Alliance Inc. (RSAI - SK) formed to address this issue in Saskatchewan. The RSAI has been working towards a system that rewards landholders who are good stewards of the land. RSAI is working to make species at risk an asset rather than a liability for land managers. A feasibility study has recently been completed, with examination of several international accreditation systems. The document will outline the findings and suggest an appropriate approach in determining compensation for grassland ecological goods and services. Documents will be made available when they are released





- Who pays for what and what are ecological goods and services worth? Valuation of grassland ecological goods and services may average \$300.00/acre/year. Conservation land stewardship costs vary from \$5.40 to \$13.88/acre/year
- A pilot accreditation project related to improving and protecting Sage-grouse habitat is underway with one rancher in Saskatchewan, with 55 sections of pasture being enrolled. Key components of the project are that it is voluntary, assessment is carried out only once a year in the fall, it has clear measurable goals related to grass height and forb content, the rancher will not be penalized if measured values are not achieved or if he chooses to leave the project (however in such circumstances he would not be paid) and it is compensatory
- There is interest from landholders in a similar valuation system as part of a Sage-grouse recovery initiative
- Deindustrialization and a decrease in motorized vehicle use are only two components of Sage-grouse recovery
- Deindustrialization must be done in a way that makes sense
- Deindustrialization is a long-term component of Sage-grouse recovery
- Continued sales of surface dispositions by the Alberta government is counter productive
- Previously issued dispositions can be respected
- Limit future dispositions and implement strategies like horizontal drilling
- Change public attitudes and awareness regarding responsible access of grazing leases
- Ensure deindustrialization is prioritized appropriately by working with oil and gas
- Educate the public to reduce motorized vehicle use in critical habitat areas
- Considerable work has been completed by ESRD and the Sage-grouse Recovery Team
- Redundancies in approach should be avoided
- Some landholders have been part of the Sage-grouse recovery team
- Montana committed to provide Alberta with 40 birds per year for five years. Of 41 released last year less than 20 survived and no more birds will be provided until a more developed conservation directive is apparent in Alberta
- Hope to establish the Sage-grouse Partnership as a model of a clear conservation directive
- Process should not be government lead
- Communication is inherent to the success of recovery efforts
- Development of a captive breeding program options need to be explored
- Chick development is reliant on the presence of certain insects at particular stages of growth and this is a limiting factor on the implementation and development of a successful breeding program
- Calgary Zoo may be investigating captive breeding program for Sage-grouse
- Landowners believe any breeding program should be developed locally
- Landholders expressed interest in providing a release site for the birds if a program is launched

Next Steps

1. Interested landholders agreed to work with AWA over the next 4-6 months developing Sage-grouse Partnership, 11 landholders signed up to attend the next meeting.





2. Monthly meetings, held at the Manyberries curling rink, will begin most likely in late May after calving season.
3. Next meeting agenda will deal with common ground, priorities, and appointing co-chairs for the committee.
4. Notes from this meeting will be posted to AWA's website and will be provided to all those who have given contact information. Email is preferred communication tool, but if not possible, AWA will mail through Canada Post.
5. Attendees at this meeting will be added to a list serve newsletter that will provide updates and information about meetings for any who would like to attend.
6. Subscriptions to the Wild Lands Advocate and membership were provided to all who gave contact information.
7. Interested landholders are encouraged to keep in touch through the Internet or by calling AWA directly. Toll free number is available – 1-866-313-0713.

The following list of attendees is not inclusive as some individuals missed the sign in sheets.

Wonnita	Andrus	Mack	Murray
Bayot	Britschgi	Wayne	Murray
Aron	Brower	Christyann	Olson
Ian	Davidson	Raymond	Pearson
Phil	Gogolinski	Bonnie	Pearson
James	Hargrave	Keith	Reesor
Byron	Haugan	Ronda	Reesor
Henry	Haugan	Travis	Reesor
Travis	Hougen	Clint	Stromsmoe
Graham	Heidinger	Nyle	Stromsmoe
Nevin	Heidinger	Vicki	Stromsmoe
Rodger	Heidinger	Ian	Walker
David	Heydlauff	Cliff	Wallis
Ralph	Heydlauff	Paul	Weeks
Colin	Kusler	Robert	Weeks
Tanya	Jangula	Darcy	Wills
Gerald	Maser	Maxine	Yeast
Sue	Mihalsky	Clayton	Yeast

