



Sage-grouse Partnership
September 25, 2013
Meeting Notes

Manyberries Curling Rink

Attending:

Sharon Good
Drew Barnes, MLA
Darcy Wills
Greg Seefroed – LGX
Jim Gordon LGX
David Heydlauff
Kerrie Kusler
Ralph Heydlauff

Valinda Ivanics
Philippe Reicher, CEPA
Kevin Redden, MH Gas
Tracy Kupchenko, ESRD –
Public Lands
Joel Nicholson, ESRD
Todd Whiklo ESRD
Cliff Wallis, AWA

Sue Michalsky, AWA
Christyann Olson, AWA
Ronda Reesor
Travis Reesor
Tanya Jangula
Bayot Britschgi
Keith Reesor

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Agenda approved without additions

3. Working Committee Membership

Ronda Reesor emphasized terms of reference and expressed concern some members are not receiving emails. Christyann will arrange for a test email of the Distribution Discussion Group Mailing. Travis and Tanya are receiving some but not all emails. Test message sent during meeting, Travis and Tanya did not receive but did receive when forwarded from C. Olson account. Travis will check to see if the list is blocked by their hotmail email accounts. Discussion in general about communication and the hope that folks will contact AWA to let them know if there is some problem with emails. Also emphasized that all newsletters and materials related to the committee are posted on the AlbertaWilderness.ca website and available to all.

- Membership numbers and absenteeism discussed. Determined group size of 10 – 16 is most desirable for the working committee. David Heydlauff and Cliff Wallis will contact all those who have not attended meetings regularly to confirm their wishes about committee membership. Industry representatives expressed interest in being part of the committee. Committee agreed to make room for that once membership is confirmed with all members on the current list.
- Joel Nicholson reported that the Alberta Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan 2013 - 2018 was approved on the 24th of September by the Minister. Joel expressed concern about redundancy between the SGP and ESRD recovery efforts. Committee emphasized no desire to be redundant and to ensure what we work on is value added. Discussion emphasized the plan focused primarily on strategy and our efforts primarily seek action and help to implement the recovery strategy. The ADM sent AWA a copy of the plan this afternoon for use at this meeting. AWA has posted the plan to the AWA Sage-grouse website pages.
- Emphasis given that we are all here to recover sage-grouse and that everybody is on the same page.





4. Emergency Protection Order
 - Will not apply to privately owned land, only to federally and provincially owned lands
 - Grazing can continue under this order
 - There are very few details
 - Protection from new industry development and sod busting is expected
 - Expecting it will take several months for the actual order to be released.
 - Concern that energy leases continuing to be issued
 - How process will work and who will ultimately be in charge is unknown
 - Joel reviewed that the province has many of the elements needed for sage-grouse recovery ready to put in place; when everything is in place the emergency order would be lifted.
 - This is a precedent setting order, no others have been issued

5. David Heydlauff – presented an overview of his perspectives of how silver sagebrush has changed through the years from the time when he rode through the area and only had 3 gates with sagebrush that was 3' tall to the scenario today with 11 gates in same area and sagebrush that will only grow to be 18" tall. When there is 2' of snow in the winter, there is nothing for sage-grouse to feed on. Cattle are being taught to eat the sagebrush – it is collateral damage from the increasing grazing intensity and increasing fencing for cattle.
 - We want to change the trajectory of the decline and that is why we are here tonight. Some overgrazed areas service other species that are at risk, including Mountain plover. It is important to recognize there is good information available locally and good science readily available.

6. . Committee began to review the list of potential actions compiled from various recovery strategies and other relevant efforts. On-the-ground actions were reviewed with the following results:
 - Structure removal (staged approach), especially in Critical Habitat but also in surrounding landscape, including hawk nesting poles, abandoned buildings: Agreed this was a priority and SGP supports in principle. ESRD has mapped structures and will be working over time to remove them. Joel Nicholson agreed to share the inventory and suggested the SGP could assist if AWA could organize some volunteers to help remove structures. ESRD has also compiled a catalogue of oil & gas wells.
 - Identify roads for decommissioning: Low priority since most roads are public. However, SGP could identify potential roads to be decommissioned in consultation with petroleum companies and in conjunction with ranch planning.
 - Timing restrictions on industrial activity within 15 km of active leks and in Critical Habitat: Medium priority. Controversy over the necessity of restrictions within 15 km. Agreed to change action to 'X km' to emphasize that more research is required to determine the necessary distance. Timing restrictions are already in place within 3.2 km of wellsites. The group agreed that access control overall was required, not just specific to oil and gas.
 - Remote telemetry of wells: Medium priority – is being implemented by natural gas companies. The technology is not currently available for oil wells.
 - Fire suppression: No priority – agreed that this was not a necessary action for silver sagebrush habitat.
 - Annual grass containment: Low priority – specific to cheatgrass/downy brome. There is little invasion into critical habitat in AB at this point, but monitoring should continue.



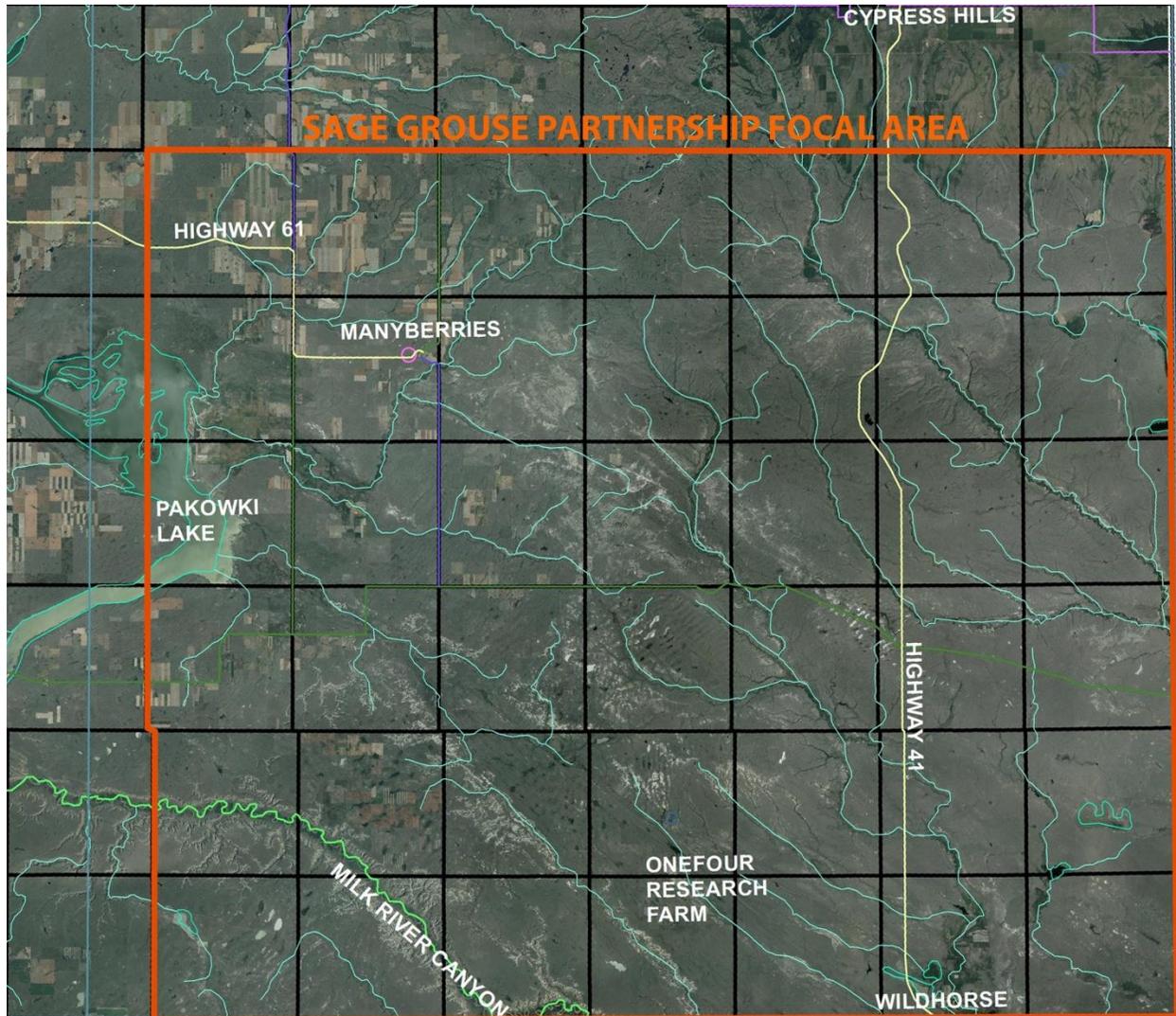


- Exotic Species Management: Low priority – should monitor.
- Sustainable grazing management (e.g. 75% Range Health Score or 25-40% utilization rates and avoidance of concentrated winter grazing/supplemental winter feeding in Critical Habitat; deferred grazing; avoidance of salt, minerals, fences within 0.8 km of leks); need mosaic of good cover and patches of bare ground; improved hiding cover (structure) and improved late brood rearing habitat(forbs): High priority – agreed to delete the prescriptive details and simply call the action sustainable grazing management. SGP will be working on developing and implementing some pilot ranch plans for two ranches with critical habitat.
- Ranch Plans for Greater-sage Grouse Success: Incorporated into above action
- Restoration of non-native annual cover to perennial native cover, especially in Critical Habitat but also restoring functionality in former range: Medium priority. ESRD and oil and gas are piloting an offset program. Funds will be used to convert cropland or crested wheatgrass conversion. SGP can assist by identifying suitable parcels of land for conversion and identifying potential landowner partners.
- Development of silver sagebrush seed for restoration work; planting after fire: Medium priority. According to Foothills Fescue Forum, silver sagebrush transplants very well. SGP could assist by facilitating production of plugs and getting plugs planted on reclaimed wellsites in appropriate habitat.
- Predator Control (including direct control as well as removal of features/structures that facilitate predator roosting, denning, or nesting success): High priority. ESRD is working on this. Great horned owl is the main predator of adult sage grouse; corvids are main culprit for nest predation; other predators include red fox, coyotes, skunk and badgers. ESRD has a detailed predator management strategy in final draft form that includes shooting, and trapping predators and use of a toxicant specific to corvids. It was noted that this was an emergency measure and not considered a long term solution. SGP agreed to support ESRD's plan. Joel Nicholson agreed to supply the SGP with a copy of the predator management strategy.
- Vehicle and Foot Access Control: High priority. Sept 15 to Nov 15 is the least disruptive period for sage grouse. There is already a notification for wellsites to restrict access during critical periods for sage grouse. A task group was established to look into potential tools for access control (see actions).
- Translocation (once habitat is secure): Medium priority. SGP agreed to support, however there is little we can do to assist.
- Captive Rearing: Medium priority. SGP agreed to support in principle, but have few details. Calgary Zoo is investigating potential. SGP will monitor progress.
- Fence-marking: Medium priority. A list of organizations that can assist with fence marking will be compiled.
- Strategic removal of water impoundments: Low to Medium priority. SGP agreed this can be looked at in individual ranch plans.
- Develop and implement a Disease Management Plan that assesses risks posed by different diseases (E.G. West Nile Virus), sets priorities for disease management activities and evaluates the efficacy of different disease management approaches: High priority. SGP agreed that while this was a high priority, there was little we could do. A vaccine for sage grouse to prevent west nile virus is being developed. The Calgary Zoo is aware of the development and if captive rearing proceeds, birds could be vaccinated.





7. The committee agreed that the initial focus of the SGP will be on the 42 townships that form the core area of sage grouse critical habitat.



8. Action items for next meeting:
- a. Task group struck to determine options for access restrictions and bring recommendations back to the next meeting. Task group includes David, Sue, Darcy and Valinda working in consultation with Tracy Kupchenko and Todd Whiklo
 - b. Sue and David will prepare a package for the next meeting on the Onefour Research Farm including a history of how it is managed with respect to grazing and policy options for future protection and management.
9. Next meeting scheduled for October 16th, 2013 at 5:00 PM, Manyberries Rink.

