

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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DRAFT MEETING NOTES October 31, 2013

Members Present: Byng Hunt, Mono Supervisors; Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo; Jeff Ulrich & Brian White USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Forest Becket, Caltrans; John Eastman, Town of Mammoth Lakes; Doug Power & Dave Brillenz, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center; Heidi Sickler, Dawne Emery, Alisa Ellsworth & James Erdman, CDFW; Steve Nelson, BLM; Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile National Monument; Carl Benz, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/Ventura (by phone)

Members Absent: Mike Gauthier, Yosemite National Park; Justin Nalder, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Chris Plakos, LADWP; Adora Saulque, Benton Paiutes

Staff Present: Scott Burns, Wendy Sugimura, Courtney Weiche, C.D. Ritter

Guests Present: Wendi Grasseschi, Mammoth Times; Lisa Cutting, Mono Lake Committee; Danna Stroud, Sierra Nevada Conservancy; Katie Vane, The Sheet

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Byng Hunt called the meeting to order at 9:13 a.m. and the pledge of allegiance was recited. Attendees introduced themselves.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

3. MEETING NOTES: Review/approve draft meeting notes from July 25, 2013.

MOTION: Approve draft meeting notes from July 25, 2013. (Eastman/Regelbrugge.
Ayes: All except Hunt, who abstained due to absence.)

4. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE: Members presented agency planning issues & pending projects.

5. ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT LISTINGS

A. HIGH MOUNTAIN LAKES PROJECT/Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog: James Erdman, CDFW, presented a PowerPoint on wilderness stocking practices, balancing ecological values. Aerial stocking began after WWII. About 89% of lakes have fish. Same habitat is required for amphibians, such as lakes that don't freeze solid. Fast-action fishery gets lots of fish, but stunted growth. Frog listing was prevented before, but likely will list now. Frogs share warmth in "cuddle puddles." Terrestrial garter snakes eat frogs.

CDFW developed management units of smaller planning watersheds and extensive database of backcountry lakes. Native fauna are frogs, historic recreation is fishing. Golden trout are not native to East Side. Provide better habitat instead of marginal. Maybe translocate frogs to fishless lakes. Trout removal while striking balance. Identify through GIS number of sites, survey for fish and amphibians. Frogs began multiplying after fish removal; monitoring frogs for disease that could wipe out population in one summer.

Ability of habitat to handle certain number of frogs? *Yes. Disease was introduced by frog brought to California for pregnancy tests, moving across Sierra. Raising population might create resistance among frogs.* Eastman observed netting of trout, and then frogs were prolific. Predation followed by disease: double punch. CDFW uses only mechanical means, not chemical.

Byng Hunt noted worldwide epidemic could make frogs extinct in a couple of decades.

Jon Regelbrugge asked if restoration sites are available to public or agencies. *Yes, available at office. Aerial photographs show each lake's characteristics. Document library on website later. Inyo National Forest is heavily involved.*

Danna Stroud noted Inyo meeting by USFWS did not get this presentation, which explained rationale on restoring ecosystems that should be shown everywhere to communicate to public. Erdman has been giving presentation at outreach meetings and will visit schools.

B. YOSEMITE TOAD UPDATE: Wendy Sugimura, Mono County, noted a better use of time would be to discuss listing of sage grouse. Erdman noted restoration of toads does not rely on fish removal. Toad does not have same habitat needs as fish or yellow-legged frog. Main element for toads? *Toad is terrestrial creature. Need more studies.* Sugimura thought grazing and pack stock perhaps were not causing meta-degradation.

C. SAGE GROUSE UPDATE: According to Steve Abele, USFWS, sage grouse are listed as threatened, not endangered. Agency is considering designating critical habitat for Bi-State population. USFWS received petitions in 2001 and 2005. Published insufficient info to warrant listing in 2006. Effort was challenged, courts ordered reconsideration. In 2010 it was precluded by higher-priority listings.

Abele cited factors that led to listing by Bi-State Action Plan. USFWS had to interpret high, medium, low impacts on species. Endangered = in danger of extinction. Threatened = likely to become endangered in foreseeable future. How far out? *Recovery/regeneration for sagebrush is 30 years. More latitude with threatened status, more deference to groups the State might be working with. Special rule proposed exemption from take. Not applicable to critical habitat.*

Concepts affecting conservation of species: 1) stressors (woodland, meadow or upland treatments to restore habitat condition); and 2) routine ranching operations. Grouse prefer large intact landscapes to those fragmented, less contiguous. Critical habitat delineation basically is informed by: 1) quantitative model saying what grouse like/don't like projected onto map by USGS; 2) vegetation layer, local expert knowledge of where grouse occur (BLM/USFS), maps merged; 3) woodland treatment projects into spatial map largely driven by habitat loss (global concern), confounding connectivity. No good soils data exist, and ecological description is not well defined. Soil surveys will be conducted in the future.

Jeff Ulrich noted coyotes and ravens affect population. Abele indicated Nevada is taking quantitative look, researching leks. Variations exist across entire area. Predators probably are impacting female survival into adulthood and chicks out of nest. "Grouse are prey, born to be eaten - it's their lot in life," Abele said. Landfill in Long Valley is unclear on subsidizing prey, giving them advantage. Predator management could play.

Grazing application? *To federal allotments primarily, under good prescription. Concern over grazing is to not affect producers. Federal agencies have responsibility to do things. Spend time in consultation or conversation with FWS. Defer some responsibility to FWS.*

Jon Regelbrugge noted Section 7 cites authority only when no effect on species. It's hard to imagine how to do that. *Lawyers hash out specifics. Fair degree of latitude on mechanism to work out kinks. FWS gets out of way of those concerns.* Regelbrugge thought it would trigger administrative workload at land agencies.

Carl Benz noted leverage point is discretionary authority, need to consult. Keep agencies informed.

How to delist Bi-State? *Global challenge is multiple populations with fair degree of isolation. Strongholds at Long Valley and Bodie, others lesser. Want to maintain ability to*

blink back on. Challenged by degree of fragmentation. Pine Nut population = 100. Usually 15 birds strut, but this year none at all. Core populations are challenged. Can alleviate some stresses, but not existing roads, power lines, housing developments. Facilitate connection between populations. Dispersal poorly informed, but getting better. Genetics are helping. Recovery involves addressing stressors.

Why is seasonal grouse hunting allowed? *Nevada has hunted since 1997. California hunts in Bodie Hills and Long Valley in one-bird permit system. Allocate 25 permits/unit, usually get 15-20 birds killed, a negligible effect on grouse population. Perception issues exist. Get education to public, California sets example for other states. Montana and Wyoming have liberal seasons. California uses permit system, both a blessing and a curse. The public reacts.*

Scott Burns mentioned GIS data showing boundaries, with most of Mono significantly impacted by fish and toads. Where is boundary, how would it affect property? How is LADWP qualified for exclusion? Over 30 special districts plus small businesses would be affected. Concern exists with fragmentation analysis. Mono Supervisors will request 90-day extension plus public hearing, as they're not prepared to respond within 60 days. Go to RPACs, get informed. Need more time to compile final comments. A lot of unanswered questions exist. *Requesting more comment time is always an option.*

6. LOCAL IMPACTS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN: Byng Hunt asked about lasting effects on winter months. USFS/Inyo: Jon Regelbrugge indicated three weeks of work set back and impacts to budget. Employees would have worked OHV funds. Unanticipated effects occurred. No staff to maintain facilities, but public didn't lose land access. Mammoth Lakes Tourism Director John Urdi shared info with public about responsibility for picking up after themselves. USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe: Brian White noted similar effects. Jeff Ulrich noted weed crew did some work for a while. BLM: Overall, campground closures were smooth, public was understanding. No rangers were out writing tickets. Dispersed camping occurred despite working years to contain it. CDFW: Public came into office about closures and access, so staff would help if it happened again. Devils Postpile: Deanna Dulen recalled an intense effect. It was heartbreaking to turn people away, she recalled Sad stories, anger, yelling. USFS/BLM lands were open, so people went elsewhere. All the different agencies with different missions are needed. Shutdown was hard on NPS staff. Urdi and ESTA helped public to reframe how to enjoy their experience. Mono County: Byng Hunt donned tie-dyed gear to attend "Occupy Yosemite" at Tuolumne Meadows. Family of six from Australia had been saving to visit Yosemite, but instead was introduced to Eastern Sierra and viewing fall colors.
7. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS
 - A. LAND ADJUSTMENT SUBCOMMITTEE: Chair Steve Nelson, BLM, reported no meeting due to federal government shutdown Oct. 1-16.
 - B. BIOMASS FEASIBILITY STUDY: Wendy Sugimura, Mono County, deferred report to Jan. 30, 2014.
8. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: **To be determined.**
9. ADJOURN at 12:10 p.m. to next meeting: Thursday, January 30, 2014, at 9 a.m.

Prepared by C.D. Ritter, CPT secretary