

**CMR NWR Community Working Group
Meeting Minutes for April 9, 2015
Methodist Church, Winnett, MT**

Bill Milton called the meeting to order at 10:08 am with introductions and grounding question and 28 people in attendance.

Bill asked each participant to give a brief update on the status of moisture and plant growth. Everyone in turn introduced themselves, who they represented, and what the weather is like for their area.

Bill and Rachel introduced the second draft of the 3-part goal and provided a brief background of the origin of the goals and the reforms. Bill then asked the group to look at the “suggested reform” on each goal. He asked the group to write any comments on the suggested reform and then went around the room allowing each person to share their comments. Suggested changes to the goals are captured in the appendix of this document.

Bill then had the participants number off and separate into 4 groups. Bridget Nielsen with the USFWS had researched and documented the identified threats for Northern Montana to sage grouse from a variety of agency sources. The identified threats were: **Agricultural Conversion, Sagebrush Elimination, Grazing Management, Fire, Energy, and Recreation**. The groups were asked to answer the following questions in regards to the threats:

Question 1: Do you agree with these threats? If not, edit them to your satisfaction, and then rank the threats in order of importance.

Question 2: What are the factors driving these threats? In other words, what is the motivating force (i.e. economics, fear, etc.) behind conversion of rangeland to farmland? This exercise will be done for all the identified threats.

Question 3: Now that we have identified the driving forces behind these threats, what are the 3 most important tasks that this group can do to create solutions to these threats? These solutions should address the causes of the threats, not just the symptoms of the threats; i.e. a solution of stopping the conversion of rangeland to farmland through regulation alone without providing solutions to lessen the motivation of conversion to farmland will likely be less effective and may create problems elsewhere.

The groups were given from 11:30 through lunch until 2:00 pm to discuss these topics, then the large group reconvened and each group shared their results. Below is a compilation of the identified Threats, Drivers, and Suggested Actions of all 4 groups.

Threats: *(Because each group ranked the threats differently, they are presented here as Tier 1 and Tier 2, not ranked in order of importance)*

Tier 1

- Agriculture conversion
- Sagebrush elimination

- Predators
- Poor grazing management
- ESA Listing itself and associated misinformation

Tier 2

- Energy development
- Wildfire
- Disease
- Weather
- Invasive Plants
- Recreation

Drivers Behind the Threats:

- Agriculture conversion
 - economics (*commodity prices, need to diversify*);
 - fear of listing (*loss of control, do it now while still can convert, uncertainty of future*);
 - farm program incentives (*specifically organic farming*),
 - succession of farms and ranches (*new generation coming back brings need to diversify*)
- Sagebrush elimination
 - Economics (*succession, more people make a living off same piece of ground*)
 - Fear/misunderstanding of listing (*get habitat off place, won't have to worry about bird*)
 - Abundance of fuels
- Predators
 - Regulations preventing control of avian predators (*protected species*)
 - Economics of fur prices
 - Loss of prey habitat concentrating predators
 - Water availability in the uplands increases predator habitat
 - Lack of money for predator control programs
 - Access to land for predator hunting
 - Change in livestock species (*predator control more intense for sheep vs cattle*)
- Poor grazing management
 - Economic pressures
 - Bad attitude, anti-govt sentiment
 - Lack of education
 - Weather (*drought, fire*)
 - Recreational properties managed for hunting
 - Succession of farms/ranches
- ESA Listing itself and associated misinformation
 - Fear of regulatory uncertainty (*Anticipation of listing results in poor decision making*)
 - Different perspectives of species and their values/worth
- Energy development
 - Economics
 - Global policy

- New technology
- Wildfire/Rx Fire
 - Weather
 - Desire to eliminate sagebrush for reasons listed above
- Disease
 - Weather
 - Lack of immunity to foreign diseases
- Weather
 - Nothing we can control
- Invasive Plants
 - Spread by animals and people
- Recreation
 - Economics
 - Fear of listing creates need to harvest animals now while still an opportunity
 - Lifestyle and demographic changes
 - Single (or limited) species focus and management

Suggested Tasks For Sage Grouse Committee and Full Group:

1. Develop/produce a broadly accepted metric that can be monitored by agencies and landowners.
2. Education
 - a. Address regulatory uncertainty through education, clarify myths versus realities
 - b. Workshops, informational sessions geared toward audience availability
 - c. Better education on livestock grazing and the benefits/threats to sage grouse
 - d. Education on optimal sage brush canopy cover for sage grouse.
3. Create master list of current incentives, services, and contact information for habitat restoration and conservation
4. Succession Planning – options and methods for passing down best practices for that farm/ranch
5. Make connections with influential community leaders (ambassadors for conservation)
6. Develop a study looking at effects of predator control on all types of predators on a large scale without a set agenda.

CMR Surrounding Area Map Project: The group reviewed the maps that had been produced using data from the World Wildlife Fund. Group members noted that the following should be changed and/or included:

- Garfield County Livestock Sales / Cow Sales
- Lands with Wilderness characteristics – current or proposed study areas
- Cropped and non-cropped land
- Easements and leases
- Revenue generated from wildlife dependent recreations
- County economics breakdown
- Existing conservation easements

- Crops vs grazing
- Sources of personal income
- AG conversion

Members of the Sage Grouse Committee were announced and the process for which people are allowed to serve on that committee was discussed.

It was noted that the next meeting date time and location will be discussed by the planning committee and that the committee would meet in the next 10 days.

Worked Well	Did not work
Good overall meeting	Lot of information in the allotted time
Good information from groups	Not being able to set the next meeting date
Sage grouse sub committee	Breakout sessions not being outside
Break out groups	More time for the meeting
Adaptability of group	
Open/ honest dialogue	
Diversity of group	
Interest of group	
Good facilitation	



Appendix to Minutes:

Third Draft: Goals for the 6-County Region

Prepared April 9, 2015

Question 1: Describe the quality of life you would like to see be predominant in the region in 5 to 10 years.

Suggested Reform:

We want this region to maintain a diversified economy within which a prosperous agriculture industry is sustained and local communities are prosperous with stable populations. We desire an atmosphere where agencies, local government, NGOs, and citizens work together to create positive outcomes for the community and citizens: focusing on common ground, mutual respect, and community-based decision making, where people are committed to the working group and access to public land is ensured for both the public and producers.

Question 2 – What kind of production* will be needed to sustain this quality of life?**

Suggested Reform:

A diversity of unique goods and services to support economic and social values will need to be produced from a working landscape that maintains its scenic value, healthy soils, and ecological integrity. We must also identify and implement best management practices that integrate local ecological knowledge, succession planning in all entities, local working groups to address challenges, incentives to practice conservation, steady tax base to support infrastructure and responsible, well-educated citizens.

**** There were several suggestions to exchange “production” in the question to “economics” or “commodities”. This question was posed by Bill, so I am not going to implement that change at this time.*

Question 3 – What does the landscape need to look like to obtain your production?

Suggested Reform:

We desire a landscape that provides habitat for diverse and healthy wildlife populations, where further conversion of native prairie is discouraged, and where the needs of natural resource dependent industries are balanced with conservation. In short, healthy agriculture lands cooperatively managed for the benefit of the resource, wildlife, industry, and community.