

Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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MEETING NOTES

July 26, 2012

(Approved October 25, 2012)

Members Present: Vikki Bauer, Mono Supervisors; Steve Nelson, BLM alternate; Ed Armenta, Jon Regelbrugge & Sarah Tomsky, USFS/Inyo; Donna Sisson, Yosemite National Park; Brad Mettam, Caltrans; Doug Power, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center; John Eastman, Town of Mammoth Lakes

Members Absent: Mike Crawley, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe; Carl Benz, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/Ventura; Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile National Monument; Chris Plakos, LADWP; Bruce Kinney, CDFG; Ron Johnny, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Adora Saulque, Benton Paiutes

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

Guests Present: Karen Ferrell-Ingram, Eastern Sierra Land Trust; Wilma Wheeler, citizen

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Vikki Bauer called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m., John Eastman led the pledge of allegiance, and attendees introduced themselves.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT: Karen Ferrell-Ingram, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, is attending to take part in land tenure process and hear about sage grouse.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR: John Eastman, Town of Mammoth Lakes, volunteered.

4. MEETING NOTES:

MOTION: Approve meeting notes from April 26, 2012 (*Mettam/Nelson. Ayes: All.*)

5. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE: Agency planning issues & pending projects

6. SAGE GROUSE/Bi-State Effort update: Steve Nelson, BLM, indicated Bi-State, including Mono, warranted listing in March 2010. Lawsuits have been filed on previous findings rangewide and Bi-State. Court-driven decisions arose on findings. Listing was warranted, but other species had higher priority. A proposed rule to list/not to list will occur September 2013. In response to short time frame, Bi-State drove finding: 1) lack of adequate regulatory mechanisms for long-term protection; 2) threat to habitat quality and quantity; and 3) overall small size of population. Land managers intended to work closer together due to impact of decision. An executive oversight committee will look at conservation across boundaries. Effort will be put into new, revised 2004 conservation plan. Do as much as can in new plan prior to listing decision. Continued lawsuits are likely. It behooves Mono to think about what could be done together, possible workshops with Mono Supervisors. Collective challenge is that 75%-80% of birds are in Mono County: Long Valley, Bodie, and White Mountains. Nevada populations are not as familiar.

John Eastman, Town Council, wondered why sage grouse is such high priority, yet California still issues hunting licenses. He saw a huge contradiction to protect yet hunt. Nelson responded that overuse is a factor considered. USFWS does not believe hunting has significant impact. California has an ultra-conservative hunting model. State agencies are not pushing listing. They're all of a mind that "it's a bird that belongs to the state, and the state wants to manage that bird." When take away hunting, remove all doubt and focus more on true challenges. Historic epics existed when grouse were susceptible to direct take. Sage grouse is not a typical game bird like quail or chukkar. It'll be gone in California, certainly if listed. Even in Nevada with no hunting, sportsmen are putting money into conservation efforts. The grouse issue is largely political, so extremely challenging. Initial listing focus was against grazing on public lands, yet it is far more complicated. Do grouse rise to level of wildfire, oil/gas development? *No*.

Ed Armenta, USFS, participates occasionally on the executive oversight committee in Reno. He noted lack of info on White Mountain population will be addressed in plan revision. Unique character of the Inyo habitat involves stepping up fire suppression and preventing noxious weed spread.

Nelson, who has worked with grouse his entire career, indicated it's not gloom and doom. Record counts were found in Mono this year, Bodie was off the chart, and Long Valley was on count. Strong but small populations exist on fringe of the range, not completely typical in Wyoming, Idaho or Nevada, and USFWS recognizes that. In big scheme, would life change in a huge way if listed? Additional regulatory burden and lengthening of processes, but no one knows that for sure. Message is to do the right thing, not only talk, but conservation. Nothing can be done about small population size.

Interim guidance for public lands is to add additional regulatory conditions until new land use plan considers grouse more holistically. Bishop request for proposals is adequate. Karen Ferrell-Ingram, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, asked about private land conservation. Nelson noted meadows and water are in short supply for grouse. Conservation easements for key properties have been identified and willing landowners involved. Bi-State is model for collaborative conservation planning for grouse in the entire country. Scott Burns, Mono County, noted states of Wyoming, Nevada and Idaho are taking grouse seriously at political level. California has no concern at state level; main impact is to Mono County.

Nelson noted the issue is huge for BLM, so it's easy to give support. Governor of Nevada has stated #1 issue = sage grouse. Don't get that in California. It's really a Mono County issue for elected officials. The BLM is committed to conservation of the bird. Burns asked if politics enters, would small population rate as higher threat and get listed. Nelson would not be surprised at listing in September 2013.

7. SCENIC BYWAY: Heather deBethizy, Mono County, discussed this about six months ago at CPT. The effort involves getting national designation from Inyo County line to Mountain Gate park as an overlay on state designation. Corridor management plan is under way with a grant. Data collection portion is completed. Outreach efforts now go to commissions and committees. Strategic Marketing Group consultants will write the plan, and Mono Tourism is working on the economic development portion. The intent is to utilize CPT on policy development and to align planning efforts of land management agencies. Agency feedback is sought on tying in with resource management objectives. The CPT can provide input on process, project list funded through byways program, potential funding sources, and policy recommendations.

- **Possible CPT role:** Look at draft plan, include everyone affected, and get agency projects on list. Caltrans: Mettam thought it was a good idea. With quarterly meetings, could take info back early enough to bring back for discussion. BLM: Nelson thought BLM would be interested and supportive. Identify contact within agency. USFS: Armenta noted it falls within plan revision effort. Vikki Bauer: Include Tioga Pass? DeBethizy noted Tamara Wilton of USFS is struggling, farther behind, not heard anything. Meetings in Lee Vining could overlap. Armenta noted the USFS enterprise team is national. Yosemite: Sisson was not sure what's happening. DeBethizy mentioned incorporating 395 feeder roads, including SR 120, which is already a National Forest Scenic Highway. Bauer asked about data online. DeBethizy noted it's internal, not public yet. GPS will assess quality of information and photos.

- **Regional Trail grant:** Eastern Sierra Regional Trail is a project out of corridor management plan. Direction was given to pursue grant resources. A soft-surface trail on existing dirt roads and community trails would extend from Topaz to Inyo County. An Aug. 1 NPS grant awards technical assistance on developing a conceptual plan. Apply for a segment that ties into NPS.

8. **MONO BASIN COMMUNITY PLAN:** Heather deBethizy & Wendy Sugimura, Mono County, will take the plan to Mono Supervisors August 21 after a long planning process with the Mono Basin RPAC. A steering committee realized the plan needed more than land use issues. Goals were to involve the community outside the RPAC. Action plan would assign roles and responsibilities. A bilingual survey was conducted. Sugimura gave a brief overview of entire plan and distributed an excerpt. The plan is a data-based policy document. Intention is to make it easier for agencies, County and community to go in a desired direction. Staff would like to know about red flags soon. Major issue was a more-vibrant Main Street. Some regard road yards as vital to a working community, providing snow removal and highway maintenance. Get out of dichotomy of moving vs. not moving road yards. Town has embraced the 395/120 junction. No CEQA document exists yet, so the plan won't apply in a regulatory manner. Minimal agency outreach has been conducted so far. Staff has seen a difference in how the community interacts – divisiveness has broken down, and they've found a way to work together even if they disagree.

9. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS

A. **June Mountain closure:** Ed Armenta recalled a month ago when USFS was notified MMSA would not operate June Mountain, as much a surprise to USFS as everyone else. A letter of noncompliance was issued. Per permit, an audit will be conducted. USFS is very concerned about impacts of non-operation, and is working with Mono Supervisors and Coalition to Save June Mountain on alternatives to keep it open. It is preferable that MMSA operate it. Many technical and financial issues exist. Can't USFS revoke permit? Nobody is stepping up to operate June now. Revocation would be a last resort. MMSA has a 40-yr permit till 2046 and significant investment in infrastructure. MMSA would not go down without a fight and could play out appeal rights. Vision is to operate next winter, but it's not going to happen. If closure lasts more than one winter, step up pressure on consequences of not operating. Best bet is to get MMSA to operate.

Vikki Bauer expressed kudos to Armenta for support. Having USFS in the conversation has brought a level of sanity. Six years ago June was open only on weekends, and USFS was not on board. Rusty Gregory asked identical things last time, then ignored what was done since. Closure of one year could endanger economic vitality forever. MMSA's and June Mountain's visions do not align, probably never will. Get through this year, do planning, and find middle ground. Biggest points are that markets change, people who ski change. June could fill a small-niche ski area market, no real competition to MMSA. Co-op discussions are going on. Carl Williams doesn't see June opening. Gregory has been in DC seeking support for land trade at Main Lodge. June has nothing to lose, so might as well figure out what to do. Armenta noted that closure does not absolve MMSA of responsibility – it still has to have an operating plan to keep it closed, provide security, and address avalanche issues. Keeping it closed is not cheap: \$300,000/yr. Public safety is #1 concern. Was bark beetle part of consideration? No; permittee is required to deal with bark beetle.

B. **Bridgeport Main Street Revitalization:** Wendy Sugimura noted collaboration with Caltrans on balancing needs of drivers on highway and pedestrians on Main Street. Interactive charettes will be staged instead of sitting at meetings. Incorporate in-town visitor center with BLM? Brad Mettam cited high hopes and high anxiety for this project, recalling that Dan Burden had proposed things for Lee Vining that Caltrans couldn't do. "Push the envelope but don't tear it in half," Mettam quipped.

C. **Landownership Adjustments subcommittee:** Wendy Sugimura, Mono County, indicated Bernadette Lovato, BLM, chairs the subcommittee with staff support from Sugimura. Idea is to convene two weeks prior to CPT meeting so could report goings on. Bring in ESLT, maybe invite Inyo County. Lovato will talk to LADWP and Inyo County. Sugimura requested agency staff contacts. USFS: Recreation lands officer, when hired; Sheila Irons meanwhile. BLM: Larry Primosch. MWTC: Doug Power. Humboldt/Toiyabe: Mike Crawley. Town of Mammoth Lakes: Ask Mark Wardlaw. Yosemite: Not involved. (Side note: NPS employee housing on east side?) NRCS? Seeking suggestions on topics: Adobe Valley.

D. **CPT videoconferencing:** The one agency that responded can set up videoconferencing only internally. "Nothing replaces face-to-face," Bauer said.

E. **MOU update:** Three more signatures have been obtained, some are still missing.

10. **POTENTIAL FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:** 1) INF forest plan update; 2) solid waste; 3) Tuolumne River plan; 4) US 395 scenic byway.

11. **ADJOURN** at 12:05 p.m. to next meeting: Thursday, October 25, 2012, at 9 a.m.