

MRCDC Coordinator's Meeting Report

Who:	Laurie Riley, John Chase, Karl Christians, Jeff Tiberi
What:	Montana NRCS Sage Grouse Partner Meeting, Annual Update
Where:	Best Western Great Northern, Helena
When:	9:30 - 1:30 Mar 10, 2011
Why:	<p>Learn about sage grouse recovery efforts in Montana.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Area 1 - Mostly in Valley County • Core Area 2 - Blaine, Phillips, Valley Counties • Core Area 3 - Fergus & Petroleum Counties • Core Area 5 - Very small portion in Petroleum and Garfield Counties • Core Area 6 - Very small portion in Garfield County
Accomplished:	<p>Speakers included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joe Fidel, NRCS, State sage Grouse Coordinator • Tim Griffiths, NRCS Natl Sage Grouse Coordinator • Jenny Woodward, NRCS Biologist • Dave Wood, BLM • Rick Northrup, MFWP • Jim Stutzman, USFWS • Jeff Tiberi, MACD • Brian Martin, TNC • Ben Deeble, The National Wildlife Federation • Karl Mattson, MT Stockgrowers Assn • Bruce Waage, BLM <p>The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) was launched in March 2010 by the NRCS "to provide a holistic approach to conserving sage grouse and sustaining working ranches in the West" and is one of the largest success stories in the West. There is a strong link between conditions to support sustainable ranching and habitats required for healthy sage grouse populations. NRCS approved 223 contracts totaling over \$18.5 million in financial assistance to remove threats to sage grouse on working ranches in the West. What is good for sage grouse is good for ranching: large, intact landscapes; plant diversity, and healthy ecosystems. In MT the major threat is tillage agriculture, in WY it is oil & gas development, in OR it is conifer encroachment, in Ca it is conifer encroachment and fire.</p> <p>Fence marking within a 1/4 mile of a lek can prove a 6-fold decline in mortality. By marking or moving 180 miles of fence, they believe 800-1,000 collisions were avoided.</p> <p>Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is leveraging conservation funds because sage grouse core areas overlap with elk winter range.</p> <p>Discussed activities and accomplishments in Core Areas 4,3,6 and 8,9,10.</p> <p>In MT, 8.9 million acres contain 75% of all sage grouse in the state. Focus is on weeds, fencing, escape ramps (water trough), working ranches/grazing. Working with grazing plans, grass height is key. In the Round Up area, 90,000 acres in the first year accepted</p>

	<p>NRCS rest/rotation grazing standards. This year added 30,000 more acres. In Core Area 3, NRCS put a staff person there and approx 90,000 acres accepted NRCS standards. In Core Area 6, NRCS put a staff person there and 200,000 acres should be signed up next year. In Core Area 1 they are using conservation easements to reduce fragmentation. Interest is very high in SW MT (Centennial Valley).</p> <p>MFWP confirmed (and inventoried) 11,052 active leks in MT.</p> <p>The USFWS has a private lands program that is voluntary and based on habitat enhancement through cooperation with landowners. They have a biologist in Sheridan</p> <p>Jeff Tiberi discussed the MACD \$25,000 grant program that is currently over-subscribed. They are looking at a monitoring program.</p> <p>BLM is revising 5 RMPs and deferring leasing oils and gas parcels.</p> <p>In the Northern Prairies Area, the TNC Matador Ranch has a grass bank where ranchers lease at a discount in return for certain conservation practices on their own ranches; they are building a community-based approach. Sod-busting is a big issue related to corn for biofuel production.</p> <p>The National Wildlife Federation has an "Adopt-a-Lek" program started in Beaverhead County for monitoring; use of volunteers is large.</p> <p>The BLM in partnership with MFWP to delineate core areas and develop local working groups (Dillon, Glasgow, Miles City).</p>
Follow Up:	<p>Tim Ouellette has invited Tim Griffiths to the MRCDC quarterly meeting in Glasgow in May. We will hopefully also incorporate a ranch tour for this meeting.</p>