

Sage Grouse Implementation Team
March 22, 2012
9:00 AM, Casper BLM Office

FILED

MAY 29 2012

Final Notes – Corrected 4/13/2012

SGIT Members: Bob Budd, John Emmerich, Brian Rutledge, Steve Fernald, Penny Bellah, Donna Wichers, Doug Thompson, Peter McDonald, John Corra, Mark Winland, Mark Sattelberg, Susan Child, Paul Ulrich, Buddy Green, John Andrikopoulos, Jason Fearneyhough

Jim Ruby, Executive Secretary
Casper BLM Quality Council

Staff: Nancy Botkins, Craig Smith, Bud Stewart, Tim Thomas, Dan Thiele, Amanda Losch, Chris Keefe, Rhen Etzenmiller, Mark Moxley, Mary Flanderka

The following changes will be made to the DDCT Manual

Disturbance Calculation Process for Linear Features: The impacts of linear disturbances are varied. The following are recommendations for dealing with linear features:

1. Non-2 track roads would contribute towards disturbance calculations. The actual footprint should be digitized.
2. Overhead transmission lines constructed in transmission corridors established in the SGEO 2011-5 (1/2 mile either side of existing 115kV or larger lines and the east-west corridors mapped in the SGEO (Attachment D Map 1 and 2) are exempt from conducting a DDCT analysis and will not be included in disturbance calculations for any new projects located outside the corridors. In essence the SGEO established corridors are considered unsuitable habitat for the purpose of DDCT calculations and will not be counted in the numerator or denominator.
3. New transmission lines
 - a. 5%: New transmission lines proposed to be constructed within core habitat but outside the SGEO established corridors must complete a DDCT analysis to determine disturbance status relative to an average 5% surface disturbance per 640 acres. Disturbance is calculated as Right of Way (ROW) width multiplied by length.
 - b. 1/640: New transmission lines < 4 miles from the perimeter of the lek (POL) proposed to be constructed within core habitat but outside the SGEO established corridors must complete a DDCT analysis to determine disturbance status relative to disruptive activity (1/640) as well as any other considerations e.g. seasonal construction stops, raptor proofing, etc). New transmission lines >4 miles from the perimeter of the lek (POL) proposed to be constructed within core habitat but outside the SGEO established corridors must complete a DDCT analysis to determine disturbance status relative to its contribution to the 5% surface disturbance threshold only. Seasonal construction stipulations would apply.
 - To evaluate the 1/640 for new transmission lines described above, a viewshed analysis will be conducted from the perimeter of the potentially affected leks(s). (A protocol will be developed by the

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fed/state interagency team). Each transmission structure (pole, tower, etc.) visible within 4 miles of the perimeter of an occupied core area lek, as demonstrated by the viewshed analysis, will be calculated as a disruptive activity (1/640).

4. Any new pipelines constructed in utility corridors established by and as defined in BLM Resource Management Plans (RMP) including those portions of the corridors located on non-Federal lands in core population areas, that have been disturbed by a previous utility installation, are exempt from conducting a DDCT analysis and will not be included in disturbance calculations for any new projects located outside these corridors. In essence BLM RMP established corridors occupied by utility infrastructure are considered unsuitable habitat for the purpose of DDCT calculations and will not be counted in the numerator or denominator. New pipelines outside BLM RMP corridors, but in core population areas, would contribute towards the 5% surface disturbance calculation until the area is reclaimed to suitable sage grouse habitat.

Reclaimed Disturbance – When is it considered suitable? The SGEO states:

Reclamation: Reclamation should re-establish native grasses, forbs and shrubs during interim and final reclamation to achieve cover, species composition, and life form diversity commensurate with the surrounding plant community or desired ecological condition to benefit sage-grouse and replace or enhance sage-grouse habitat to the degree that environmental conditions allow. Seed mixes should include two native forbs and two native grasses with at least one bunchgrass species. Where sagebrush establishment is prescribed, establishment is defined as meeting the standard prescribed in the individual reclamation plan. Landowners should be consulted on desired plant mix on private lands. The operator is required to control noxious and invasive weed species, including cheatgrass. Rollover credit, if needed, will be outlined in the individual project reclamation plan.

Attachment A will be added to the manual. Changes were suggested and added to the material.

Reclaimed large areas – there are numerous large areas inside core that have been disturbed and have been 'reclaimed' to past standards but are not considered suitable habitat for sage grouse.

Director John Corra will coordinate with his staff to determine if there are possibilities to bring those areas to suitable sage grouse habitat standards and will report back at the next SGIT meeting.

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Fencing

A new study by Bryan Stevens, Univ. of ID looked at fences in southern Idaho and determined that fences within 1.25 miles of a lek had a greater chance of fence strikes than fences greater than 1.25 miles. He also found that when fence densities were greater than 1.6 miles of fence per square mile there was a greater chance of fence strikes than if there were less than 1.6 miles of fence per square mile. In addition he found several other attributes that appeared to contribute to fence strikes. Adoption of the 1.25 mile distance by the BLM is consistent with EO provision #19.

BLM will be using 1.25 miles. The SGIT subgroup (Chris Keefe, Bob Budd, Tom Christensen, Doug Thompson) will discuss the options of accepting 1.25 miles prior to 4/15 and will present their recommendations at the next SGIT meeting.

Habitat improvement 10 acres (aquatics only)

4. Construction of agricultural reservoirs and habitat improvements less than 10 surface acres and drilling of agriculture and residential water wells (including installation of tanks, water windmills and solar water pumps) more than 0.6 miles from the perimeter of the lek. Within 0.6 miles from leks no review is required if construction does not occur March 15 to June 30 and construction does not occur on the lek. All water tanks shall have escape ramps.

The de minimus habitat improvements less than 10 acres are for aquatic habitat improvements only. Any terrestrial habitat improvements <10 acres will require compliance with the SGEQ.

Web Application Update

Application has been tested, a data steward has been hired, Nicolas Graff. Mr. Graff will start 4/1/12. The Web Application is scheduled to be released May/June.

Lost Creek Uranium Mine – Reviewed by DEQ and currently by BLM. WER 2792.011

The SGIT felt that the DDCT and exceptions were handled appropriately.

Camino Mine WER 12510

The SGIT felt that the DDCT and exceptions were handled appropriately.

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Standpipe Substation WER 12454

The SGIT felt that the DDCT and exceptions were handled appropriately.

West Bear Pod WER 12103.20, 12506.

The SGIT felt that the DDCT and exceptions were handled appropriately although there were questions about the amount of analysis conducted for the small amount of disturbance proposed.

FMC WER 1108.02

The SGIT felt that the DDCT and exceptions were handled appropriately.

Douglas Core Area Overview and Outlook and Anadarko's Shawnee State and Shawnee Fee wells –WERs 12409.01 and 12409.02

The SGIT recommendation was to try to hold on to a sage-grouse population in this core area knowing that these valid and existing rights are going to be exercised. The general consensus was to try to collocate development as much as possible and encourage companies to mitigate disturbance and disruptions.

East Fork Ranch DDCT WER 12515

The SGIT recommended that a habitat assessment be done for the whole area identifying large, photo obvious areas and then having those ground truthed. There will need to be a protocol developed on how detailed a habitat assessment needs to be.

Grazing Review of NTT

A workgroup consisting of Doug Thompson, John Emmerich, Jason Fearnough, Buddy Green and Brian Rutledge will convene to review NTT and BLM grazing stipulations. Doug Thompson will coordinate the group.

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Public Comments

Mr. Erik Molvar addressed the SGIT about his concerns about applying the National Technical Team Report to conserve habitat.

Mr. Doug Cooper addressed the SGIT about his concerns of the validity of the SGEO and the SGIT actions.

Next Steps

The SGIT agreed that there should be quarterly meetings held to discuss policy and project issues.