

# Mono County Collaborative Planning Team

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## MEETING NOTES

April 26, 2012

(Approved July 26, 2012)

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Members Present: Vikki Bauer, Mono Supervisors; Dale Johnson, BLM alternate; Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo, Brad Mettam, Caltrans; Eric Dillingham, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe alternate; Carl Benz, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/Ventura

Members Absent: John Eastman, Town of Mammoth Lakes; Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile National Monument; Dave Brillenz, Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center; Chris Plakos, LADWP; Donna Sisson, Yosemite National Park (sent report for roundtable); Bruce Kinney, CDFG; Ron Johnny, Bridgeport Indian Colony; Adora Saulque, Benton Paiutes

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

Guests Present: Karen Ferrell-Ingram, Eastern Sierra Land Trust; Lara Kirkner, The Sheet

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- 1. CALL TO ORDER:** Chair Vikki Bauer called the meeting to order, and Eric Dillingham led the pledge of allegiance. Attendees introduced themselves.
- 2. PUBLIC COMMENT:** Karen Ferrell-Ingram recalled several months ago when multiple agencies were asked for input on East Walker River Watershed. Hydrologist Rick Kattelmann completed this watershed assessment to complement all other Mono County watersheds. Electronic versions are available upon request.
- 3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR:** Scott Burns distributed "Rules of Procedure," stating Mono Supervisors chair presides, team elects vice chair after first meeting in January. Brad Mettam was nominated. (Bauer/Dillingham. Ayes: 5-0.)
- 4. MEETING NOTES:**

MOTION: Approve meeting notes from January 26, 2012, as amended: Item 9A: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is on top of ~~that~~ *endangered species consultation*.
- 5. AGENCY ROUNDTABLE:** Agency directors discussed planning issues and pending projects. Vikki Bauer mentioned the possibility of videoconferencing. Carl Benz has attended by phone, but found it hard to hear. Donna Sisson called today, and found it difficult to follow the dialog. Some preferred face-to-face, but videoconferencing would be an option when needed. Send technical contacts to C.D. Ritter.

**6. AGENCY ENERGY POLICIES AND DIRECTIVES:** Scott Burns noted agencies have been seeing increased interest in energy projects. Mono Supervisors reviewed current energy policy, which is somewhat dated. Ultimately, agency policies will be reflected in Mono policy.

Dale Johnson, BLM, distributed information on wind and solar. Problems with sage grouse thwarted wind proposals.

Carl Benz, USFWS, cited huge planning effort among agencies to identify energy hot zones to set aside, resource/cultural issues (endangered, sensitive, game), and connectivity of corridors. A conservation plan will be developed. Biomass developed five years ago, got best pieces of land.

Jon Regelbrugge, USFS/Inyo, noted that from 2005-08 USFS promulgated a new policy for renewable energy that neither industry nor conservation groups liked. Draft directives were shelved, with no effort to redo. Energy falls under land use regulations. Geothermal is special under mineral leasing authorities, maybe more liberal than solar or wind that would fall under land uses. Consider proposals for uses that could be authorized for other resource benefits. Uses tend to change character of landscape in long term or even in perpetuity. Challenge at Inyo is land zoning from congressional designations (wilderness, Mono Basin Scenic Area, Bristlecone) and roadless areas. Small fraction of Inyo would be open to consideration. Geothermal rules are different, more favorable toward development if a resource exists. Lease blocks were set up in 1990s by Mammoth Pacific. USFS and BLM make joint lease decisions, and then BLM manages mineral resources.

Eric Dillingham, USFS/Humboldt-Toiyabe, noted most all sites are on Nevada side. Entire state is being reviewed, including bi-state sage grouse impacts.

Wendy Sugimura asked what if proposal was outside identified areas. Benz indicated planning process is not even to draft stage for public review, but permit requests that come in get processed anyway. Wind energy on private land (Tehachapi). Thermal goes through California Energy Commission (CEC), and must be in step with CEC and CDFG.

**7. LANDOWNERSHIP ADJUSTMENTS:** Dale Johnson indicated Bernadette Lovato would be willing to chair CPT subcommittee. Scott Burns described it as an ongoing issue for years, with final report presented last meeting. Concern exists for not losing momentum. Pilot project would involve BLM. Policies and processes by federal agencies in dealing with land adjustments vary from agency to agency. Basic principle is to look at Mono map showing landlocked properties, possibly to exchange near communities.

Wendy Sugimura was assigned as staff support for the committee. Regelbrugge offered to participate if Lovato took the lead. Karen Ferrell-Ingram noted Eastern Sierra Land Trust wanted to participate. Sugimura cited a broader regional scale not even limited to Eastern Sierra, other properties in California. LADWP owns lots of land, and could be included. Brad Mettam noted Gene Coufal is transitioning till August, maybe would participate in CPT. Bauer wanted to start small with existing group.

## **8. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS**

A. **MMSA Land Exchange:** Jon Regelbrugge reported this land exchange passed the House of Representatives yesterday, but companion legislation has not yet been proposed in the Senate. Lara Kirkner noted House passage needs concurrence by the Senate and the President. USFS believes Main Lodge land value would require more parcels. General Exchange Act cap may not be adequate for base lodge exchange. Lands outside proclaimed boundary would need authorization. Moving forward, complexities have arisen: Caltrans wants to acquire land for highway easement along exchange parcel. Cultural resources: The Yodler and Mammoth Mountain Inn may be historic structures. Would structures be considered for historic preservation, such as moving Yodler to historic cabin site? MMSA has no desire to retain structure. Structures likely would be destroyed. Cunningham parcel: Bodie era shed/barn likely is historic, so USFS is working with archeology consultants on a plan to retain. Historical society is interested in the structure. Acquire lands in Pine Creek Canyon? Historic mining district needs further evaluation. Environmental Assessment will be out for public review this summer.

B. **Bridgeport Indian Colony Land Exchange:** HR 2467 was up for mark-up in Natural Resources Committee yesterday.

C. **Sage Grouse:** Carl Benz recalled identifying tentative listing in March 2010. Bi-State has greater endangerment, hence a higher listing priority number. Listing has been precluded by greater-priority work. Lawsuits were filed, with a settlement agreement on addressing Bi-State and Greater Sage Grouse. Bi-State status review will occur in 2013 after collecting information on status of species in meetings with resource agencies in California and Nevada. The dynamic group shows plenty of energy in sage grouse conservation. Agencies are looking at funding for proposed actions, with commitment to proceed with existing resources. Outreach to promote conservation of sage grouse would allow landowners to continue existing uses.

Scott Burns wondered if actions by various agencies would be recognized. Benz opined that a plan to do good things is not the same as a track record with funding to do it. A need exists to identify primary issues that pose threat and a track record for addressing. Need to come up with a finding to submit for public review. Karen Ferrell-Ingram noted funding is possible through National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for easements within Bi-state. Landowners in Bridgeport Valley and elsewhere are talking about preserving land for sage grouse. Benz wanted to work with private landowners to cost-share. NRCS could be invited to CPT.

Burns noted the clock is ticking. What would happen to land use decisions in Eastern Sierra if grouse were listed? Benz indicated agencies would need to consult on management plans and identify ways to minimize effects. Landowners could request exemption by habitat conservation plan, a lengthy process. A permit would allow continuance of activities that result in take of species. Safe-harbor agreements are effective for a limited term (30 years). USFWS is already involved with USFS planning for bighorn sheep and other listed species. Regelbrugge noted much of Mono land is unsuitable sage grouse habitat. Burns mentioned exposure on private property; e.g., cell tower proximity to sage grouse created greater process. Benz mentioned the possibility of a USFWS agent in Bishop.

**D. Inyo National Forest & Devils Postpile National Monument “blowdown” update:** Jon Regelbrugge reported that a huge wind event Nov. 30 to Dec. 1 caused extensive damage in Reds Meadow valley. Efforts are under way to reopen road, recreation sites, and trails. Substantial funding has been acquired for facilities and roads. Hopefully, local economy will suffer no adverse impact. Caltrans plowed to Minaret Vista. The road is clear all the way down for administrative access only. USFS can start work on road repairs, hazards, campgrounds, etc. within a week or two. Public meeting on fuels reduction project with timber sale at Reds before it cures and becomes a fire hazard. Most trees were green, with lots of moisture now, but could pose problematic next year. A lightning-caused fire in Reds Meadow started Tuesday. Crews couldn’t get there, so sent fire fighters to top of mountain. Despite plenty of snow, the fire seemed to spread. With rain/snow occurring, it might go out. In an agreement with Devils Postpile (DEPO) USFS could handle DEPO facilities as well. It’s too early for opening-date prediction, but hoping for mid-June. Water supply system damage? Vikki Bauer reported that Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) is ready for June 15 if road is cleared of assessed hazards. Bring in special crew for two weeks to replace crews attending fire training. An agreement is close between MMSA and ESTA on winter shuttle service with 12 new buses.

**E. Inyo National Forest - Forest Plan update:** Jon Regelbrugge reported a new planning rule was published late March, replacing 1982 shortcomings. USFS tried to revise planning rule several times, but it was overturned through litigation. Inyo National Forest (INF) plan, which dates from 1988, has been revised twice. Lots of changes have occurred, so plan should reflect that. Impetus exists for all forests to update. Default back if new rule is overturned. Early adopter forest is the Inyo. Preliminary discussion with supervisors has occurred. Regional office support exists on plan for INF, to be completed within three years. Start sometime this summer.

**F. Eastern Sierra Regional Trail Concept:** Heather deBethizy cited the goal as linking communities by a soft-surface, non-motorized trail, using existing trails and roads where possible. Good models exist all over the country. Efforts within communities started occurring after project sat on shelves when advocate left. Tourism/Film Commission wants this as its first economic development initiative. Mono Supervisors directed staff to pursue funding. The concept has not been vetted by the public – it’s just a starting point. DeBethizy wanted to introduce the idea and get feedback. Brad Mettam designated Forest Becket as the Caltrans contact. Mettam noted railroad bridge removal created a gap. Scott Burns noted northern Mono interest in motorized.

**G. MOU update:** Scott Burns explained background on updating MOU with new members, and recalled objection from Humboldt/Toiyabe (HT) grants/agreements department. Now, this is for a working relationship, so HT will sign and take the heat so CPT can move on. Regelbrugge indicated Ed Armenta should sign. The MOU is about working together, not funds, goods, services in boilerplate language, Regelbrugge said. Burns will continue acquiring signatures.

- 10. POTENTIAL FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:** 1) Regional Trails Plan; 2) restrooms along roadways; 3) videoconferencing; 4) Lovato lead on land ownership; 5) NRCS overview; 6) ESTA updates

11. **ADJOURN TO NEXT MEETING:** Thursday, July 26, 2012, at 9 a.m.