

2009 Partners for Conservation Meeting Summary Notes

October 15, 2009

Embassy Suites, Denver, Colorado

Attending

Private Landowners

Duane Coombs, Nevada

AB Cox, Nebraska

Russell Davis, Colorado

Jim Faulstich, South Dakota

Steve Hackett, California

Ray Hendrix, Nevada

Margaret Hinson, Idaho

Dean Hunt, California

Hod Kosman, Nebraska

Ken McArthur, Colorado

Dina Moore, California

Mark Smith, Colorado

Pat & Sharon O'Toole, Wyoming

Bill Sproul, Kansas

Jim Stone, Montana

Craig & Yolanda Zuger, Oregon

Conservation Partners

Kevin Brown, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Montana

Gary Burnett, Blackfoot Challenge, Montana

Ali Duvall, Blackfoot Challenge, Montana

Chris Johnson, Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, Washington

Casey Stemler, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Craig Utter, Sand County Foundation, Wisconsin

Rick Warhurst, Ducks Unlimited, North Dakota

Meeting Background

In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program was granted an Innovations in American Government Award for community-based conservation in partnership with the Blackfoot Challenge, a watershed group in the Blackfoot watershed of western Montana. The \$100,000 award from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government was used to transfer the model of cooperative conservation, build trust and partnerships between private landowners and public agency managers, and provide consensus-based solutions to natural resource issues and recommend ways to improve cooperative conservation at local, regional and national scales.

As part of the award, the Blackfoot Challenge and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hosted a Partners for Conservation Conference in Seeley Lake, Montana in May 2008 (see www.blackfootchallenge.org for summary proceedings). Participants representing 12 western states expressed an interest in meeting in 2009 to continue sharing information, experiences and lessons learned, challenges and solutions to private land conservation. The meeting on October 15, 2009 was planned and hosted in conjunction with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Private Lands Day on October 14, 2009. Funding to support the two-day event was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Joint Ventures, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Karval Community Alliance, Sand County Foundation and Brainerd Foundation.

Overview

The first half of the meeting featured an update on the Partners for Conservation effort and 2008 conference highlights; an update on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, budget and partnership opportunities; other success stories including the Yager/Van Duzen

Environmental Stewards in northern California and Partners for Fish and Wildlife efforts in Fallon, Nevada; and a roundtable discussion about the challenges, concerns and issues private landowners are facing with respect to conservation and stewardship. During the second half of the meeting, private landowners and agency partners held separate sessions. The landowner group focused on the topic of creating a landowner-led network across the west to share innovative land conservation and stewardship tools, resources, and lessons learned and inform regional and national policy.

Challenges, Concerns & Issues

- Working across public/private ownership lines
- Need to identify risks associated with this partnership
- How to keep the land for the next generation
- Listing of species and associated policies affecting private land management
- Need to market fish and wildlife habitat, and ranchers as the original land stewards
- Current problems/disconnects with the system, i.e. \$'s spent in the courtroom versus on projects
- The danger of creating a welfare state/program; instead we need to encourage partnerships and cooperation
- Need accountability to balance flexibility in programs AND predictability
- Need to understand and listen to agency and other stakeholder interests
- Need to engage the scientific community
- Agriculture has become de-humanized (i.e. corporate ag) – need to tell the story and culture of American farms and ranches
- Need to get ahead of DC's "script"
- Need to focus on innovative opportunities versus threats and problems
- Need to focus on holistic management, not just the symptoms
- Need to quantify conservation value and benefit for public education
- Regulation and permitting
- Government: Accessibility to government (i.e. communication breakdown with DOI for this event), bringing federal agencies to the table to partner together, private landowners should be involved in the process, continuity between agencies

Goals, Common Issues, WHAT we are going to work on:

- Advocate for private land
- Federal policy (ESA, Clean Water Act, Appropriations)
- Pressure of land conversion
- The value of working landscapes
- Communication strategies
- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Rural communities, heritage, culture, generational ties
- A holistic approach to management
- Education, i.e. RAW Tours

Strategies, HOW we are going to work together:

- The group reached consensus and agreed to form an organization (NOTE: some would like it to be a "loose" network while others would like to see an established organization with a mission and formal structure). It was recognized that the group needs to be separate from agencies, like the USFWS-PFW, to effect policy change, tell their story as a model program and avoid the conflict of interest.

- Need a vehicle to focus on two tasks, including – 1) to share information, resources and provide support to one another (i.e. lessons learned related to conservation easements, etc.), 2) to inform and shape federal policy related to private land conservation and stewardship.
- Utilize effective ways to communicate to respect time commitments, i.e. email, listserv, website, resource database, other.
- Private landowners would serve as members of the group versus the established collaborative organizations. The group discussed the differences between local efforts and the potential of a regional or national group. The role of local collaboratives, coalitions and watershed groups is to implement private land conservation and stewardship activities on the ground and encourage other landowners to participate in these efforts. These efforts provide legitimacy and respect. The issues that local groups face should be solved locally. The value of this group would be to form an umbrella and bring people together to effect change at a national scale.

NOTE: In the future, the group will need to define private landowner and the geography/scope of the effort.

Action Items:

- Form steering committee (network); share contact information and provide sounding board for tools and resources; “park” the network under an existing organization during the short-term (Blackfoot Challenge?).
- Explore legal structure/organization of this group.
- Steering committee to meet via teleconference call and decide who would like to be a part of the group.
- Meet in 6 months (February-Reno, Nevada?).
- Meet in one year in conjunction with USFWS-PFW Private Lands Day Meeting (date-place TBD).

10 Years-What would you like to see from this group (innovation):

- Exempt status from ESA and CWA because of the conservation relationships on the ground.
- Universally recognized as setting the standard.
- More landowners having the perspective that all you have. Understand that both conservation and landowners need each other.
- Group powerful enough to influence change.
- Tell the story that changes society’s view of what we are doing.
- Recognize that it takes all of us to tackle the landscape issues before us.
- Become a role model for business and others to follow.
- Strong organization with many allies that share a common vision of a working landscape that has positively changed public perception of our stewardship and policy.
- Strive for honesty and integrity.
- Marketing the best of the best of what we do.
- Still trot out and hear the bronco’s song.
- “Go to” group for policy people: good true source of information.
- Provide leadership when we all go home.