



# COLLABORATIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT IN THE THUNDER BASIN OF WYOMING: *FOREST SERVICE PERSPECTIVES*

*By Mary Peterson*

*(The following are outline notes from Ms. Peterson's presentation.)*

## *Challenges*

- Thinking differently.
- Developing trusting relationships.
- Forming a common vision despite different missions.
- Securing public trust.
- Legal issues.
- Financial issues.
- Implementation issues.

## *Opportunities*

- Managing species of shared interest on a landscape scale without regard to ownership.
- Seamless management across public and private land boundaries aimed at conserving declining species.
- Expanding planning to include those elements that private landowners can best provide, versus what public lands can best provide, will result in greater benefits for species.
- Improved public-private relationships and reduced conflicts.

## Challenges: Thinking Differently

- Requires a “paradigm shift” away from traditional roles and beliefs.
- Recognizing the opportunities and forming a “compelling reason” for changing attitudes.
- Recognizing that changing the way we do business takes time and persistence.
- Requires patience but not inaction.

## Challenges: Trusting Relationships

**Mary Peterson** is the Forest Supervisor for the Medicine Bow - Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland  
2468 Jackson St., Laramie, WY 82070

- Thinking differently.
- Effective communications.
- Good intentions.
- Sharing data.
- Working together.
- Understanding the role of consultants.
- Maintaining trust.
- Long-term commitment.

### Challenge: Common Vision

- Recognizing differing missions of agencies and private landowners.
- Recognizing regulatory authorities and agency policies.
- Recognizing decision-making authorities.
- Understanding intentions behind developing a public-private ecosystem management plan.

### Challenges: Securing Public Trust

- When other interest groups see a public-private partnership, suspicions arise.
- Need to demonstrate a “compelling reason” resulting in a public benefit.
- Public involvement is the key to securing public trust.
- Failing to secure public trust will likely result in appeals and legal challenges.

### Challenges: Legal Issues

- Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA).
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- Endangered Species Act (ESA).

### Challenges: FACA

- The USFS may not utilize the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association (TBGPEA) or its consultants as an “advisory group” in the development of a joint ecosystem management plan.
- Forming a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) or other collaborative group with broad representation of all potentially affected interests might be beneficial.

### Challenges: NFMA

- Any ecosystem management plan will require meeting general direction in the grassland plan.
- Changes in management direction for portions of the Thunder Basin National Grassland will require grassland plan amendment (through NEPA).

### Challenges: NEPA

- Implementing a change in management direction or implementing a site-specific management plan will require the following:
  - Public involvement.
  - Interdisciplinary work.
  - Environmental analysis.
  - Documentation and disclosure.
  - Public appeal rights.

### Challenges: ESA

- Any change in grassland plan management direction for threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species will require consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).
- To obtain a Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) or Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) may require long-term legal agreements with the USFWS and the federal agency.

### Challenges: Financial Issues

- Developing a site-specific ecosystem management plan will require funding by involved parties.
- Recognize that US Forest Service funding is allocated in distinct budget line items for specific work.
- Congressional, administration, or agency emphases for budgets can shift.
- Long-term agency commitments of funds are not likely.
- Implementing and monitoring an Endangered Species Management (ESM) plan requires funding.
- Federal agencies have many priorities for funding available. ESM planning will be competing with other priorities for federal funding.

## Challenges: Implementation Issues

- Point wildlife and habitat data collected on private lands must be shared.
- Methods to verify that all parties are living up to their agreements on managing habitats must be in place (i.e., joint monitoring).
- Long-term commitments are needed despite changes in landownership (i.e., conservation easements or legal agreements).

## Summary: Success Means

- Thinking differently.
- Building and maintaining trusting relationships.
- Developing a common vision.
- Securing public trust.
- Addressing legal issues.
- Addressing financial issues.
- Addressing implementation issues.
- The opportunity to jointly manage habitats for species of shared interest—prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), swift fox (*Vulpes velox*), sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), ferruginous hawks (*Buteo regalis*), etc.—is before us.
- These and other species operate on a landscape scale without regard to land ownership.
- Ideally, it would be in the best interest of these species to manage habitats on the same scale.
- This approach would also fit in well with various state or regional plans being developed for particular species.
- Nothing worthwhile is done without great effort and the persistence and passion of a few folks.
- The ultimate result of having a public-private ecosystem management plan is improved relationships and reduced conflicts between public land managers and private landowners.

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*A sharp-tailed  
grouse in Thunder  
Basin.  
Photo: S. Yeats 2004*