BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

By Don Simpson and Bill Daniels

Abstract—In Wyoming, the natural resources are managed across a mixed pattern of federal, state and private ownership. Jurisdictions vary in every landscape requiring that multiple-use decisions be made in a collaborative fashion. Planning processes have proven to be less than successful in very large geographic areas crossing many jurisdictions and involving many issues. On the other hand, collaborative efforts that are located in smaller geographic areas and involve a limited number of issues have been very successful. The use of local working groups or committees that bring various interests together to address a common set of issues and that attempt consensus on a prescription for managing the natural resources with which they are entrusted has had great success.

INTRODUCTION

Today, people from various interests are coming together and forming a sense of community around the management of natural resources. They are joining together to solve common problems and resolve conflicts moving toward community objectives. We offer these insights into an important transition now underway in the field of natural resources management. Since the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which emphasized the involvement of the public in the evaluation of federal actions, there has been growing input from groups and interested individuals. As the population in the West is growing, the competition for various resources is increasing. In the past 10 years, this participation has evolved quickly. In the new West, people with varying interests are asking for involvement in the management of resources that cross multiple jurisdictional boundaries.

For federal planning and environmental projects, the norm has become the involvement of collaborators either as public interest groups or with a more formal status, resulting from NEPA requirements titled “Cooperating Agencies,” where the collaborators are actually representatives of federal, state, or local agencies. Since the passage of NEPA, it has been common, based on the requirements of the act, to involve the public in various phases of major planning efforts and environmental evaluations. NEPA is a public disclosure law, that allows for public advice and comment throughout the process of evaluating the impact of a federal action. The public may be representatives of agencies, local interest groups or individuals. The question is not whether groups and agencies will be involved, but the dilemma becomes how and to what scale the various interests groups and agencies become part of the planning/NEPA process.

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has been involved with Collaborative Landscape Planning since the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which requires public involvement and direct involvement with counties and other local agencies. As part of the FLPMA requirements, BLM must coordinate its land use planning with local agencies having land use plans

in the same area. Where these plans provide for overlapping jurisdictions, the use of the cooperating agency status is appropriate.

BACKGROUND

Federal agencies have tried a variety of joint planning endeavors. Some produced large, all encompassing landscape-type plans, such as the Interior Columbia Basin Management Plan and the National Forest Plan. Others have been smaller in scale, centered on issues such as weed eradication or recreation management. In many of these larger plans, the group attempted to cover many landscapes involving the jurisdiction of many agencies, even multiple states under one strategic plan. Many issues were involved, along with many diverse resources and interests. This was found to be too large an undertaking with difficulty in coordinating the many local groups with administrative jurisdictions. These efforts required political intervention to resolve. These large-scale landscape or ecosystem management efforts left a poor image of the "ecosystem" planning approach and gave the appearance of a government takeover attempt to many in the public. A more successful approach has been bringing together interests in a local area oriented toward a particular landscape where the concerns and issues are well defined and agreed upon by all parties.

There are, however, definite opportunities with local groups to reach consensus on resource issues. These partnerships build a sense of community where consensus is possible in an objectively facilitated, non-threatening environment. Most of the successful, local working groups are composed of folks with a single interest, but they have a desire for a balanced approach for uses of the lands where all users can work together.

There are many representative efforts that reflect the success of logical approaches to collaborative landscape management. Where there is a mix of private, state, and federal land, coordination and cooperation are imperative. Decisions made for one management group influence the other management groups that may have authority on nearby or contiguous resources.

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TYPES OF GROUPS

The successes in these various arenas include landscape-oriented working groups, stewardship committees, and program oriented working groups. [At the end of this narrative] are case studies describing each of these approaches and discussions of how and why they have been successful.

Let us talk about each of these types of groups:

1. *Landscape Oriented Working Groups*. Resource management in Wyoming requires close coordination with varying interests. This requires the establishment of working groups to provide advice and comment, develop data, and share resources to accomplish tasks related to managing multiple uses. These working groups are set up in one of two ways:

A) A full representative group with state, federal and local agencies, as well as environmental, commodity, academic and private interests being members.
B) Group representatives only from federal, state, tribal and local agencies.

In the agency-only working group, certain agencies represent other interests because of the subject orientation. As an example, the state Game and Fish Department in many cases has like interests to some of the wildlife groups. The State Department of Agriculture may represent a like position to the ranchers and farmers in the state. This approach is desirable because it is an exception to the

requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). If public interest groups are represented in a working group membership, then a FACA charter will be required. As reflected in the case study on the Pinedale Anticline Working Group, it takes years to receive an approved charter and membership for a non-agency group to provide input to a federal agency.

An example of a working group composed of agency-employees-only is the Powder River Basin Working Group. This geographic area involves the northeast portion of Wyoming and an adjacent area in Montana where large-scale gas and coal development is occurring. The interest of this working group is the resource issues surrounding the mineral development. Subgroups have been established around the major environmental issues. They are water quality, air quality, wildlife and aquatic resources. A case study is included (see later Case Studies) explaining this working group's activities.

In the Powder River Basin, no one agency can make decisions to prescribe the management of natural resources in a multiple use context. Examples of jurisdictional decisions are Applications for Permit to Drill (approved by BLM), National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits authorized by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and Section 404 permits approved by the Corp of Engineers. The overlapping jurisdictions make desirable the use of an interactive group that can represent the decision-making authority of the members and take action or prescribe programs across these authorities. Otherwise, each entity in a particular landscape makes an independent decision for managing resources.

2. *Stewardship Committees*. Stewardship committees, usually designated Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) efforts, represent another approach to landscape-oriented cooperative management on a smaller scale. The state of Wyoming has assumed the leadership in developing, promoting and implementing CRM committees. Through the CRM process, natural resource managers and private landowners are able to respond to management concerns, resolve conflicts, and accomplish common goals. Dedicated individuals from private, public and special interests come together in a CRM process for the benefit of the resources. A case study is provided on the CRM process.

CRM in Wyoming was initiated in 1982, when the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) and the University of Wyoming entered into an agreement to support a CRM program for the state. In 1990, the Wyoming Department of Agriculture assumed leadership of the program and strengthened its concepts and objectives. The Department provided training materials and personnel to train and provide guidance to the CRM groups that formed in the state. Training topics included team building, conflict resolution, negotiations, goal setting, facilitation, communication, watershed management, and monitoring. Ultimately, about 70 of these groups formed, mostly around local ranches and surrounding public lands, for the improvement of natural resources management on these local landscapes. The concepts are very useable for larger-scale cooperative efforts.

In the CRM process, groups work as teams to move toward consensus in establishing goals and objectives and taking action to improve the management of resources. CRM is a voluntary and cooperative solution to natural resource issues, with the management of resources for the long-term sustainability as an overriding goal. CRM allows consensual decisions to be made by local people with varying backgrounds and interests. CRM efforts remain free from FACA, as they are lead by a state agency, not a federal agency.

3. *Program Oriented Working Groups*. This type of working group is oriented toward a subject or program and is more focused on a particular desired outcome. It is represented by the case study on the Sage Grouse Working Group (see Case Studies on page 93).

In these situations, like interests come together to share resources, manpower, funds, equipment, and data to reach a desired program commitment. This type of group is centered on recognized issues, whether a local, regional or national scale. They rally around an issue and try to solve related problems by focusing the thinking of people from varying backgrounds toward solving the recognized problems.

This type of team or group gains successes because they are focused on a specific subject matter. They are working towards needed decisions to solve issues related to that particular subject.

A group with this orientation works well together for, in many cases, the members have shared interests, perhaps shared backgrounds, and certainly an interest in solving the recognized problems with the issues surrounding the program.

SUMMARY

Bringing varying interests to the table to solve common problems has become an accepted practice in the realm of agency decision-making. No one agency or private interest has the jurisdiction or the ability to accomplish on-the-ground work or make unilateral decisions on how natural resources will be managed. Agencies alone do not have the personnel, the funding or the local knowledge of the various resources. Also, it is a rare case when one entity has the authority to make decisions across the landscape. Bringing together all the interests to establish common goals, objectives and actions that represent a prescription for managing all the resources in a landscape is desirable to establish sustainable resource management. The chaotic actions of uncoordinated actions put natural resources in jeopardy in a landscape. This is certainly not the desire of the land managing agencies or the private landowners.

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Larger-scale efforts to date have proven less than satisfactory. They have been unwieldy because of multiple jurisdictions and interests and the varying issues that must be addressed. Timeframes become extended and decisions become marginalized. Working groups of varying sizes and composition have proven to be effective when working at a localized scale. The types of working groups that are in action today are described in the case studies (next page). They are successes, because they operate at a landscape scale and are limited to a program orientation that is focused on solving specific issues. It is useful to study these successes to decide on the best practices that can be gained from them when one of these working groups is contemplated.

Future efforts will likely be a continuation of past actions with an additional focus on monitoring, implementation of land use plans and adaptive management. Cooperators are currently involved in the scoping, review and commenting stages of plan/NEPA review. Future collaboration will involve the use of cooperators in monitoring and review of planning decisions. Adaptive management strategies will become an important part of the interaction among interests to see if our mitigation is working and our expected outcomes are occurring. This will mean the cooperators with which the agencies are cultivating an understanding of the processes will need to be engaged for longer periods than past projects.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are provided as examples from which to draw best practices or to gain some things that might be avoided:

- *"THE PINEDALE ANTICLINE WORKING GROUP"*
- *"POWDER RIVER BASIN WORKING GROUP"*
- *"MUDDY CREEK COORDINATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT (CRM)"*
- *"THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE/WAMSUTTER II EIS, WILDLIFE PROTECTION PLAN MONITORING TEAM"*
- *"THE GOSHEN COUNTY COORDINATED RESOURCE WEED MANAGEMENT PROJECT"*
- *"WYOMING WILD HORSE PILOT PROJECT"*
- *"WYOMING SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PLANNING WORKING GROUP"*
- *"THE HOBACK RANCHES COMMUNITY – AT RISK OF WILDFIRE"*

THE PINEDALE ANTICLINE WORKING GROUP

Location
The Pinedale Anticline is an area of west central Wyoming south of the town of Pinedale. It includes about 200,000 acres of rolling sagebrush covered lands that are about 80 percent federally managed surface and 83 percent federally managed minerals.

Summary
The Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration and Development EIS Record Of Decision (ROD) were signed on July 27, 2000 by the Wyoming BLM State Director, providing for an Adaptive Environmental Management (AEM) Working Group. This Working Group would provide collaborative input to the Pinedale Field Manager concerning monitoring of the mitigation measures provided for in the ROD. The AEM process was designed to ensure that the implementation of the Pinedale EIS project was managed to provide for maximum oil and gas development while balancing that with environmental protection. The PAWG, consisting of members from the BLM, the oil and gas industry, the environmental community, local governments, and the public at-large, will function as an oversight, working group. The PAWG will establish smaller, specific issue or activity Task Groups (TGs), consolidate information provided by the TGs, and provide advice and recommendations to the BLM Pinedale Field Office Manager on monitoring efforts related to the oil and gas development in the Pinedale Anticline area.

The PAWG will provide advice and recommendations on matters relating to oil and gas development, including but not limited to: the setting of goals and objectives for the monitoring of field development, the drafting of monitoring plans needed to validate predictive models used in the EIS, and the effectiveness of the mitigation measures contained in the Record of Decision for the Pinedale Anticline EIS. The PAWG will provide advice and recommendations on these matters to the BLM, but the final decisions will be made by the Pinedale Field Manager, or BLM State Director of Wyoming.

To the extent authorized by law and regulations, the PAWG is authorized to: gather and analyze information developed by the TGs or from other sources, hear public testimony, and foster communications within the region regarding the activities associated with oil and gas development in the Pinedale Anticline EIS area. All PAWG recommendations are to be made through consensus, and the PAWG will provide a forum for community interaction.

Issues
In a hearing in the US District Court in Wyoming, in July 2001, it was found that the Pinedale Anticline Working Group (PAWG) and Task Groups (TGs) were in violation of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The Federal Judge therefore instructed the BLM to file a charter for the working group and to develop an interim process, which will allow for an assembly of individuals in a "town hall" meeting concept. Thus the collaborative process which was to bring all the interests together relative to activities in the Pinedale Anticline geographic area was put on hold pending the chartering of the group. Reverting

to a town hall meeting concept was a step back to taking individual comment or recommendations related to decisions regarding federal activities in this landscape. Some options to filing a FACA charter include:

- Follow a process that allows for input of individuals and agencies not in a collaborative process.
- Develop a chartered committee such as a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) that will operate a working group statewide. Landscape or site oriented working groups can then be established under this umbrella charter.
- Establish a working group made up of agency representatives, federal, state, and local, which is allowed as an exception under FACA.

THE POWDER RIVER BASIN WORKING GROUP

Location
The Powder River Basin includes a total of approximately 8.6 million acres of rolling, sagebrush covered lands that are about 10 percent federally managed surface and 60 percent federally managed minerals. The Basin is primarily in northeastern Wyoming with about 600,000 acres in the southeast portion of Montana.

Summary
The Powder River Basin Oil and Gas Project and Resource Management Plan Amendment and the Montana Statewide Oil and Gas and Resource Management Plan Amendment EIS Records of Decision (Rods) were signed on April 30, 2003 by the Wyoming and Montana BLM State Directors respectively. The RODs provided the establishment of an Interagency Working Group (IWG). The Wyoming ROD included a Monitoring, Mitigation and Reporting Plan (MMRP) that outlined goals and objectives and IWG process implementation. The IWG was established as the forum for government agencies to address, discuss, and find solutions to issues of common concern to all parties involved in permitting and monitoring of CBNG development. Additionally, attention will be given to those issues that may result in cross border affects requiring close coordination among the state and federal agencies in Montana and Wyoming, and with Tribal governments. The primary objectives of the process were to:

- Determine the effectiveness of the mitigation measures contained in the Record of Decision (ROD).
- Modify the mitigation measures as deemed appropriate to achieve the stated goal/objective.
- Provide a rapid response to unnecessary/undue environmental change.

The IWG consists of members from the BLM, other federal, state, tribal and local governments. A charter and Memorandum of Understanding were consummated. The IWG expounded on several priorities that were identified in the Wyoming ROD MMRP. The IWG then established four smaller, Task Groups (TGs) made up of a cross section of agency specialists in the fields of water, air, wildlife and aquatics. Their charge was to gather information and produce monitoring plans that would assist the BLM Buffalo and Miles City Field Office Managers to adaptively manage the implementation of the oil and gas development. The established monitoring would be collaboratively conducted. All IWG recommendations are to be made through consensus but final decisions will be made by the Buffalo and Miles City Field Managers, or BLM State Directors of Wyoming and Montana, the DEQ leads from Montana and Wyoming and the EPA lead in Region 8. Meeting schedules, minutes and annual monitoring reports will be made available to the public.

MUDDY CREEK COORDINATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT (CRMP)

Location
The Muddy Creek watershed is located in south central Wyoming south of the town of Rawlins. It includes about 500,000 acres of rolling sagebrush and upland, mountain shrub covered lands that are about 80 percent federally managed surface.

Summary
The CRMP objectives for the Muddy Creek watershed include: restoring watershed/riparian/wetland balance and function to maximize related values/benefits; reducing non-point source pollution (especially sediment and salinity, within the watershed); improving fisheries habitat to address the need to establish

healthy, viable populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout; providing recreational opportunities; and, demonstrating that livestock grazing, if properly managed, can be compatible with the production of other public values/benefits. The BLM is working with allotment permittees—the Little Snake River Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and the Wyoming Game and Fish—to implement land management activities to meet these objectives.

Most of the work within the Muddy Creek Watershed Project is related to implementation of Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) for the grazing allotments within the watershed. These plans include livestock management practices with proper timing and distribution of livestock use, as well as rangeland and riparian improvement treatments, to manage livestock use and meet other resource objectives. In addition, energy development projects include Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect watershed and other resource values.

Successes
Site specific projects resulting from the effort have included aquatic habitat treatments for fish, willow plantings, in-stream structures to improve channel stability and habitat diversity, beaver habitat improvements, road improvements to control erosion and sedimentation, vegetative treatments, construction of reservoirs for livestock and wildlife watering as well as recreation purposes, and cutthroat trout re-introduction. Although this type of work takes years to see results, improvements are now evident in: 1) the health of riparian habitat and stabilization of stream channels so the habitat will support sensitive and threatened fish species as well as natural long-term water cycles; 2) restoration of healthy shrub communities to benefit big game species and other wildlife; and, 3) the general condition of upland rangeland.

This effort has been showcased as one of the very successful CRM efforts in Wyoming with successful consensus building among the many interests that have been involved.

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE/WAMSUTTER II EIS, WILDLIFE PROTECTION PLAN MONITORING TEAM

Location
The Continental Divide/Wamsutter II Natural Gas Project (CD/WamII) EIS area is in south-central Wyoming between the communities of Rawlins and Rock Springs and straddling Interstate 80 about equally on each side of the highway. It includes at little over 1,000,000 acres of rolling sagebrush to sparsely vegetated lands. The project area is located within the “checkerboard” land pattern that resulted from early railroad grants made by the federal government to the Union Pacific Railroad Company. Most odd-numbered sections within 20 miles of each side of the railroad mainline are privately owned (surface and mineral rights). Approximately 50 percent of the surface (531,400 acres) and 45 percent of the mineral estate (474,100 acres) are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Summary
The CD/WamII project proposes to permit up to 3,000 gas wells at 3,000 locations (1,500 on BLM managed lands); approximately 1,500 miles of new roads; 1,500 miles of new pipelines; five compressor stations; one gas processing facility; 10 evaporation ponds; five disposal wells; and 50 water wells. The project was proposed by a handful of large oil and gas companies and other companies (hereafter referred to as “operators”). The goal of the wildlife protection plan (plan) is to avoid and/or minimize adverse impacts to wildlife present on project-affected areas by monitoring wildlife population trends on the CD/Wam II project area during the course of project development and operations and by developing appropriate mitigative actions. Implementation of this plan has allowed land managers and project personnel opportunities to achieve and maintain desired levels of wildlife productivity and populations on the CD/Wam II by minimizing and/or avoiding potential adverse impacts to wildlife species and to facilitate the maintenance of a diverse assemblage of wildlife species – simultaneously with the development of natural gas reserves.

Issues
There is “checkerboard” land ownership and important wildlife and gas resources in this area providing seemingly opposing entities. A monitoring team of oil and gas industry operators (operators), BLM staff, a Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. (WGFD) biologist, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) biologists, was developed early on and meetings were held early in the project timetable. Initially, the interests were a bit “polarized,” but the commitment to make the plan work was a priority. A biological assessment (BA) was developed describing impacts to species listed and proposed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). The FWS prepared a draft biological opinion (BO) in response to the BA. The operators had issues with some of the terms and conditions in the draft BO. They were asked to provide comments and after a review of the comments by the FWS, the monitoring team again met and worked with the BO until a satisfactory product was reached by all parties. The largest operator in the project area, BP Amoco, flew some low level flights over the area to plan for their operations. The photos were very detailed and proved to be excellent for mapping wildlife habitat (white-tailed prairie dogs and mountain plover). One of the conditions of the BO was to map the prairie dog habitat within three years of project inception. BP took a big step and worked with the team using their photography and staff to map the prairie dog habitat. The product was outstanding! A 94.3 percent accuracy rate (what was mapped as prairie dog habitat was actually prairie dog habitat) was achieved and ground-truthed by an independent wildlife consultant – who was funded cooperatively by the team. The team was instrumental in co-funding a full-time WGFD biologist to work on wildlife related issues in southwest Wyoming. Stipulations to protect wildlife required on BLM managed lands have been adopted by some of the operators on all of their operations – regardless of land ownership. The operators have funded mountain plover surveys/inventories to get a better idea of where these birds breed and nest so they can be avoided during gas production operations. The monitoring team has “jelled” over the past four years and is an effective, collaborative team in working together to develop the gas resource and maintain and protect the important wildlife resources found in the project area. Due to the success of this collaborative model, the BLM is utilizing the plan around Wyoming on other energy development projects.

THE GOSHEN COUNTY COORDINATED RESOURCE WEED MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Location
The Goshen County Coordinated Resource Weed Management Project (CRM) totals over 100,000 acres in Goshen County, Wyoming; located in southeastern Wyoming. The project area is quite diverse: from irrigated agricultural lands to short grass prairie. Likewise, land ownership is also diverse: private agricultural lands, state wildlife management areas, and private and federal rangelands.

Summary
This project was formed in 1994 to address the local area concerns of private and public landowners, dealing with the spread and treatment of noxious weeds on rangelands, riparian areas, and wildlife habitat in the southern half of Goshen County.

The CRM members are comprised of individuals, farmers, ranchers and organizations at the county, state and federal levels. Since noxious weeds cross all land ownership and jurisdictional boundaries, the CRM came together to protect the health of the land by developing a coordinated, long-term program for the management of noxious weeds in Goshen County.

The stewardship goals and objectives of the CRM have been achieved through long term, integrated, weed management practices. These practices include education, mechanical, cultural, biological and chemical methods.

Public meetings, along with field trips to the project areas have helped communicate and educate the community and organizations regarding the goals and objectives of the project. Various schools in the area have also taken field trips to show the value of controlling weeds. Newspaper, magazine, and internet articles have been written describing the success of the CRM. A BLM training video on how to effectively establish a weed management area has been developed and has been distributed internationally.

Successes
All the stewardship practices have had a significant impact on reducing noxious weeds within the CRM. This effort has positively affected the livestock business by increasing grazing production, increasing forage for wildlife, and increasing land values.

The CRM has been recognized locally and nationally for its performance. One of the most prestigious awards was the Wyoming Stock Grower's Association's (WSGA) Environmental Stewardship Award for 2002. It was awarded because the CRM is an excellent example of a successful partnership between private, state and federal partners. It was quite unique for a cooperative effort to be given the Stock Grower's award because normally it is awarded to individual ranchers or farmers.

THE WYOMING WILD HORSE PILOT PROJECT

Location
The Wyoming Wild Horse Pilot Project is planned to be implemented in all counties within the state of Wyoming.

Summary
This project and partnership was initiated in 2000 to address concerns over the placement of older, hard to adopt wild horses. The current management direction was to either leave the older horses (6 years and older) on the range or place them into long-term holding facilities (large ranches in lower Midwest).

The Wyoming State Grazing Board (WSGB) proposed a possible solution that would address concerns of both private and public landowners. Their proposal would provide long-term rangeland homes on private ranches for the older un-adoptable horses. The initial agreement was for BLM to provide funds to the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (DOA) for grants to those adopters willing to take from 10 to 60 older horses for the one time payment of $1,800 per horse. The BLM begins seeing beneficial budgetary relief after approximately 4 years for every horse placed in the program when compared to similar expenditures in the long-term holding scenario. The DOA will administer the funds, provide the grants, and administer the performance bond that will be required under this program. Applicants for this program will be approved by all three parties to the MOU with BLM having the final decision on the selection. Horses will be adopted under a modified Private Maintenance and Care Agreement (PMACA), which waives the adoption fee and eliminates titling provisions.

The public interest in the Wild Horse Pilot Project revolves around three beneficial facets of the program:

- Helping promote adoptions of wild horses of all ages
- Promote tourism for people to see wild horses on the range
- Provide long term rangeland homes on private ranches for older un-adoptable horses while providing a small financial benefit to the private landowner

Successes
Guy Faris of Arlington, WY in January 2003 became the first participant in the Pilot Program when he agreed to a long-term adoption of 27 head of horses. All of the 27 geldings were gathered from Wyoming herd management areas.

Ben and Pauline Middleton of Douglas, WY, became the second participants in the program in March 2004 when they agreed to a long-term adoption of 28 Wyoming horses.

There are currently 47 additional applicants interested in the Wyoming Wild Horse Pilot Project. There has been a lot of interest from landowners in Nebraska, Montana, South Dakota, Kansas and Colorado, however at this time the program is limited to Wyoming. The State Department of Agriculture and State Grazing Board have stated that they would not object to horses going out of state for this program.

WYOMING SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PLANNING WORKING GROUP

Location
The Wyoming Sage Grouse Conservation Planning working group (Working Group) includes citizens with a variety of interests from across the state of Wyoming. Sage grouse occur in 20 of 23 counties and are found in all but the southeastern corner of the state. Wyoming has the largest population of sage grouse of any state or province in North America.

Summary
The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission directed the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) to develop a sage grouse conservation plan utilizing various interest groups and agencies in 2000 in response to long-term population declines of sage grouse in Wyoming. The purpose of the Working Group was to develop a collaborative sage grouse management plan to address population and habitat management issues and develop Wyoming based solutions to those issues. The plan also provides for coordinated management across jurisdictional or ownership boundaries and developed statewide support necessary to assure the survival of Wyoming's sage grouse populations.

The Working Group consisted of 18 individuals representing diverse interests including agriculture, industry, environmental, sportsman's groups, Indian tribes, and governmental interests. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had one member on the Working Group. Meetings were facilitated and the general public was invited to participate in all meetings.

The Working Group generally met monthly in addition to subgroup meetings or conference calls needed to complete specific tasks. Following nearly three years of meetings, a conservation plan was completed and approved by the Commission in July 2003. The final plan identified recommended management practices for dealing with threats/issues to sage grouse and their habitat. The plan also identified the need for eleven local working groups to address local issues, identify solutions, and develop action plans for sage grouse conservation. Local working groups are thought to be in the best position to respond to local issues and would be essential to developing local solutions. To date, three local working groups have been initiated and are currently meeting. Due to personnel and budgetary restrictions the remaining local working groups are expected to begin in 2005/2006. In the absence of plans developed at local levels, goals and tasks and Recommended Management Practices found in the statewide plan will guide planning and management efforts.

Issues
Sage grouse have been petitioned for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act since as early as 1999 in some portion of their range in the United States. Due to the widespread distribution of sage grouse and their habitat in Wyoming, the potential listing of the species would have a significant impact on Wyoming's economy and the management of its resources. Due to the variety of backgrounds and the wide range of knowledge of individual participants on the Working Group the initial year was used to provide basic understanding of sage grouse ecology and management. This period was also used to develop relationships between participants to be able to work together in a collaborative and forthright fashion. Although there were many disagreements during the development of the plan, the final product was a consensus of the group and provided basic recommendations and a template for local working groups to implement on the ground actions for sage-grouse conservation.

Due to listing petitions presented by various groups, Working Group members were cognizant of and gave consideration to addressing the five listing factors for listing species as threatened or endangered as defined by the Endangered Species Act. Working Group members also reviewed the Fish and Wildlife Service's Policy for Evaluating Conservation Efforts (PECE) to determine if their efforts would contribute positively to sage-grouse conservation.

THE HOBACK RANCHES COMMUNITY - AT RISK OF WILDFIRE

Location
The Hoback Ranches is a remote subdivision located in west central Wyoming 46 miles northwest of the town of Pinedale. Near the base of the Wind River Mountains, it includes about 5800 acres of rolling hills and steep terrain ranging in elevation from 7,000 to 8,400 feet with about 48 percent federally managed lands (BLM and USFS), 3 percent state land, and the rest as private land.

Background
Hoback Ranches consists of 106 homes and cabins with high occupancy during the summer months. Primitive roads provide access in the summer and are not plowed in the winter. Covenants on the properties are guided by a vision to ensure protection of the attractiveness of the residences and the ecology of the area, such as restricting grazing and tree removal, while allowing horse ownership. Forest types include lodgepole pine, aspen stands, aspen/conifer mix, mixed conifer and sub alpine fir with areas of sagebrush/grass mixed in. Recreation in the subdivision and adjacent public lands consists of riding horses, snow machines and ATVs as well as hiking, hunting and wildlife watching. This WUI was listed as the number one priority in Wyoming by the Interagency Wyoming National Fire Plan Implementation Team.

A partnership was formed that recognizes the shared responsibility of reducing wildland fire risks to communities. The partners include Hoback Ranches home owners, BLM, USFS, State Forestry, and Sublette County Fire Department. Following is a chronology of the major actions by the group:

2001 to present -Wyoming State Forestry, using grant monies, has been working with individual property owners to reduce fire hazard on private lands.

2002- A contractor funded by the BLM produced hazard assessment and mitigation reports for the Hoback Ranches partnership outlining prioritized actions to take to reach a desired condition. Implementation is slated to begin in the summer of 2004. The partnership oversaw the contractor's actions.

2003 to 2004 - A joint NEPA document was done by the USFS and the BLM. The USFS and the BLM also cooperatively worked together on a cadastral survey to establish public/private land boundaries.

2004 - The BLM and USFS will be issuing a joint contract to begin a shaded fuel break in critical areas of public lands.

2004 - The Homeowners group is working with the BLM to establish an Assistance Agreement to funnel Community Assistance funding to the homeowners group for private land hazard reduction.

Issues
Hazardous vegetative fuels--Forest health is a concern demonstrated by effects of dead and dying trees from mountain pine beetle, mistletoe, bark beetle, and porcupine girdling. The dominant hazardous fuels in the assessment area are the overstocked mixed conifer stands that will make initial attack difficult and enhance the potential for crown fires. Fuels reduction projects adjacent to roads and structures are needed as well as shaded fuel breaks.

Structure vulnerability--72 percent of the structures have a high hazard rating. Covenants would need modification to allow implementation of fire wise practices by homeowners.

Infrastructure--Access to public lands adjacent to the subdivision is lacking, as are water storage facilities for use in firefighting. Road improvements are needed to accommodate firefighting vehicles. Response time for fire suppression forces is greater than 40 minutes.