

Benton County HCP Prairie Conservation Strategy Stakeholder Advisory Committee Work Session Minutes April 2, 2009



Stakeholder Workshop: Developing the Prairie Conservation Strategy

The following is a summary of the questions, comments and discussion relating to the meeting presentation, agenda and materials. Additional written comment provided by Adam Novick (public attendee) at end of document.

Meeting Presentation

Tom Kaye (IAE) presented the stakeholder committee members and members of the public (identified in Table 1) with a summary of how the Prairie Conservation Strategy (PCS) fits into the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP): it will be an appendix to the HCP and also a stand alone document available for public download on Benton County's website.

Rachel Schwindt (IAE) outlined the meeting goals and the committee discussed aspects of these goals as she presented the timeline, process, and development of portions of the PCS. The PCS goals and objectives were emailed to the group and are available on the Benton County webpage (<http://www.co.benton.or.us/parks/hcp/stakeholder.php>).

Meeting goals

1. Make recommendation to the Benton County Board of Commissioners (BOC) concerning:
 - If there should be a comment period for PCS
 - If there should be an additional comment period for HCP
2. Review and approve stakeholder meeting content and timeline
3. Identify gaps in SAC membership
4. Review and approve list of species covered by PCS
5. Review and approve goals and objectives of PCS

Meeting goal 1: Comment period for HCP/PCS

Discussion: Dave Lysne (OSU) felt that without knowing the actual comments it was difficult to gauge if an additional comment period would be needed. Carolyn Menke (IAE) updated the SAC on the general nature of the comments and that there would be a SAC meeting to review the comments on May 7th at which time the SAC would make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners (BOC). Karen Fleck-Harding (Marys

River Watershed Council) commented that there was a feeling among private landowners that once the draft was submitted to USFWS there was little chance of major changes. It was also mentioned that the comment period would not need to be long. There was agreement that there should be a comment period for both the HCP and the PCS.

Outcome: The SAC recommended that the BOC approve a comment period for the HCP and the PCS before submission to USFWS.

Meeting goal 2: Stakeholder meeting schedule

Discussion: The committee was asked to decide if monthly meetings would work for the group. Some members were concerned about not being available during the May field season. Tom Kaye recommended that SAC members have another representative from their organization attend when they are not available.

Outcome: The SAC agreed that monthly meetings would be suitable.

Meeting goal 3: Identify gaps in SAC membership.

Discussion: It was noted that several organizations were absent from the meeting, or absent from the list of stakeholders. The group listed NRCS, ODFW/BPA, and private landowners such as Dave Buchanan from Tyee. Karen Fleck-Harding added that a focus group of private landowners could be convened to brainstorm actions on private lands. Adam Novick (public) recommended adding a social scientist to the SAC to address regulatory disincentives for recovery of listed species on private lands.

Outcome: Recommend to BOC to invite NRCS – Tom Snyder, ODFW/BPA – Jim Noyes

Meeting goal 4: Approve list of species

Discussion: Tom Kaye noted that the PCS will utilize the umbrella species concept which will pull in species that utilize similar habitat and the plan will identify habitat guidelines. A speaker asked that herpetological species such as sharp tailed snake be added to the list of species included in the PCS. Steve Smith (USFWS) recommended that a complete list of prairie species be included in the PCS, including those to benefit from a focus on habitat. The SAC discussed having a network of prairie sites to address a suite of species and to use locations in context. Species could be grouped by prairie habitat type: oak savanna, wetland prairie, upland prairie, oak woodland, riparian habitat. Tom Kaye mentioned that the PCS is covering organisms that are terrestrial or have a terrestrial life stage.

Outcome: IAE will group species by habitat type

Meeting goal 5: Document goals and objectives

Discussion on PCS goal 1: John Gaye (Audubon) commented that the term “viable” is vague and may be difficult to achieve. Tom Kaye clarified that viable means “capable of being perpetuated in the long term”. Karen Fleck-Harding recommended that the title of the goal be changed from “Achieve viable populations of prairie dependent species” to “Achieve viable populations of Federal and State listed prairie dependent species”. Rachel Schwindt stated that there are species that are not listed but are

being covered in the strategy. There was discussion on the need to emphasize habitats, not just single species and that species and habitat are linked. The group recommended that goal 1 language be crafted around protecting habitat and the species used to evaluate success. At that point habitat quality can be identified, along with the management needs. It was noted that the PCS is not a planning document, but will identify areas and actions. The group recommended that the goal be broad and that it address habitat. Recovery has to happen range-wide for de-listing, the strategy needs to specify the "Benton County" portion of the recovery zone. Steve Smith noted that the PCS should retain individual network analyses for listed species to attract grant money.

Outcome: IAE will rewrite goal 1 language to incorporate habitat and will look into mapping broad habitat types to cover multiple species as well as identify the needs of individual listed prairie species.

Discussion on PCS goal 2: Adam Novick (public) asked that the PCS go beyond identifying incentives and also identify the disincentives that work against recovery. He mentioned that it is important to look at how regulations affect people and species. Karen Fleck-Harding noted that the PCS could identify long-term maintenance costs and identify methods to work around these barriers to private landowners. One method could be equipment shared by groups of landowners. The SAC also noted that the PCS could let landowners know the workload involved in restoration and the economies of scale.

Table 1. Workshop attendees.

Jeff	Powers	Benton Co. Natural Areas and Parks
Dave	Lysne	OSU College of Forestry
Tom	Kaye	Institute for Applied Ecology
Jerry	Davis	Consultant to Benton Co.
George	McAdams	Benton Co. Natural Areas and Parks
Jeff	Baker	Greenbelt Land Trust
Karen	Fleck-Harding	Marys River Watershed Council
Ann	Kreager	Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Steve	Smith	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Al	Kitzman	Benton Co. Natural Areas and Parks
Jim	Fairchild	Public
Bill	Pearcy	Landowner
Adam	Novick	Public
John	Gaylord	Audubon
Donna	Schmitz	Benton SWCD
Nicholas	Testa	ODOT
Ken	McCall	Public
Jerry	Chiappisi	Public
Laura	Starha	Benton County
Steve	Northway	Public
Rachel	Schwindt	Institute for Applied Ecology

Carolyn	Menke	Institute for Applied Ecology
Annabelle	Jaramillo	Benton County

Written comment provided by Adam Novick 4/7/09 based on comments made at meeting on 4/2/09

I praise the Prairie Conservation Strategy for seeking ways to increase voluntary cooperation by private landowners. However, I suggest that to achieve this objective, the Strategy needs to encourage thinking about how regulatory policies might better encourage landowner cooperation, even under existing law. Recent research (such as by Fischer and Bliss in 2008) suggests > that species-based land-use regulation inadvertently tends to discourage private landowners from maintaining habitat or participating in incentive programs. At today's meeting, officials nevertheless described the Prairie Conservation Strategy as excluding any discussion of existing regulatory policies. To illustrate the need for broader thinking, I note that at the public meeting of January 27th on the draft Habitat Conservation Plan, a landowner asked whether she could plant Kincaid's lupine without incurring liability for mitigation fees, and USFWS replied that to avoid liability, the landowner would in effect have to agree to a conservation easement lasting "more than six months, more than a year". USFWS apparently has sole discretion for determining the nature and duration of such easements, yet USFWS apparently has no guidelines for such decisions and perceives no duty to consider any risk to species from making such demands. I suggest that these policy issues are not philosophical, but biological. I am hopeful that discussion of regulatory policy will lead to policy innovations that help these species and landowners alike. USFWS has undertaken such initiative before, as when USFWS established its present No Surprises policy and Safe Harbor program, under existing legislation.