

**Western Governors' Wildlife Council
Spring Business Meeting**

May 31, 2012
Denver, Colorado

Meeting Summary

Introductions

John Harja, WGWC Chairman, opened the meeting by announcing the recent election by the Council of Kevin Hunting (CA) to serve as Vice-Chair.

WISDOM Presentation (John Emmerich and Kirk Nordyke, Wyoming Game and Fish Department)

Wyoming's online habitat mapping tool, Wyoming Interagency Spatial Database & Online Management System (WISDOM), is not yet public but will debut publicly in August. Officials from Wyoming Game & Fish demonstrated the tool, which makes available geospatial maps of key datasets included in the Wildlife Council's CHAT White Paper. WGFD plans to conduct stakeholder trainings on use of WISDOM around the state this summer. As western states collectively determine a process for aggregating data into a relative ranking of crucial habitat (see Crucial Habitat Roll Up Workgroup report below) WDGF will apply that common process and incorporate crucial habitat data layers into WISDOM.

Status Report on Regional CHAT Development Efforts

The WGWC held a private meeting on May 31 with CHAT workgroup leads to provide an update on the regional development of the CHAT and to discuss technical and policy questions that have arisen for the workgroups.

The workgroups were formed by the Council at their November 2011 meeting. Their charge was to produce regional data products and provide recommendations about how individual states can prioritize crucial habitat in a compatible manner for inclusion in the west-wide CHAT. The primary effort of the workgroups is to develop coarse-scale, regional data layers that individual states can utilize, if necessary, to ensure they meeting the minimum Tier 1 data requirements in the WGWC's CHAT White Paper. Workgroups are establishing products and processes that individual states can consistently apply to identify crucial habitat, as well as developing specifications for a West-wide CHAT GIS viewer application.

Some of the big-picture issues identified by the workgroup leads at the beginning of the meeting included:

- Creating flexibility for states while still maintaining regional compatibility in data development and crucial habitat “roll up.”
- Ensuring WGWC comfort with foundational data being developed by regional workgroups.
- Dealing with uncertainty in the data when publicly displaying crucial habitat.
- Creating an understanding by the WGWC of the level of effort going forward for individual states to identify crucial habitat.
- Keeping in perspective the vision of CHAT as a west-wide guide versus use for project- or state-specific decisions.
- Thinking of the workgroups (the regional viewer, crucial habitat roll-up, and regional data development) as three distinct efforts within one overarching subject.
- Making sure decisions are informed by stakeholder expectations.

Highlights of the workgroup presentations follow.

Species and Habitat Workgroup (Audrey Hatch, WA)

The Species and Habitats of Concern Workgroup, led by Audrey Hatch, provided recommendations for how to depict a subset of Tier 1 data in a west-wide default layer – information that will help states include information for species and habitat of concern. Specific recommendations were to develop a process that states can utilize to develop the following default layers:

- Weighted species – of – concern layer
- Two terrestrial vertebrate species richness layers:
 - Overall richness (simple overlay)
 - Weighted richness (by conservation status)
- Aquatic species layer: could follow similar approach, but needs more work
- Riparian layer: to be determined by state expert group

The workgroup also recommended that species be selected by conservation status with federally- and state-listed species receiving top priority for inclusion in CHAT. Ranking criteria are still under development, and it is possible that a separate layer for listed species could be created.

Additionally, the workgroup recommended that the CHAT should be as inclusive of taxa groups as possible, including fish, and the group has already reached out to the Council to ask for an aquatic species expert from each state.

Data sources for the default layers will come from documented occurrences from Natural Heritage Programs and/or State Agency Databases, as well as modeled distributions from USGS-GAP or other sources.

Further work to develop scoring criteria will proceed, potentially in collaboration with the crucial habitat roll-up workgroup. In some cases, additional policy guidance may be needed to evaluate options for ranking listed species.

Game and Sportfish Workgroup (Chet VanDellen, NV)

This group, led by Carmen Bailey (UT) and Chet VanDellen, provided recommendations to the council on how to develop a regional “default” layer representing habitat for game and sportfish species, to support the minimum Tier 1 data requirements in the White Paper. The group recommended that the default layer include three big game species: mule deer, bighorn sheep, and elk using existing data from WAFWA, USFS, and RMEF (respectively) to provide a map across state boundaries. States would be encouraged to include in their ultimate crucial habitat layer(s) their own data on those and other game and sportfish species if they have better data.

Landscape Integrity Workgroup (John Pierce, WA)

The landscape integrity workgroup is charged with developing a suite of regional data layers depicting native and unfragmented lands and connectivity to support the minimum Tier 1 data requirements in the White Paper. The group recommends modeling these habitats from data sources including USGS Gap Landcover Analysis as well as other datasets to identify Large Intact Blocks (LIBs) of areas with the highest landscape integrity. Currently the group is still assessing multiple models and will ultimately recommend models to depict the following across the West:

- Areas with high Landscape Integrity (LI)
- Large Intact Blocks (LIB) on the Landscape
- Ecological Systems of concern (ESOC)
- Important Landscape Connectivity (ILC)

Regional Viewer Workgroup (Jeff Hamerlinck, WY)

The Regional Viewer Application (RVA) workgroup provided a status update on its role defining the user interaction side of the CHAT. The group plans to present information to the Council in September on the best approach for developing the West-wide CHAT application. They are currently considering three alternatives for developing the cross-boundary online interactive tool:

- Adopt and modify an excellent state CHAT
- Adopt an existing outside tool
- Start from scratch (put out for RFP)

The RVA workgroup will start on a system design document and develop a Request for Information to gather opinions and ideas on possible data architecture features. At this time the group does not anticipate being the developers of the RVA, but contracting with another entity to create it.

Crucial Habitat Roll-Up Workgroup (Laura Canaca, AZ)

The Crucial Habitat Roll-Up workgroup recommended that crucial habitat be depicted in a relatively ranked classification system to allow for both consistency and flexibility across states. The relative ranking also was found to be a more accurate way to depict the coarse-level data that most states will be using to identify “crucial” areas. The next step for the workgroup is to recommend a process by which every state can aggregate their data into the ranked classification.

They presented two preliminary approaches for aggregating Tier 1 data into crucial habitat: weighted sum - a summation of all of the Tier 1 data sets where the greatest overlap of Tier 1 data is given the highest Crucial Habitat value, or hierarchical classification - where the highest Crucial Habitat value is based on the highest classified value from any Tier 1 dataset . Moving forward will require the testing of each of these approaches to determine which best suits the intent of the WGWC for identifying crucial habitat. How to test these options before the regional datasets are completed by the other workgroups proves challenging.

BLM and REAs (Presentation by Kit Muller, BLM)

The June 2011 agreement under the June 2009 MOU between Western Governors and Secretaries of Agriculture, Energy and the Interior articulated the need to better coordinate between BLM's Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs) and western states' crucial habitat assessment. The BLM will complete seven of its Rapid Ecoregional Assessments this year, according to Kit Muller of the BLM. "Completion" means that contractors will submit to BLM and each REA's Assessment Management Team (AMT) their report, analyzed data layers, and models used in assessing both the current condition of the landscape and the predicted future condition. BLM is beginning to consider how they will utilize completed assessments from the REAs. No policies are currently in place to guide BLM's use of the REA information, as well as use of other regional assessments like crucial habitat. Policy currently being considered includes:

- ☐ **Planning/NEPA Guidance:** Issue guidance on the use of REA and other regional assessments in preparing future RMPs, plans amendments, and NEPA documents.
- ☐ **Program Review:** Review the REA change agent projections and determine what additional actions the resource programs should do to address these change agents.
- ☐ **Budget Development:** Use the REA data in preparing out-year budget proposals and in establishing funding priorities.
- ☐ **Lessons Learned:** Identify lessons learned from the first set of REAs and develop recommendations to improve future REAs.
- ☐ **Regional Report:** Work with regional partners to prepare a report (a) outlining the regional challenges and opportunities highlighted by the REA; (b) describing what is currently being done to address these challenges and opportunities, such as identifying focal areas for conservation, restoration and development; and (c) identifying additional actions that could be taken over the next 3-5 years to address these challenges and opportunities.

- **Ecoregional Direction:** Issue ecoregional direction (following completion of the regional report) outlining what the BLM will do to address these challenges and opportunities.

During discussion, the Wildlife Council raised concerns about the process utilized to communicate the final REA reports/products to states, and the states' opportunity to review REAs before they are completed. Kit Muller indicated that AMT members should receive completed REA reports/products, so states interested in reviewing those documents should inquire with the relevant AMT. If states are unhappy with information included in REA reports there should be an opportunity to work within the AMT to sort out issues of concern. John Harja, WGWC Chairman, indicated that Wildlife Council members should check with their staff on review and comment opportunities within REA AMTs as some move towards completion this year.

The Wildlife Council will pursue further conversations with the BLM as they consider the policy options presented by Mr. Muller.

USFWS and LEAP (Presentation by Mike Thabault, Assistant Regional Director, FWS Region 6)

Region 6 of the USFWS is developing an early planning tool called the *Landscape-scale Energy Action Plan* (LEAP) – an online decision support tool for energy developers and conservation managers. This tool is being developed by Region 6 largely to help them provide information for energy project developers, as well as to inform USFWS decision-making in project permitting processes.

The USFWS will be conducting a Landscape-scale Vulnerability Assessment (LVA) that will ultimately be displayed in an on-line decision support system – LEAP. The analysis will provide a ranking of the landscape based on relative vulnerability (exposure and sensitivity) of conservation elements to specific types of development. The data included in this assessment will include threatened and endangered species, other species under federal management, as well as non-federally managed species of importance. Region 6 is beginning to pilot this assessment effort in Wyoming. Mike Thabault indicated that LEAP is interested in working with western states to determine opportunities to coordinate with CHAT development.

WGWC members had the impression that there is a high degree of overlap between LEAP and the CHAT. The missions of the two products appear to be identical and the Council recommended that Region 6 collaborate with the CHAT technical leads to avoid duplication of effort. WGWC members asked WGA staff to help connect technical CHAT leads with LEAP staff to determine the actual similarities and differences between 1) the data layers being

developed and utilized in each assessment, 2) the assessment processes (LVA vs. crucial habitat), and 3) the efforts to develop viewer tools with which to display the assessment information to the public.

Stakeholder Advisory Group Update

In response to the Council's April 2 memo and a productive discussion at the November 2011 WGWC meeting, the Stakeholder Advisory Group offered suggestions on how to implement policy priorities identified by the Council. Members of the SAG delved into land use, transportation, and energy issues by self-selecting into subgroups. Those subgroups each presented a series of recommendations at the WGWC meeting, mostly centering on outreach about implementation of CHAT.

Land Use

Barb Cooksley, a Nebraska rancher and member of the SAG, suggested ways to improve outreach to private landowners about the CHAT. WGA is currently refining a fact sheet that can be used as one outreach tool. Cooksley also recommended looking at the new structure of programs run by NRCS after the 2012 Farm Bill passes and encouraging use of the CHAT as a planning tool for landowners interested in NRCS-run programs.

The Council also discussed a potential partnership with the Denver Zoo to pilot a speaker's bureau to inform landowners about use of CHAT. The Zoo requested that the Council help with planning, contacts and fundraising. Overall, the Council responded favorably to the suggestion but no specific actions were decided.

The SAG also offered a suggestion on activities related to federal land policy – specifically how to encourage implementation of an Instructional Memorandum passed by the BLM in 2011. The IM directs all state BLM offices to use CHATs to inform their decision-making. WGA staff would like to solicit SAG input on opportunities to pursue case studies for how crucial habitat and corridor information can improve decision-making in BLM planning processes.

Proposed Actions from the SAG included:

- Work with SAG members to help identify useful sites for case studies, and to help work with BLM in utilizing CHAT information in the selected planning processes. This work could be expanded to the U.S. Forest Service as well.
- WGA/WGWC/SAG members should work to brief BLM senior leadership on this effort during their monthly conference calls.

Transportation

The Transportation subgroup recommended that the Council encourage workshops and interaction between state DOTs and wildlife agencies as a discussion point for the CHAT. This suggestion was well received by the Council. WGA staff noted that they and the Wildlife Council have been pursuing a partnership with DOT/Federal Highway Administration to support the use of crucial wildlife habitat and corridor information in transportation planning. WGA has submitted a grant proposal to help improve communication about – and future implementation of – CHAT in the use of transportation planning.

The group also recommended keeping an eye on the transportation bill that is currently in conference committee in Congress, in case there is an opportunity to weigh in about ways to incorporate wildlife planning into transportation design. If the bill does not pass out of conference committee the Council could have an opportunity to weigh in with opinions on the new bill, specifically relating to the importance of including wildlife corridors and connectivity. Alternatively, the Council could send a letter thanking Congress for including language favoring wildlife corridors and connectivity in a successful bill.

Energy

The Energy Subgroup recommended that the CHAT should be marketed to the energy industry through workshops and speaking engagements, such as in conjunction with an industry trade association meeting. These opportunities would be the first step in socializing the CHAT concept, and some existing CHATs, with energy developers and would help to begin deeper discussions about appropriate use of CHAT. SAG members offered some specific suggestions for speaking opportunities, however the Council asked WGA staff to follow up more specifically with SAG members to develop a strategic list of outreach opportunities in the coming year. That would allow a forum for discussion about the ways current state tools – and, eventually, the west-wide CHAT – can be used in project siting and early stages of planning and development. Some SAG members said that they would appreciate some training on how to talk about the CHAT. They also suggested that having a stock PowerPoint presentation on CHAT would make it easier for them to speak about CHAT themselves. WGA will develop such a presentation and circulate it to the SAG.

This prompted some discussion amongst the Council about how extensively the West-wide CHAT could be marketed given that it will not be completed until 2013. Council members advised WGA staff and the SAG to consider in what context CHAT be presented to the energy sector, as well as others, and suggested that current outreach could focus on existing state CHATs, and begin to prepare the public for a regional CHAT debut.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Susan Gray, Assistant Director, US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region, was in attendance for Anne Zimmermann, USFS's representative on the Council's State-Federal Implementation Group. Ms. Gray indicated that the USFS is preparing a letter from the Chief to all regional offices supporting their use of CHAT information in forest planning.
- WGA will start a dialogue between the Council and the USFWS on the connections between CHAT and LEAP, with specific focus on where collaboration can occur and efforts can be streamlined.
- The next WGWC meeting will likely be held in Utah in the mid-fall.
- WGA will continue to work with the BLM on coordination between REAs and CHAT, and the SAG on policy implementation recommendations.

ATTACHMENT A: Meeting Agenda

Western Governors' Wildlife Council Spring Business Meeting Agenda May 31, 2012 Denver, Colorado

Meeting Objective: Inform and engage federal agencies, stakeholder advisory group and the public on the Council's CHAT development efforts and progress on use of state wildlife data and policy initiatives.

8:30 - Convene meeting, introductions and agenda review

8:45 - Wyoming's CHAT (WISDOM) Presentation - John Emmerich, WY

9:15 - Status Report on Regional CHAT Development Efforts

9:45 - Public Q & A

10:00 - Break

10:15 - Discussion with BLM on use of state wildlife data, and future of REAs including state review – Kit Muller, BLM

11:15 - Discussion with USFWS on planned pilot of Region 6's Landscape-Scale Energy Action Plan (LEAP) and coordination with state wildlife data – Mike Thabault, Assistant Regional Director, USFWS Region 6 & Todd Lickfett, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, USFWS Region 6

11:45 - Lunch served in room (use as working lunch, if necessary)

12:30 – Stakeholder Advisory Group discussion on Wildlife Council policy initiatives

2:00 - Public Q & A

2:15 - Recap Action Items, Next Steps and Next Meeting

2:30 - Adjourn

ATTACHMENT B: May 31 Participant List

First Name	Last Name	Title	Organization
Robert	Ament	Senior Conservationist	Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Josh	Avey	Habitat Branch Chief	AZ Game and Fish
Michael	Bean		Department of the Interior
Jon	Beckmann	Ecologist	Wildlife Conservation Society
Matt	Bergles	Research Associate	Denver Zoo
Bob	Broscheid	Assistant Director	Arizona Game and Fish Dept.
Carlee	Brown	Policy Associate	Western Governors' Association
Wally	Butler	Natural Resource Advisor	Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Laura	Canaca	Habitat Branch	Arizona Game and Fish Dept.
Barb	Cooksley		Cooksley Ranch, Anselmo, NE
Ken	Cunningham		New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish
John	Emmerich	Deputy Director	Wyoming Game and Fish Dept.
Steve	Ferrell	Policy Advisor	Wyoming Governor's Office
Chris	Friel	Natural Resource Lead	Esri
Joe	Grennan	Permitting Director	Renewable Energy Systems Americas Inc. (for the American Wind Energy Association)
Betsy	Hands	Energy and Conservation Associate	Western Environmental Law Center
John	Harja	Director	Utah Office of Public Lands
Audrey	Hatch	Environmental Planner	WDFW
Kevin	Hunting	Chief Deputy Director	California Dept. of Fish and Game
Sharon	Kiefer	Deputy Director	Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Spencer	Kimball	Manager of Gov't Affairs	Western Energy Alliance
Tom	Kirschenmann	Chief	South Dakota Wildlife Division

Jim	Lane		New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish
Todd	Lickfett	Fish and Wildlife Biologist	US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6
Holly	Michael	Conservation Policy Coordinator	Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Kit	Muller		Bureau of Land Management
Kirk	Nordyke		Wyoming Game and Fish Dept.
Paul	Orbuch	WGA Consultant	Orbuch Consulting LLC
John	Pierce		Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Brad	Powell	Energy Director	Trout Unlimited
Laura	Richards	Chief, Wildlife Diversity Division	Nevada Department of Wildlife
Dave	Risley	Administrator	Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Kirk	Robinson	Executive Director	Western Wildlife Conservancy
Keith	Sexson	Assistant Secretary of Operations	Kansas Wildlife and Parks
Scott	Story		Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Carl	Sylvester	Strategic Accounts Executive	Esri
Mike	Thabault	Assistant Regional Director	US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6
Kim	Titus	Chief Wildlife Scientist	Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Chet	VanDellen	GIS Coordinator	Nevada Department of Wildlife
Susan	Gray	Assistant Director	U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region
Gary	Vecellio	Staff Biologist	Idaho Fish & Game
Lisa	Veneroso	Assistant Director	Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Madeleine	West	Program Director	Western Governors' Association