Notes

Third Workshop **Public Lands Focus**

Platte Valley Habitat Partnership

Platte Valley Community Center, Saratoga, Wyoming

August 17, 2012

Agenda

9:00 Introductions

9:15 Recap of the Collaborative Process and Purpose of Today's Meeting:
Mule Deer Habitat Improvement on Public lands.

9:45 Uncompahgre Plateau: an example of a large landscape scale collaborative partnership. Pam Motley, Public Relations and Outreach specialist for West Range Reclamation and Member of the National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule.

10:30 Break

10:45 Discussion 1: What are PVHP's interest in mule deer habitat improvement? Exploration of prevailing needs and wants to help determine PVHP objectives.

11:45 Lunch

12:15 Discussion 2: Criteria for Mule Deer Habitat Improvement: what criteria can we use to gauge mule deer habitat improvement?

1:30 Discusssion 3: Options for Mule Deer Habitat Improvement:
a. What vegetation types are most important for mule deer?
b. What types of treatments would improve mule deer habitat?

14:55 Wrap-up

15:00 Adjourn

FLIPCHART RESULTS OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Discussion 1: Stakeholder Interests - The Mule deer habitat improvement partnership is important to me because (*indicates a point of commonality between groups):

NGO

- Will increase habitat for all species
- *Important as high profile/iconic species for hunters in Eastern Wyoming.
- *Important in maintaining role in biodiversity and landscape connectivity.
- *It's a lynchpin for improving and maintaining hunting, fishing and wildlife recreation quality and opportunities.
- *Important also for propagating our wildlife-centered heritage.
- *Opportunity to tackle management challenge of addressing balance between mule deer, elk, livestock and host of other challenges.
- *Important part of our aesthetic appreciation of our environment.
- *An important source of economic benefit to our communities/state (drives $ 1 billion in direct revenue
- It's important to link mule deer habitat to riparian/aquatic components.

WGFD

- *Sustainability of Mule deer, Sage Grouse and livestock and other wildlife.
- *Quality of life/recreation/Income/Local economics.
- *Mule deer hunting 0 $ for Department to manage wildlife (mule deer and others).
- Importance of Mule deer to country and state for unting and viewing.
- Aesthetics of mule deer and their habitats.
- *Our WGFD responsibility to sustain mule deer populations. Mission: " Conserve Wildlife, Serve People".

Landowners

- *$ into the community.
- Prime Mule deer habitat is good for all species including livestock.
- Addressing Mule deer habitat (keystone) is also addressing the entire habitat.
- *Mule deer indicator species for entire ecosystem.
- *See more deer for kids and grandkids.
- *What's good for wildlife is good for landowners.
- WGFD cooperating with seasons and would like to see this continue i.e. limited quota hunting and point restrictions.
- Want to kill and see big muledeer.

- Misconception about what good habitat really is. Ties in with sage grouse, grazing reduction. Why were numbers of mule deer so high with such poor conditions?
- Improve habitat to open forest canopy – and enhance watersheds.
- Public education to create a connection between the lands and the animals.
- Healthy ranches and agricultural communities = healthy mule deer, and vice versa.
- Guide public land management agencies' decisions to keep private enterprises viable: landowners, mining, outfitting, etc.
- Keeping ranchers economically strong keeps mule deer healthy.
- *Water is key lifeblood to everything.
- Agricultural water developments is key to mule deer habitat.
- Explore the importance of junipers to mule deer habitat.
- Human encroachment does not make for good mule deer habitat i.e. road access, too many hunters, subdivisions.

<u>Federal agencies</u>

- *Provide habitat to sustain viable/healthy populations.
- *Good mule deer habitat is good for other species.
- Multiple age class habitat provides for multiple uses.
- Problem identified – need to fix.
- Improved mule deer habitat improves resource: water quality, soils, vegetation.
- To leverage funding.
- *Vitatlity to Community through good hunting opportunities.
- *Happy public – serving people.

Discussion 2: Criteria for Mule Deer Habitat Improvement: what criteria can we use to gauge mule deer habitat improvement?

<u>NGO</u>

- *Use standard measurements set in place by WGFD so we can compare to current conditions – gets to "more deer"
  - Population numbers
  - Doe-fawn ratios
  - Buck-doe ratios
  - Mortality rates.
  - Satisfaction surveys (hunter, landowner)
- Economic analysis

- Numbers of hunters, anglers, recreationists
- Outfitter, hospitality, business revenues
- Establish vegetation goals and criteria

WGFD

- Improved nutritional aspects in vegetation.
- Vegetation community structure: improvement by hedging class and sustainable levels,
- Canopy cover, age class, species composition, presence/absence of invasions.
- Photo points.
- *By improved fawn productivity.
- Improving range/riparian health.
- *Increase cooperation/involvement of all involved (i.e. stakeholders).
- Ease of process for implementation.
- *Increase political and monetary support (social acceptance).
- Shift in diet selectivity towards traditional MD groceries.

Landowners

- *Mule deer numbers are up.
- *More acres that meet the mule deer habitat needs throughout the year.
- *Doe-Fawn ratio – reproductive efficiency.
- Winter survival
- *Thriving ecosystem , all elements sustained.
- No reduction in livestock numbers – UP increase
- Accurate assessment of habitat compared to baseline in 2012.
- Have an understanding of where we have been and where we are (conditions), where are we going, what are the desired conditions?
- *Do not use dollars spent as a measure of success.
- Public satisfaction on changes made over 10 years.
- *Landowner satisfaction guarantees long term commitment

Federal Agencies

- *Mule deer Population, quality and quantity, increase. (related to fawn doe ratio increase).
- Maintain attractive landscape.
- Maintain productive landscape (other uses).
- *Maintain productive working group.

- *Higher dollar leveraging.
- Accountability with partners (finish projects in timely manner).
- Support and develop local businesses for project implementation.
- Increased education for public and business strategies.

Discussion 3: Options for Mule Deer Habitat Improvement:

1. **What vegetation types are most important for mule deer?**
2. **What types of treatments would improve mule deer habitat?**

Options Group 1

Summer: shrubs/forbs (legumes)/succulent grasses.

- Riparian Community important.
- Water is important too.
- Some migrate, some don't.
- Top 5 items: (Jack Creek)

Winter:

- Brush: Most desirable = bitterbrush.
- Sagebrush
- Four-wing saltbrush
- Mahogany?
- Meadow regrowth
- Trees (thermal cover): habitat diversity.
- Change if necessary - Ensure diverse seral stages.
- Decrease old decadent stands if necessary.

*All Site Specific

3. Tools

- Herbicides/Chemical.
- Grazing Management
- Wildlife Management – Elk/Pronghorn
- Mechanical – Machinery, Hand.
- Fire
- Fertilization of vegetation.
- Seeding – forage kochia, trefoil.
- Irrigation

- Human Management – Access, Development.

Travel Corridors (I-80 underpasses)

Summer Tools:

- Mechanical/Mosaic
- Timber management
- Conifer removal, aspen regeneration
- Water development
- Grazing management
- Fire
- New Forage species.

<u>Options Group 2: Jim, Pat, Mae, George, Ryan, Paula</u>

- Winter: Big Sage, Mahogany, Bitter brush, snow berry, snow brush.
- Transition: Big sage, bitter brush.
- How do we change the vegetation to improve Mule deer habitat?
- Diversity of composition and distribution.
- Leader growth.
- More groceries to reduce pressure (over grazing).
- What tools are appropriate?
- Area specific
- Mechanical: roller chopper, chaining?, grading, mowing, plow.
- Burn: mosaic. Depends on timing and what the objective is.
- Chemical: spike (rate) – sage bush
- Planting: time of year.
- Livestock grazing:
    - species: goats, sheep, bovine, other
    - intensity
    - duration
- Water developments and making the most of what we have.

<u>Options Group 3</u>

1. Juniper/Cedar

- Winter range
- Mountain schrub (bitter brush, mahogany, service berry)
- Sage brush
- Aspen
- Grasses/Forbs
- Cultivated crops (alfalfa, other legumes)

Mountain Shrubs:

1. more and healthier plants.
2. Increase age diversity

- Reduce use on existing plants = Catch 22
- Spring/Fall burns (Caution with other species)
- Plant bitterbrush

Juniper/Cedar

1. Reduce encroachment into riparian and foot hills
2. Maintain deer cover/shelter and aesthetic values

- Mechanical removal
- Chemical (spike)
- Carefully!
- Prescribed fire.

Sagebrush

1. Increase age diversity
2. Decrease canopy cover (primarily summer range)
3. Change species composition
4. Need mosaic

- Prescribed fire
- Mechanical (mowing
- Chemical: spike or fertilizer
- Manage herbivores for proper use

Aspen

1. Increase age diversity
2. Decrease conifer encroachment
3. Expand distribution
4. Improve understory vegetation

- Mechanical (jack strawing)
- Fire
- Exclosure
- Controlling herbivory (elk, livestock)

Options Group 4

Vegetation: Aspen, Riparian, Mixed Mountain Shrub, Sagebrush with inclusion of juniper, greasewood, saltbrush. Coniferous, Early lodgepole pine.

Consider: food, cover, water, space, arrangement

Treatment options for Aspen:

Conifer cutting/removal

- Clearcut entire clone/stand.
- Prescribed fire.
- Allow natural fire.
- Bioweed control
- Post-treatment grazing management (Elk)

Manage for:

- Multiple age classes
- Cover vs. food
- Understory vegetation
- Water management.

Consider:

- Location on landscape
- Proximity to water
- Size and scale of treatment.

Riparian Areas

- Livestock grazing management (time, duration, intensity).
- Plantings (willow) and deciduous shrub.
- Bank stabilization
- Irrigate meadows: seeding of high quality, easy to digest species.
- Bioweed control – insects, goats, sheep.
- Use of approved herbicides and timing of weed control.

Mixed Mountain Shrub and Sagebrush

- Sprouters vs. non-sprouters
- Plant shrubs? With protection.
- Prescribed fire
- Mowing
- Allow natural Fire
- Livestock grazing management (e.g. bitterbrush and fall livestock use).
- Herbicides e.g. spike, plateau for understory management.

Coniferous

Early to mid seral lodgepole pine.

- Beetle
- Timber harvest
- Clearcut
- Thinning
- Selective cut
- Grazing management
- Natural fire/managed fire
- Prescribed fire.

NEXT STEPS:

Next PVHP Public lands meeting: November 2, PVCC, 9 am – 3 pm.

In November Public Lands Workshop

1. Jessica to draft Interests (into Objectives), Criteria of Success and Tools and options.
2. Need maps with vegetation layers to explore vegetation issues and identify where projects should be.
3. Reading List, including Habitat Guidelines that Daryl worked on.
4. Data from USFS (Wendy) and Conservation District (Cody and Mae from Extentions) re. current conditions (and historical conditions?)
5. Find out what WyGIS can offer re. vegetation layers, watershed, migration routes (Jess and Daryl to work with Mae, Wendy, BLM and NRCS to also get private land vegetation data).
6. BLM historical Data (Mike).
7. NRCS web soil survey information (Mae will obtain this).
8. Need to discuss scale: at what scale are projects going to be meaningful and effective, also achievable and acceptable. Paula will explore this issue and present some ideas.