

**MINUTES**  
**MONTANA SAGE GROUSE OVERSIGHT TEAM**

Friday, September 18, 2015 Meeting Summary  
DNRC Central Land Office Conference Room  
Helena, MT

**Note:** Pursuant to Senate Bill 261 Section 1 (2015 Montana Legislature), meetings of the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) are to be recorded electronically. These summary minutes provide an abbreviated summary of the action taken and public comment. The time designations listed are approximate and may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio recording of this meeting. Access to the electronic copy of these minutes and the audio recording is provided from the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program webpage hosted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/sage-grouse>. The agenda, summary minutes, MSGOT meeting materials, and audio recordings are listed by meeting date on the MSGOT Meeting Archive webpage.

**Members Present**

Tim Baker, Governor's Office  
Mike Tooley, Montana Department of Transportation Director  
Jeff Hagener, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Director  
John Tubbs, DNRC Director  
Kristi Ponozzo on behalf of Tom Livers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Jim Halvorson, Montana Board of Oil and Gas Administrator (by video)  
Diane Ahlgren, Rangelands Resources Executive Committee  
Senator Matt Rosendale, Glendive Montana (by video)  
Representative Mike Lang, Malta Montana

**Staff Present**

Mark Bostrom, DNRC Administrator  
Carolyn Sime, DNRC, Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program, Program Manager

**Call to Order**

00:00:20 Tim Baker called the meeting to order.  
00:01:23 Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team introductions.

**Business Considered**

00:06:27 Jodi Bush, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Montana (USFWS) Field Supervisor, provided an overview of events leading up to a court settlement agreement requiring the USFWS decision whether to classify greater sage grouse under the federal Endangered Species Act by September 30, 2015. Ms. Bush summarized possible outcomes of the upcoming decision.

00:10:45 Mr. Baker presented an overview of Montana's efforts to develop and implement sage grouse conservation efforts beginning with the 2005 Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Sage Grouse Plan, the Governor's Sage Grouse Advisory Council,

Executive Order 10-2014, Executive Order 12-2015, and the Sage Grouse Stewardship Act passed by the 2015 Montana Legislature.

- 00:22:47 Mr. Hagener summarized Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) current and past sage grouse and sage grouse habitat conservation and management efforts related to range-wide coordination, conservation planning, population monitoring, research, habitat conservation, and population management. See Handout 1 (FWP Sage-grouse Management & Conservation Actions).
- 00:34:05 Kale Gullett, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service summarized past efforts and upcoming activities of the Sage Grouse Initiative. Mr. Gullett summarized recent NRCS reports: Outcomes in Conservation Sage Grouse Initiative (Handout 2) and Sage Grouse Initiative 2.0 Investment Strategy, FY 2015-2018 (Handout 3) available from NRCS. NRCS Handouts 2 and 3 available upon request.
- 00:51:02 John Carlson, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Montana State Office, summarized BLM planning efforts and their commitment to work closely with Montana and MSGOT.
- 01:01:02 Eric Johnston, U.S. Forest Service Regional Office, summarized USFS planning efforts and its commitment to work closely with Montana and MSGOT.

### **Action Items**

- 01:01:21 Mr. Baker, the Governor's designated representative, chairs MSGOT as the presiding officer pursuant to the Sage Grouse Stewardship Act (SB 261, 2015 Montana Legislature). Mr. Baker will attend all meetings.
- 01:27:01 The Committee discussed decision-making process and procedures. MSGOT requires a majority of members attending in person or by video or telephonic conference for a quorum to conduct business. The program staff and MSGOT members will strive to schedule and provide adequate advance notice of meeting dates and to make remote connections available so that members can attend in person or through remote connection. If an MSGOT member can't attend a meeting in person or by remote connection, an alternate is encouraged to attend. Alternates may take notes, share information, and ask or answer questions.
- 01:39:54 Mr. Tubbs made a motion to allow proxy voting through another member of MSGOT. The motion was seconded by Sen. Rosendale and passed unanimously.
- 01:42:42 Pursuant to the Sage Grouse Stewardship Act, MSGOT committee will meet at least quarterly. The next two scheduled meeting dates are November 17, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. and December 15, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. MSGOT's 2016 meetings will be scheduled around members' meeting commitments and responsibilities.

01:50:37 Introduction and program update from Carolyn Sime. Her first day on the job was September 9, 2015. She and Mr. Bostrom have reached out to state agencies to assist efforts to identify where and how Executive Order 12-2015 applies to programs and activities. They have also been in touch with stakeholders and personnel from Wyoming Game and Fish. The Governor's Office committed to having a fully operational program by January 1, 2016. A timeline to achieve that goal is being developed.

The program's web pages can be found on the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) website under Popular Links, right column. See <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/sage-grouse>. In addition, there is an MSGOT page to capture MSGOT's work and as a resource for the public.

01:59:40 Mr. Baker summarized the anticipated need for rulemaking. The Executive Order 12-2015 and the Sage Grouse Stewardship Act serve as administrative guidance for MSGOT. Individual state agencies may need to modify rules to comply with the requirements of Executive Order 12-2015. It is anticipated that administrative rules will be needed for implementation of the Stewardship Fund for grants provided for in SB 261 and for creation and implementation of the habitat exchange mitigation bank provided for in SB 261. Stakeholders were encouraged to work collaboratively between now and the next scheduled MSGOT meeting to ensure that rulemaking can be completed expeditiously and the program can be fully operational by the January 1, 2016 timeline established by the Governor.

#### **General Public Comment**

02:22:30 Elena Evans, Association of Conservation Districts (Handout 4 available upon request.)  
02:27:20 Dyrck Van Hyning (Handout 5 available upon request.)  
02:35:07 Alison Vergeront, Senator Daines staff  
02:35:08 Glenn Marx, Montana Association of Land Trusts Executive Director  
02:38:42 Senator Bradley Hamlett  
02:41:28 Gary Forrester, Montana-Dakota Utilities  
02:52:08 Errol Rice, Montana Stockgrowers Association

#### **Adjournment**

02:53:43 Adjournment

CHAIRMAN

ATTEST

/s/ Tim Baker  
Tim Baker, Chairman

/s/ Mark Bostrom  
Mark Bostrom, CARDD Administrator