

**SUMMARY MINUTES**  
PECOS DISTRICT RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)  
LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN HABITAT PRESERVATION AREA OF CRITICAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (LPC ACEC) – LIVESTOCK GRAZING  
SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING  
**December 11, 2014**

Co-chairperson Tish McDaniel opened the meeting and reiterated the need for dialogue in managing the Prairie chicken habitat in the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Adam Ortega, BLM reminded that at the last meeting the focus was to use grazing on a smaller area, using cattle and working with neighboring ranchers in that area.

The meeting discussed for January 14 will not be held and another will be scheduled prior to the RAC meeting in the Spring.

BLM Roswell Field Manager Chuck Schmidt stated that a foundation core, with rationale behind it, is the recommendation that managers are looking for from this sub-committee. This recommendation will then be submitted to the RAC for their formal recommendation.

It was agreed that disturbance on the ground is desired and that it should be grazing. Electric fencing, and fire were also discussed as tools to be used. There is an interested rancher that has attended and participated in all the meetings. Timing and parameters have also been discussed. BLM is looking for a process that would stand in the future, should personalities/owners change. Grazing philosophies should be continued.

A document should be prepared from this subcommittee encompassing all the details discussed at all the meetings. Tish asked if it should be only the two (2) species or think about all species. She was told that the BLM 2008 ACEC document does allude to other species as well. BLM must evaluate and write a Plan, including the recommendation from the RAC, using grazing and fire as a tool to manage this area, which is different from other areas. This will be a fluid management plan, with moving of livestock as needed, focused on the southern end for better manageability.

To the question as to how to select a "grazee", it was mentioned that as BLM must be able to defend the selection and it was suggested that anyone interested in grazing the area should write a plan, for approval by the agency, to be used in the selection of who will graze. It was advertised to the public that these meetings were to be held and that all were welcome to attend and participate. Willingness to participate is critical.

Recommendations from this committee have to be addressed in the activity plan that will be developed by the agency. When the recommendation comes from the RAC, it will be a part of the plan to be developed. "Long term" in the Plan must be explained relative to who will be chosen.

Activity Plans cannot be protested but since the implementation must be developed it will have public comment. Goals of this special area must be the prime focus of this committee in their development of criteria.

It was stated that water may be a limiting factor and that this issue should be considered, with possible preference coming in the planning.

Whoever is chosen must be able to remove cattle, if necessary, in a timely manner. Dates can be included at the start in any plan developed.

It was asked if thought had been given to using only fire, rather than grazing at all. The response was that this has been thought of as a tool rather than exclusive, but this option is available as well.

All options must be considered in this long term document with the ability to try other options in the future since things may change.

It was again stated that both options should be considered, not one or the other exclusively.

**The subcommittee will write a document to the RAC which shows what they feel should be included in the planning document for this area.**

Using cattle to assist with fire was suggested as a "good idea" by some.

Monitoring was discussed – who will make decisions as to moving, compliance, etc.? It was stated that hopefully it will be looked at by the grazer, who will know what the parameters are and then decide whether the parameters need to be changed or not.

It was then stated that the reality is that the agency (BLM) must make the decisions, based on those monitoring, grazing, and others. It was stated that they must have a way to remove the responsibility/ability to graze if expectations are not being met.

There were questions asked about feelings concerning hard dates. It was suggested that specific use parameters and use levels in specific areas need to be set. Key areas should be selected annually, so that when certain conditions occur, cattle will be removed.

Monitoring is essential to whether or not success is occurring. Suggestions were given regarding types of rain gauges that can be used.

Consider language recommending keeping the committee as an overseer, possibly having a semi- or annual meeting to help decide whether it is working or not.

**It was asked if the group was ready to compile a working document and the answer was yes.**

More discussion/comments followed:

Key species of grassland must be identified to see whether success is occurring. Improvement of these species must occur.

Utilization levels are already set and cannot be exceeded. Need to focus on the key issues. Should keep all options open and not be too restrictive.

It was asked if the group has thought of using area only as dormant season grass bank? Would need to determine how much livestock when water is not available.

What utilization rate – 30% was discussed. Whatever is done will be a work in process.

Ms. Tish McDaniel asked the ranchers in the room how dormant season grazing would work.

Mr. Brett Riley stated that it would be no problem, use as a tool.

Mr. Weaver stated that it was the best idea

If birds are seen in areas not previously used, the plan is successful - (or adjacent areas being utilized)

“Patch” grazing might need to be considered.

Must decide what to do with old growth.

There was discussion of a fee system to help defray expenses with monitoring. CHEMM could possibly help with monitoring or it could be contracted out to others.

If use CHEMM or others would need to compete with others for an Assistance Agreement within Taylor Grazing Act to authorize it. **Field Manager Schmidt will research this with the Solicitor.**

Chuck stated that an Assistance Agreement would need to be in place to be able to receive dollars.

It would be necessary to overcome several hurdles to be able to work with fire in the immediate future.

Ms. McDaniel stated that the next step is to create a document, even a draft, by the April meeting. The RAC must approve the document and formally recommend to BLM.

Further comments included:

Parameters should include any issues that need to be done to achieve goals.

A ranking system should be utilized in determining the selection of the lessee.

Exposure to hazard of fire on the area as a whole to neighboring ranchers of the ACEC.

High quality habitat is sometimes seen as a fire hazard. Should be considered when drafting parameters. Some control should be able to be seen.

Possible maintenance of permanent fire lines might help perception of the agency's actions to avoid high risk.

**Ms. McDaniel will draft an outline, with a ranking system worked on by George Farmer. Input will be sought from others.**

**Next Meeting – February 4, 2015 – BLM Conference Room**