

**Local Working Group – Wildlife Initiative
Blaine SCD and Butte SWCD
May 19th, 2021
Butte County Business Center, Arco and via Zoom**

Present: Lori Ringle – High Country RC&D, Rob Sharpnack – ISWCC, Frances Perkes – Butte SWCD, Randy Purser – Butte SWCD, David Callister – University of Idaho Extension, Jesse Fullmer – NRCS, Chris Johnson – Blaine SCD, Jennifer Weathered - Butte SWCD, Kelsey Barg – Blaine SCD, Brett Gullett – IDFG, Berett Erb – NRCS, Brett Ingles – NRCS, Kathy Noble – Blaine SCD, Keri York – Wood River Land Trust, Lara Fondow – NRCS, Stephanie Barnes - Butte SWCD, Justin Fry – BLM, Walt Johnson - Butte SWCD

Jesse Fullmer – NRCS Team 9 Lead, provided an overview of the last local working-group meeting held on April 14th. During the April meeting, two natural resource concerns were identified, however, time was limited and the second natural resource concern was not discussed. The purpose of this local working-group meeting was to discuss an initiative to address this second natural resource concern – wildlife habitat.

Part 1: Pronghorn Migration

Brett Gullett with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game provided an overview of a landscape wide project that would provide benefit for landowners and wildlife in the Blaine SCD and Butte SWCD. He provided maps and information concerning the pronghorn migration route from Carey to Birch Creek in Butte County. The project would provide technical, financial and labor to modify fences along the migration route to convert them to wildlife friendly and/or to remove unnecessary fences/barriers.

Justin Fry with the Bureau of Land Management expressed interest in completing the same type of project on BLM ground within the migration route.

Discussion was made about fence maintenance after the new fences are installed. There would be a few options available for landowners to choose from and decisions on fence modifications would be made on a case-by-case basis.

NRCS staff provided examples of existing accepted practices for fence modifications and example cost-share rates.

Discussion was made to add the Fish Creek area in Blaine SCD to the priority area.

Potential challenges identified with this project included maintenance after installation and sheep grazing which requires more wires than typical wildlife friendly fences.

Partner contributions include:

- IDFG: Potential funding, Brett Gullett will take the proposal to his state office.
- BLM: Funding and labor on BLM ground.
- NRCS: At least 15% of local working-group funds can be utilized. Potentially more funding available.
- Wood River Land Trust: In-kind and potentially financial match.
- Butte SWCD: In-kind and potentially financial match.

Next Steps:

- The NRCS will provide a list of potential participants to Brett Gullett and the Districts.
- The Districts/Wood River Land Trust will coordinate outreach meetings with the participants in late summer.
- Brett Gullett will go to Boise to visit with the state office on potential funding.
- Justin Fry will provide a list of BLM permits/permit holders to the NRCS.

Part 2: Fish Habitat and Passage

The need for improved fish habitat and passage ways was discussed for both Districts. Priority areas were identified.

- Blaine SCD priority areas: Fish Creek, Carey Lake, and Belleview.
- Butte SWCD priority areas: Blaine diversion at Darlington in the Big Lost River valley. In the Little Lost River valley, Badger Creek, the flume, and a structure located on private ground.

Next Steps:

- Blaine SCD/Wood River Land Trust will coordinate a meeting with the USFWS, NRCS, IDFG, and the Blaine SCD board to discuss the priority areas.
- Butte SWCD will coordinate a meeting with the USFWS, IDFG, Big Lost River Irrigation District, NRCS, and the Butte SWCD board to discuss the priority areas.
- NRCS will meet with BLM to discuss structures on BLM ground in the Little Lost River valley.
- NRCS staff will work on a draft document for the wildlife initiative proposal.

Discussion was made to include mesic area improvement, aspen stands, spring developments, and water restoration practices to this proposal or to include it in the fall local working-group meeting. Discussion was made regarding the pros and cons of combining these two proposals into one initiative or to keep them separate. It was agreed to keep the funding requests to NRCS separate, but to submit one document.