Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Fund - 1st Round approvals by MSGOT 5-24-16

Application	Type	County	Approved	Fund Amount	Cumulative $	Area/extent	units	Notes
Hansen Conifer Removal	Conifer Encroachment	Beaverhead	Y	202,500	624,500	1,100	Ac	
Julie Burke Easement	Easement	Phillips, Valley	Y	422,000	422,000	2,593	Ac	
Raths Easement	Easement	Golden Valley	Y	812,500	1,437,000	11,229	Ac	
Watson Easement	Easement	Phillips	Y	162,500	1,599,500	2,833	Ac	
44 Ranch Easement	Easement	Petroleum, Fergus	Y	1,500,000	3,099,500	18,033	Ac	
Hansen Easement	Easement	Beaverhead	N	750,000		13,886	Ac	Hold until August
Kelly Burke Easement	Easement	Valley	N	293,820		3,786	Ac	Hold until August
Weaver Easement	Easement	Cheateau, Blaine	N	787,680		9,870	Ac	Reconsider in August
Smith Easement	Easement	Beaverhead	N	36,000		288	Ac	Hold until August
NWF Fence Marking Project	Fence Marking	Various (in core)	N	40,716		90	Mi	Reconsider in August

Sage Grouse Stewardship Fund Applications; MSGOT decision pending May 24, 2016

	Julie Burke Easement	Hansen Easement, conifer removal	Kelly Burke Easement, cropland restoration	Weaver Easement	Raths Easement	Watson Easement	Smith Easement	44 Ranch Easement	NWF Fence
County	Phillips, Valley	Beaverhead	Valley	Choteau, Blaine	Golden Valley	Phillips	Beaverhead	Petroleum, Fergus	Blaine, Phillips, Valley, McCone, Garfield, Petroleum, Fergus
Amount Requested	$422,000.00	$952,000.00	$293,820.00	$787,680.00	$812,500.00	$162,500.00	$36,000.00	$1,500,000.00	$40,716.00
payment method	1x at closing	1x at closing for easement; reimbursable for conifer encroachment ($202,500)	1x at closing for easement; reimbursable for cropland restoration ($39,820)	1x at closing	1x at closing	1x at closing	1x at closing	1x at closing	reimbursable; (materials $7000; remaining is travel, staff, indirect)
cost / acre or mile	$162.73	$68.59	$77.60	$79.80	$72.35	$57.35	$124.62	$83.18	$452.00/mile
Acres Proposed	2,593	13886	3786	9870	11,229	2833	288	18,033	90 miles
Core Habitat	100% core	98% core	30% core	0% core	100% core	100% core	100% core	100% core	unknown
Match	TNC; in hand	TNC; NRCS	TNC, NRCS	NRCS; landowner	NRCS; landowner	NRCS; landowner	NRCS; landowner	The Conservation Fund; landowner donation; both in hand	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; NWF; Montana Conservation Corps
NRCS ALE Match	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Anticipated closing / implementation	close Sept-16	easement: unk; conifer: 2016-2017	easement Nov-2016; seeding 2016, 2017	close Nov-17	close Nov-17	close Nov-17	close Nov-17	close Nov-16	2016 and 2017 field seasons

Prepared by C. Sime based on information provided by applicants. 5/16/16

MONTANA SAGE GROUSE OVERSIGHT TEAM AGENDA ITEM BRIEF SHEET
MAY 24, 2016

AGENDA ITEM: SAGE GROUSE STEWARDSHIP FUND GRANT APPLICATIONS

ACTION NEEDED: CONSIDERATION OF EACH APPLICATION RECEIVED AND DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO FUND IT

SUMMARY:

The Sage Grouse Stewardship Fund was established as a source of funding for competitive grants to establish ongoing free-market mechanisms for voluntary, incentive based conservation measures that maintain, enhance, restore, expand and benefit sage grouse habitat and populations on private lands, and public lands as needed. Nine applications were received: eight proposals for permanent conservation easements and one proposal for marking high risk fence. Applicants graciously honored requests for supplemental information to assure uniformity of information across all applications to the extent possible.

The Program created Workbooks using GIS to generate statistics about each project and to make maps. The proposed easements were buffered by 4 and 12 miles, respectively to place the proposal into a landscape context. Four miles relates to the nesting radius from leks and 12 miles relates to the distance at which birds respond to breaking of native range.

A peer review committee was formed, consisting of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, a retired wildlife biologist, a consultant from the private sector with experience in mitigation, and a private person on contract with the Program. Peer reviewers were provided with all application materials, supplemental information provided by applicants, and the Workbooks. They ranked the proposals, and responded to open-ended questions. Not every reviewer provided comments on every project. The Program reviewed the rankings and comments. The comments were compiled in a single document for each proposal, respectively.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS:

Any funds committed at this time count towards the [no more than] $5 million which can be allocated before the mitigation framework and habitat quantification tool is finalized.

- ***Commit to funding at this time, subject to conditions and contingencies:*** Julie Burke Easement, Hansen Ranch Conifer Removal, Kelly Burke Easement, and Hansen Ranch Easement [special contingency is the applicant has until June 1, 2017 to secure matching funds or the award is revoked and that final building envelopes remain near existing residential compounds as represented].
    - Conditions and contingences should require, for example: final easement terms as represented by the applicant and are adequate to protect habitat values for sage grouse and offer future mitigation opportunities, matching funds remain committed, credits will be available for compensatory mitigation in the future, the state will become a third party beneficiary to the easement with a contingent right to enforce terms, the state consents before the easement is transferred for value, sold or extinguished, applicants enter in a grant agreement approved by MSGOT, applicants provide monitoring reports.

- ***Reconsider for funding at a later time, determined by MSGOT:*** 44 Ranch Easement, Raths Easement, Watson Easement, Smith Easement, and NWF Fence Marking.
    - This recommendation is based on the lack of important details critical to the determination of consistency with the purposes of the Stewardship Fund. Easement terms are not settled and specific fence segments have not been identified. In all cases, resource benefits to sage grouse, sage grouse habitats, and mitigation potential cannot be determined.

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- If sufficient details and assurances are provided to MSGOT's satisfaction during this meeting, the proposals having the strongest habitat values for sage grouse are: 44 Ranch Easement and Raths Easement.
- MSGOT could decide to tentatively approve these applications during this meeting, conditional on details being provided in writing in the near future.
- MSGOT could reconsider all of these proposals during a meeting in August, 2016.
- Alternatively, MSGOT could initiate a second grant cycle and consider them all anew, with an estimated decision timeline for December 2016. A December decision timeline would likely jeopardize the availability of matching funding.
- Should MSGOT commit to funding of any of the easement proposals at this time, conditions and contingences should require, for example: final easement terms as represented verbally during the MSGOT meeting on May 24 which are adequate to protect habitat values for sage grouse and offer future mitigation opportunities, matching funds remain committed, credits will be available for compensatory mitigation in the future, the state will become a third party beneficiary to the easement with a contingent right to enforce terms, the state consents before the easement is transferred for value, sold, or extinguished, applicants enter a grant agreement approved by MSGOT, and applicants provide monitoring reports.
- Should MSGOT commit to funding the fence marking proposal at this time, conditions and contingencies should require, for example: individual high risk fence segments are identified and reviewed with the Program, the applicant and the respective state or federal agency, the applicant enters a grant agreement, matching funds remain committed, credits will be available for compensatory mitigation in the future, and the applicant provides monitoring reports.

- ***Do Not Fund:*** Weaver Easement.
  - This parcel occurs entirely within general habitat and is on the edge of sage grouse habitat. While the parcel has high resource values for other wildlife species, it does not align well with the purposes of the Stewardship Fund, which specifically targets sage grouse habitats.