

HILL: Hi. We're here to talk to you today about that critical first step in your planning process, which is to gather the key resources, direction and guidance you're going to need to do your species and vegetation planning during an RMP process.

My name is Barb Hill. I'm the Oregon/Washington Special Status Species Biologist and work principally with listed species of concern, the Injured Species Act implementation and other non-listed special status species.

John?

CARLSON: And I'm John Carlson. I'm a wildlife biologist in Glasgow, Montana. I'm in the middle of a planning process myself for the mult RMP, and I just wanted to give you a little background of what we're going to be doing.

The next step, Barb will introduce some of the objectives for the course and then I will go over a list of some of the resources and information that we're going to be discussing through the rest of this presentation.

HILL: First, we'd like to review the key objectives we're going to be talking about today. As I mentioned, we want to highlight those resources that you should be gathering well in advance of your planning effort to be organized to do your analysis. And by doing this, hopefully you will spend less time running around during the planning process and spend more time truly focusing on the key analysis and planning that you need to be doing.

And also, as part of this effort, we would like to discuss, so there's a clear understanding what is required, in other words, what you must incorporate into your planning documents, versus those things that are recommended or even highly recommended to consider in incorporating.

Thirdly, we hope through doing this discussion with you we can enhance the quality of the efficiency and effectiveness of your effort by again getting you organized well in advance of the planning effort with the right materials.

John?

CARLSON: The list of resources that we are going to be discussing today include Special Status Species List -- and that would be for your individual state -- Special Status Species Manual and state policies; BLM handbooks; some Executive Orders that are pertinent to the planning process, biological opinions; recovery plans; some fact sheets; conservation assessments, strategies and agreements; overarching and existing plans that you can use; BLM and TNC regional assessments -- those are equally regional assessments -- conservation planning documents from other entities; comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies -- those are the state-level plans that were mandated by the federal government -- geospatial data; primary literature; and then we'll briefly touch on other resources applicable to your planning area.

Barb, we're going to start off with the Special Status Species List.

HILL: So, the Special Status Species List is where you start, and what we wanted to cover first off is where do you go to get the

information on what species should be on your list? Obviously for those that are federally listed you will be working with the list from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries.

In addition to that, you might also be looking at your Natural Heritage Program sites, your state agencies that manage fish, wildlife and botany resources, and also other conservation organizations may have critical information to help you develop that list.

On the slide here you see three categories. The first three are those that you are required to address under the Endangered Species Act. Those are those that are federally listed as threatened and endangered, the federally designated critical habitats and also that are federally proposed as threatened or endangered or proposed as critical habitats.

Last on this list is the federal candidates, which are those that have the information that they're likely to be listed and certainly should be addressed during your planning process.

In addition to that, under our BLM policy, every state also identifies Bureau-sensitive species, and also you may have other statuses unique to your state that under your policy that you have identified to consider.

Beyond just the Special Status Species, there's a group that John and I are calling the key focus species. Now, these are not truly Sensitive Special Status Species, but what they are are the ones that have important significance to your planning area and may be identified by your agency or unit to be considered. A good example of those might be big game species of concern, culturally significant species, such as those plant

materials or species that are collected by local Native American tribes, and they are certainly just as important as the Special Status Species to incorporate into your consideration.

So where do you go to look -- find out what you need to do with these species? There's two key documents in the BLM for Special Status Species management. One is our nationwide Manual 6840, which currently applies Bureau-wide. Secondly is the BLM states, the individual states, have Special Status Species policy which will vary state to state but also provide very specific guidance on how you develop your species list, what management, and what conservation is required for those species at your state bases. Again, these requirements vary by state by state. Also, these were developed and represent the State Director's individual discretion and authority.

So what is the BLM Manual purpose? This slide shows the key purposes, which is the policy and guidance to provide for the conservation of Special Status Species. And what does conservation mean? Basically it's the Endangered Species Act provisions are not necessary. In other words, you're undertaking actions to ensure that species will not get on the list or if it's on the list it would be removed and recovered.

Secondly, when you look at the BLM manual in that direction, it provides a second aspect to this. One is that SSS listings are not perpetuated. What that means is listings under our Special Status Species policy in Manual are not perpetuated. So that would also include beyond those that are just federally listed, the Bureau-sensitive, the federal

candidate, and other species that maybe your state has identified should not be perpetuated as rare status on your Special Status Species list.

So, also the manual and guidance does provide some key guidance that it rolls into your plan, and in these next few slides we're going to highlight those directions from the manual that are particularly pertinent to the planning process. The manual discusses many other aspects, including how to conduct endangered species consultation, but we're not going to get into detail today on those, rather, we're just going to focus on the points that are critical to your planning effort.

First off, management actions do not contribute to the need to list. Again, that means under the Endangered Species Act and under the Special Status Species policies. Second, you should ensure that these species are considered in your management plan, in other words, your planning effort that you're entering.

And also that these plans should conserve not only the species but also the major and important critical habitat areas for those.

The policy also direct that we should be looking at the distribution, the population and the habitat significant to these species that are on BLM lands, and later on we'll be talking about some informational materials that will help you identify those areas.

You also should ensure the management plans provide for the conservation of critical habitat, and when I refer to critical habitat, that is that designated critical habitat that is designated under the Endangered Species Act.

Also we should ensure that the management objectives for conservation are met through monitoring of populations, and this aspect feeds very well into the monitoring plan that you're going to be developing during your RMP process.

Thirdly, last on this list, is the fact we should be retaining in federal ownership all lands that are critical or sensitive to these species that we're addressing. In considering the fact that the lifespan of most plans is about 20 years, it is highly likely that the disposal or acquisition of lands will be something you may be addressing in your RMP process. So this manual guidance is particularly importance to keep in mind.

Finally, we are going to also talk about some other key stages that the manual addresses that you must conduct during your RMP process. One is almost certainly you will be completing consultation on your RMP, and the consultation would be under the Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

Also if your proposed species are critical habitat, you would be completing conferencing in many cases. And you must adhere to the ESA requirements for that.

You should be -- if you have any existing biological opinions that are still applicable to your plan, those need to be implemented, and in addition, the biological opinion you receive as a result of the consultation of your plan should be also implemented, or is required to be implemented.

You should be -- try to ensure that activities are consistent with

recovery needs, and ideally those recovery needs are identified in either conservation strategies or recovery plans that address your species, and we'll be talking in more detail about those types of documents in a little bit.

Also, if you have non-listed, non-federally listed species of concern such as federal candidates or Bureau-sensitive, you can request technical assistance from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service. And technical assistance is their role when they provide nonbinding recommendations to enhance the conservation measures that you might incorporate into your RMP.

Thirdly, you should participate in the development and implementation of conservation strategies. Now, the development might occur outside of your RMP effort, but certainly the implementation through incorporating these measures into your RMP document would be a sure way to ensure that you are implementing the various measures from either recovery plans or conservation strategies.

Finally, the manual does address specifically our role with the states, the state agencies that manage fish, wildlife and botany resources, and we are to assist the states in achieving these goals -- again later on we'll talk about the state's conservation strategies which provides an excellent outline for where the state would like to go with species and habitat management, and also as much as possible we should reflect state laws that are applicable in our planning documents to ensure we are consistent with state regulations.

CARLSON: Barb, I would like to point out that you may have Special Status Species in your Planning Area but maybe not occurring where you're actively doing BLM management, not on BLM surface or subsurface lands, and you would still have to consider those in your planning but maybe not in as great a detail as those ones where you really have an --

HILL: Exactly. You do have to look at that comprehensive view.

CARLSON: Okay. Now I'm going to talk about a couple of handbooks that would be beneficial for you to consult, actually required.

The first one is the Planning Handbook, and you will be very familiar with this Planning Handbook by the time you're done with your RMP, in particular, Appendix C, which contains guidance for the particular individual resources considered in the planning process. We'll cover this in much greater detail in another aspect of the course, but I just want to touch on it here because you will be using it a lot and this outlines decisions we should make in the planning process and provides key framework for planning for priority species and vegetation.

Some examples where you might apply this handbook for biological resources are when you designate your priority species and vegetation, and that's pretty much what we're going to do in this whole course, is help you figure out what those priority species and habitats and vegetation might be. You describe the desired habitat conditions and populations, identify restoration opportunities, use of restrictions, management actions to conserve or restore, and this is the real heart of your planning, and this is where this Appendix C will really help you identify what those

management opportunities, restrictions might be.

HILL: John, I was going to comment on Appendix C. I think for many of the BLM biologists and botanists we tend to focus on the 6840 manual, the Special Status Species Manual and policies, and what I found as I got more involved in this planning effort is that the Planning Handbook, if anything, has -- is much if not more valuable information for biologists and botanists to be looking. It provides some really key guidance and information on what you should consider during your planning process. It's a real asset to planning for species and vegetation.

CARLSON: Certainly helped me getting familiar with that when I started in mine.

The next handbook we're going to talk about is the Integrated Vegetation Management Handbook, and this is a pending handbook we anticipate will be available for many of you when you get to start your planning process. It supports an interdisciplinary planning process that improves biological diversity and ecosystem function. This helps promote plant communities resilient to disturbance and invasive species, and as we pointed out before, BLM manages the habitat and our local state fish and wildlife agencies are -- in charge of managing the population. So this vegetation management handbook is really important for the biologist to become familiar with because it is how we will be managing the wildlife habitat. It also outlines more consistent and unified approach to vegetation management and identifies multi-program goals, objectives and priorities to maintain and restore native plant communities and this is

where our input as an interdisciplinary team in this process will be important. And it also emphasizes ecoregional level analysis, and a lot of what we'll talk about today is a broader scale ecoregional level look at things because one of the things in the Planning Handbook suggests we need to frame our Planning Area in the context of the ecoregions around it, and that will really help with this vegetation Planning Handbook.

Now I would like to talk a little bit about some Executive Orders that are required for us in our planning process. Three of them in particular that we felt were very pertinent to the planning process for biological resources. These are directives issued by the President, and some of the three that we decided or figured were most applicable are the facilitation of cooperative conservation, hunting heritage and wildlife conservation is the next one, and then the responsibilities of federal agencies to protect migratory birds is the third one and I'll talk about each one of those individually now.

The Cooperative Conservation Executive Order, it's from 2004, this Executive Order requires Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency to implement laws in a manner that facilitate Cooperative Conservation, recognizes the interests of people with ownership or interest in land and natural resources, accommodates local participation in federal decisions and provides for programs and activities that protect public health and safety. This reads very similar to the guidance that we have in our Planning Handbook on incorporating local

entities in our planning process, bringing them in as partners. So it just really helps emphasize that portion of it.

The Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation is our newest Executive Order from 2007, and this one requires federal agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting and management of game species and habitats. This is where it really ties in with our state wildlife management agencies and really helps emphasize that relationship. It evaluates the effects of our management actions and decisions on hunting participation. It has to consider economic and recreation values of hunting in agency actions, and again this ties back into our -- some our economic analysis as part of the RMP process, specifically directed towards recreation -- recreation and wildlife resources. It asks us to expand and enhance hunting opportunities on BLM lands, and this may be where you work with your rec. planner in getting hunting opportunities on public land. Again, it emphasizes working collaboratively with state agencies, which is something that we've been emphasizing throughout this presentation. And it asks us to ensure that our actions and plans consider the state's comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies, which is a whole section we'll talk about a little bit later, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, which I will discuss in a little bit more detail coming up, and other wide-ranging plans for game and upland birds.

Lastly, the last Executive Order we're going to talk about today is the Migratory Bird Treaty Act responsibilities for federal agencies. And this

is from 2001. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act is a 1918 act, and this Executive Order just directs us to ensure that we're taking actions to implement that Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Some of those actions include supporting migratory bird conservation and minimizing adverse impacts to migratory birds, enhancing and restoring migratory bird habitat, preventing or abating detrimental alterations of migratory bird habitat, and here's the kicker for us today, it designs migratory bird habitat and conservation actions into agency plans and planning processes. So it tells us right there you have to include the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in dealing with migratory birds in your planning process. And it also asks us to promote migratory bird programs and recommendations from partners, and there are a number of partners that are interested and have a stake in migratory birds, local Audubon societies and Partners In Flight organizations and various state and national levels.

Barb is going to talk a little bit about our biological opinions and Section 7 consultation.

HILL: I think most of you know biological opinions of those documents that we receive from the National Marine Fisheries Service or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as a result of Section 7 consultation. As I mentioned, you most certainly will complete a consultation to complete your RMP. However, it's sometimes overlooked when you enter a planning process there may be biological opinions out there that are still pertinent and applicable to your planning process that need to be rolled into your consideration and those are requirements. That's the important thing

about a biological opinion, if it applies to your project or your planning effort, they are requirements under the law.

And what -- these requirements are provided in the documents in the biological opinions as terms and conditions, and the terms and conditions basically outline requirements and stipulations from the Fish & Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries that have to be followed for your plan or action to be valid.

In addition to that, if there's some incidental take of the species that is going to occur during your plan or proposed project, you need to get an incidental take statement, and those are covered in this document in the biological opinion.

An incidental take, in a nutshell, is basically harm or harassment of a listed species, and that can only be legal when you have an incidental take statement and you are following those terms and conditions. So again you see it's very important to be aware of what biological opinions apply to your Planning Area and your projects and to make sure that they're incorporated into your consideration.

Now, when I think about utilizing biological opinions in planning efforts, I kind of think of it in three different ways. One, as I mentioned, are those that exist as you initiate your planning effort but still are applicable to what you're doing, and you need to be careful that you are ensuring that those get rolled into your planning consideration and into your documents.

The second one will be the biological opinion you will get as a result

of the consultation you complete on your RMP, and as a rule those documents are achieved -- the biological opinions are provided just before the Record of Decision is signed to ensure that those terms and conditions can also be incorporated into your planning process.

And third, isn't in context as so much a requirement, but if you have existing biological opinions that address the same species and the same projects that you're considering in your RMP, it certainly would behoove you to take a look at those to see what sort of terms and conditions the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA or NMFS, National Marine Fisheries, provided to whoever proposed those projects and consider those during your project and planning design work because it would help facilitate what you have to do later obviously during your own consultation.

And the bottom line again, it's the law to make your planning process obviously successful, legal and facilitate it greatly you should definitely be following any sort of applicable biological opinions.

Next I'd like to talk about recovery plans. Now, recovery plans are another aspect of the Endangered Species Act that we should consider, however the interesting thing about recovery plans, unlike biological opinions, they are not required necessarily. I'll talk a little bit about more in detail about when they're required and when they're recommended. However, they definitely prevent -- present some of the best management actions necessary to recover the species. So obviously they're certainly something you want to consider during your planning process.

One of the benefits they provide is objective, measurable criteria

that you can obviously use for your program and project design work while you work on your RMP. They also provide times and costs estimate to achieve recovery, which again would help you when you're developing your implementation plans and your project planning during your RMP processes. And the other thing that would behoove you or strengthen your document is the written by stakeholders, usually the key agencies and organizations that are involved in the conservation recovery of that listed species. So by reviewing and incorporating recovery plans you're also able to incorporate a lot of that input, critical input, from key stakeholders who probably very likely will be reviewing your plan also. And also as I mentioned, this would greatly facilitate your later Section 7 consultation that you alone will have to complete with either National Marine Fisheries or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on your own RMP.

Now, I did mention that BLM is not required to adopt and implement a recovery plan, however, these plans are recognized as the key guiding documents, the best documents and science on how to recover and conserve the species. So even if they're not required, you should still be looking at them closely to give you a sense about what sort of design you might want to incorporate into your planning effort.

But however, and this is something you'll need to do your homework on, either at the national, state or even the local office level BLM often decides to require the application and use of a recovery plan. So you need to verify whether that's already been done and the use of that recovery plan is requirement for you.

Next, John and I wanted to talk about a fairly broad category of conservation documents that will help you in your work, and basically there's four of them, and they often come by other names but we're going to call them fact sheets, conservation assessments, conservation strategies and conservation agreements.

Now, they come in multitude of formats in various scales and levels of detail but it all helps to provide some scientific information about the species and vegetation you'll be managing for. And as noted here, they're often developed by a wide range of cooperators, agency and entities, and they're not always in a very similar format or similar level of content and detail. So there's a great selection of those out there for you to work from.

Fact sheets also -- you need -- this is very important -- you need to do a thorough search for applicable to your Planning Area and species. We can't provide you with one website that you can go to obviously to find all of these. And -- such as an example, though, some of the places you want to be looking would be your state heritage programs, state and federal and tribal agencies, professional societies, nature -- academia and other conservation organizations that have a stake in various species and types of habitats.

First we wanted to touch on the most succinct and short version. Typically these fact sheets are only one to two pages, and sometimes they're also called management guidelines. And what this is is a very short form of information on the species ecology, biology, maybe habitat

use, and they're typically not in depth, however, they can be beneficial for your write-ups to share with your planning team or to share with the public and other stakeholders just to discuss the species you're working with. And again they're developed by many types of entities and organizations and they can be in a wide range of formats.

Next we'll talk about a conservation assessment. A conservation assessment is a much expanded version of anything you would find in a fact sheet. It's a scientific document that not only covers the biology and ecology but might talk extensively about range, distribution, habitat, include information on inventory and monitoring threats, management and relevant research. The key thing to remember when you work with a conservation assessment, it should be done based on a very rigorous scientific and literature review. So it should have a great benefit to your needs in terms of planning and analysis for the species you want to address.

Next is strategies. Strategies typically have all the information that you would find in an assessment plus some additional information on management, conservation and persistence. One of the benefits they might provide to you is they would identify, for instance, what sites and what areas need to be -- or sites and populations need to be conserved and managed or perhaps those can that take impacts or even be lost and still allow for the viability and persistence of the species. So that can be very beneficial in your project and plan design during your RMT analysis. They also -- often are very -- completed by interagency or joint forum so

usually typically will have buy-in from other stake -- key stakeholders in these documents, and these are one of the documents that's particularly important to note they can be required if BLM has made a decision to incorporate these as part of the required management processes.

And last we have agreements. Now, agreements are rather than providing biological information, they're more of an agreement or assurances necessary to conserve the species with the objective of trying to either prevent a listing or to try to get the species off the list. They often are accompanied with a memorandum of understanding, typically again with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and NMFS, to help ensure this might avoid a listing. In fact, the existence of conservation assessments is often considered when these agencies are reviewing a petition for a species, if that there is one -- that exists that is required, it may help to prevent a listing of the species. It may also include a multitude of stakes -- states, organizations and other entities in the MOU or agreeing to sign onto this agreement. But on the other hand, it's also important to remember that sometimes -- volunteer and nonbinding documents. So like some of the other things I've already talked about, you need to do your homework and verify whether an agreement is nonbinding or it is a required part of your planning effort.

And, John, we need to talk about the overarching documents?

CARLSON: Sure.

Now I'm going to talk a little bit about overarching and existing planning documents, and these can be either required or recommended,

depending upon the situation. They're generally some overarching ecoregional national planning documents that may supersede some your planning documents you're currently using. They may contain information on project design or criteria, standards or direction. Some examples that you may have to apply to your Planning Area are the Northwest Forest Plan, Land Health Standards, our BLM Land Health Standards, the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Plan and the scientific data that contains, and potentially the Healthy Lands Initiative would fit under this section.

A couple other ones that you're definitely going to have to use are overarching and existing planning documents that is your RMP, your current RMP or management framework plan for your management area, and you'll know this intimately after you do your analysis of management situation that forms the framework for that and your -- also your no action alternative, although it may not be -- your current management may not be exactly your no action alternative because of some of these overarching plan amendments, national level EIS's, programmatic EIS's, that sort of stuff that would fit into your current management, potentially even lawsuits that would affect your current management beyond what you had for your original RMP or MFP.

Another source that's really good to use are existing Resource Management Plans from other management agencies. They may address similar species with similar habitats, issues and you can use a lot of the stuff if you feel like it was done very well in that plan, utilize that, don't reinvent something, and you may also look for other examples that don't

have similar species, vegetation but they've done things in a way that you really like and the analysis and it makes sense to you how they looked at that, or some of the more recent ones have actually been completed under the new Planning Handbook, and those are very good because they actually follow the same planning that you were supposed to incorporate in yours as well.

We also have some BLM regional assessments, and in some cases they were cooperatively done with the Forest Service or the USGS to develop assessments at an ecoregional level, and some of these are completed, some of them are pending, some of them are just beginning, but we wanted to let you be aware of these planning efforts -- these assessments that you could utilize. They potentially identify habitat conditions, potential threats at a broader scale than you would consider in your planning, but one of the things in appendix -- or in the Planning Handbook, it tells us to consider the context of our Planning Area in a broader ecoregional scale and these might help you do that. Some examples are the Great Basin Ecoregional Assessment, Wyoming Basin, Colorado Plateau, Prairie Grasslands and one we'll talk about a little bit later on is the Sage Grouse Range-Wide Assessment, which looks at potential fragmentation issues, connectivity and habitat across the range of the bird.

Some other planning documents and guidance from other entities that you could utilize, some important ones are bird conservation region plans, and these are generally done at an ecoregional or state level that

set some management guidelines and recommendations for species at that level, Partners In Flight Land Bird Conservation Plan, which is a national level plan that sets goals and objectives for population levels of a number of different migratory birds. We have the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, which is then broken down into subregions, kind of based on ecoregions. They are -- a couple examples are the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture or the Intermountain West Joint Venture, and these are -- the joint ventures are where those -- the -- the North American Waterfowl Management Plan actions are incorporated at. So it would be good to look to see where you fit in those joint ventures. There's also a Shorebird Conservation Plan, which is North American-wide plan directed specifically at shorebirds. There are Audubon Important Bird Areas, and they may be local or regional or even a global important bird area. The Planning Area I'm working in has a number of statewide Important Bird Areas but also I think three globally Important Bird Areas, and those are very important to incorporate into your planning process. Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, otherwise known as PARC, has habitat management guidelines for reptiles and amphibians that would be important to work in. The Xerces Society has conservation guides for invertebrate conservation, and this is something we probably don't do a lot of right now, but maybe something we will be considering much greater in the future. So it's always nice to be aware of what sort of invertebrate issues might be out there looming in the future. Western Bat Working Group has conservation materials for the conservation of a number of

different bat species throughout the west. There's a Pronghorn Management Guide. And what I wanted to point out with this Pronghorn Management Guide as an example is that being a migratory animal, you may have habitats that serve as migratory habitats for species like pronghorn or other animals that the animals might not accrue there very long, but they're very important to that animal during a specific point in their life cycle, and you have to recognize that as part of your planning process as well.

Next we'll move into some ecoregional assessments that The Nature Conservancy has done. They have looked at ecoregional plans throughout much of the United States, and they've used these as a way to direct their conservation efforts, but they've done a really good job of looking at the factors that may influence what's going on in those ecoregions, the priority species and habitats, and you can utilize those in your planning process. Often they're very good and have information that you could roll right into your planning process. They have done a lot of that work already for you.

Now Barb is going to talk a little bit about some comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies.

HILL: We touched on this briefly before in our discussion of the manual and the list, but these are written by all the states in the U.S. Luckily they're -- almost every state completed their in 2006. So everybody -- every BLM state, in turn, should have a conservation strategy they could be looking at. And this represents the key goals and objectives for fish, wildlife and botany -- plant resources for the states that you work

with.

As we discussed earlier, we have a clear direction from our manual to work to further the goals and objectives of the state organizations and agencies, and I think most of you know that jurisdictionally the states have the authority over the species, the populations, while we, like the BLM, the Forest Service, and other federal land management agencies have the jurisdiction over the habitat. So, again, it's particularly important that we consider what the states' objectives are for the populations and the species.

Currently they provide a real wealth of information, and again this would complement some of those other conservation tools we talk about on distribution status, at risk species in communities. They also provide the location of key and priority habitats, sometimes called opportunity areas, that would be excellent to manage for, and a lot of these do overlap on BLM lands. So you should be considering these in your management plans.

I should also point out that these are not mandated conservation strategies from the state but again they're voluntary, but they do give us an excellent idea of where the state wants to head with species and vegetation conservation.

They also contain things like the key issues and concerns and the adverse effects that the states feel are affecting the species and habitats. It helps us prioritize our conservation actions for the species and habitats which we can roll into our implementation plans in our RMPs and also

identifies those monitoring needs not only for the species and the habitats but also for effectiveness monitoring for various project and on the ground activities that might occur, which, again, would complement our monitoring planning effort that we undertake during our RMPs.

And we have some very clear reasons that we should also consider utilization of these conservation strategies. Number one, it involved a lot of input from the key stakeholders, the federal agencies, the tribes and the states on their priorities and issues for these species and vegetation. It also reflects extensive public participation that would also help us identify where the states -- the people in the state are concerned and what kind of issues and priorities that they might have for these species and vegetation. Again, that would all roll in and enhance our efforts in our RMP planning, and also it would help us just in general prove our coordination and with the state agencies and adhere to our manual direction that we should facilitate their goals and objectives.

And we have some -- a few other key reasons we want to consider these. We did receive very clear direction for our -- from our Washington Office in 2006 to consider the use of the state's conservation strategies in our land use and conservation planning efforts. John did touch on the facilitation of Cooperative Conservation Executive Order and obviously the utilization of their state conservation strategies would take us well along to meeting the needs to address that Executive Order. In addition, the conservation strategies help facilitate the states receiving money for on the ground projects and programs. And so our utilization of conservation

strategies might improve our opportunities for joint funding in the future.

John, did you want to visit on the geospatial data?

CARLSON: Sure. I'm going to touch a little bit on a couple of resources for you to use and the first one is geospatial data. And I'm sure all of you are probably using geospatial data to manage your resources right now. It becomes really important to be able to have that for your planning process. It's a key tool for all our species and vegetation and habitat planning. This comes from a multiple -- multiple sources, including your own spatial data that you've developed through your work in your Field Office or your Planning Area. Other federal agencies may have some good geospatial data for you to use. State and tribal governments that you may have as cooperators, particularly the state programs, that's your cooperative wildlife work and your habitat work. The natural heritage programs are another really good source of location data for maybe some of the Special Status Species that you are not familiar with. Their mission is to provide that level of information with management guidelines, locations to agencies that need that information. Other conservation groups and academia may have layers, models that they developed on species distribution or habitat conditions that would be beneficial for you to use. And The Nature Conservancy as part of these ecoregional plans that we've already talked about and their assessments may have spatial data that is available and I would encourage you to take advantage of all of that information you can find to pull together.

The next information source I wanted to mention is primary

literature. This is peer reviewed research or theses and dissertations from graduate students, Forest Service technical reports. They all may be beneficial if your recovery plans are a bit dated or your conservation assessments have been completed 10, 20 years ago. This is where you would go to find some of the latest research and how it might apply to what you're trying to manage.

Some key places to look for this information, all BLM employees have access to Bio 1, which is a literature search engine for a number of different journals, and you can access through the BLM library website. The BLM library itself is a really good resource. If you can't find anything online, you can write to them and ask for PDF's or hard copies of the literature you're having a hard time finding. And also then also university libraries. If you have a local university that you can access, that's a good place to start looking for this information.

And now what we would like to do is kind of roll this all together and talk about one species in particular that many of you are going to be dealing with in your land use plans. I am currently dealing with this quite extensively in my land use plan. And we'll try to touch on all these different resources and how it applies to sage grouse and BLM manages two different species of sage grouse throughout the west, the Gunnison sage grouse and the greater sage grouse, and a lot of these were developed specifically for greater sage grouse. We're going to stick with that. With upcoming listing decisions, this is becoming a very important species for this agency, and some resources I would like to mention are

the BLM National Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy. It was completed in 2004. It includes guidance for management of the sage grouse habitat, the sagebrush plant communities, and how you might manage those to ensure sage grouse conservation. But more pointedly, it also includes guidance for addressing sagebrush habitat conservation in BLM land use plans, and that's where you would use that information to make sure you're addressing sage grouse in your land use plan if they're an important part of your Planning Area.

There's also state level conservation assessments and strategies or management guidelines, management plans for sage grouse for many of the western states that have sage grouse.

There's a comprehensive sage grouse strategy which was completed in 2006, and this was developed by WAFWLA, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and it is -- the WAFWLA group is an overarching group of all the state -- western states game and fish agencies. They came up with recommendations for sage grouse conservation and strategy. They identify seven populations of grouse throughout the West, and what we might need to achieve neutral or positive population trends to help reverse the decline in sage grouse. Outlines associations among federal, state and local agencies, tribes, national -- nongovernmental organizations and other private entities, working in cooperation to manage sage grouse and sage grouse habitats.

I've used all of those in the current planning process I'm working on and a number of other tools as well. One that's just in draft is the Sage

Grouse Regional Assessment, which I touched on earlier. Hopefully this will be available to all of us very soon. It helps set the ecoregional context for sage grouse conservation, looking at core areas, potential connectivity areas and some habitat condition stuff.

Another key source that I've relied on is my relationship with our state wildlife management agency and the data that they have on the location leks, the number of males on leks, the spring surveys, and habitats and population status. We work cooperatively to define where our sage grouse habitat are in our Planning Area.

We also have some BLM habitat assessments and geospatial data that we've developed ourselves, and again in the Planning Area that I'm working in, we've actually been completing habitat assessments based on some guidance in the regional assessments that ask us to assess sage grouse habitat, and we've modified that a bit so that we have our own data to bring into the process to help establish maybe some local standards.

We've got a local working group. And we've utilized the information in the local working group in our land use plan to ensure that we're covering the actions that, again, this is a cooperative group of multi-stakeholders that we wanted to make sure that we were meeting with what they've recommended, and these local working groups are located in sage grouse range throughout the West.

We have state cooperative wildlife conservation strategies, and, again, I've utilized our state, the Montana State Conservation Strategy,

sage grouse is a priority species for them, and utilized the information contained in that strategy as well to make sure I'm covering everything that they're recommending, and at least looking at it.

The Natural Heritage Program and Nature Serve Species and Habitat Data, we rely on those guys for a lot of -- not so much sage grouse in the effort I have been involved in, but a number of other sensitive species, but they do have some information that helps us with our sage grouse management as well.

And then the TNC ecoregional assessments that we've mentioned earlier. They have included sage grouse and/or sagebrush -- the sage grouse habitat in the ecoregional assessments that I've been involved with the TNC. So I have been able to use a lot of the information that was derived from expert opinion and a lot of on-the-ground work to pull into our planning effort.

So, that kind of wraps up our example here, and leaves us kind of wrapping up this portion of the course and wanted to mention to you -- or discuss with you when do you think you start gathering this information for your planning process? When should you be doing this? And I would tell you that as soon as you know you're going to be doing an RMP. The sooner you jump on this, in particular the spatial data, you may have instances where you have incomplete data and need to complete it for your whole Planning Area to utilize it, or you have two field offices that need to merge together for your Planning Area and you need to ensure your data is consistent across those two boundaries. As soon as you can

start that, the better off you're going to be pulling all this information together.

But you probably are already collecting a lot of this information just day to day on your job, so in reality, you're doing that probably from the moment you got on your job you started looking at the sources of information. Oftentimes you're using it for project planning, NEPA work, day-to-day work, endangered species consultations, partnership. You're probably already a long ways to having a lot of this information already available. It's just pulling it all together for this planning process.

HILL: So, we've already discussed over a dozen different sources and websites that you should be looking at for this information, and we didn't elaborate on those in this presentation, however, as part of the course materials you will be provided a separate sheet or separate information where we've -- of websites that will be useful for you to look at. But again, I should note, that not all these resources we discussed will be able to provide you a single website source to look at. The recovery plans, yes. The TNC ecoregional plans, yes. But those various conservation assessments and strategies, no, we won't be able to, or the literature that John talked about, the primary resource literature. Again, that will take a more extensive searching and work on your part to get organized before your RMP process starts.

But in summary, we just want to go over again that list we presented at the beginning. The first five on this as we mentioned are all required. That's your species list, the manual policies, the handbooks, the

Executive Orders and the biological opinions. And then we get into the group that may be required or they may just be recommended. And that's your recovery (indiscernible), your fact sheets and assessments, strategies and agreements, those overarching and existing plans -- again, you should verify whether there's a Record of Decision in place that you still need to utilize and utilize that, therefore, that document. They also had the BLM and TNC regional assessments. Then we have those conservation planning documents from other entities, the states comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies, the geospatial data. Although we list this as recommended, we seriously doubt you could even think of getting through an RMP process without using that. The primary literature. And, again, those other resources that we didn't specifically mention but they're unique to your area and have to be considered.

So, again, we'll also cover briefly those objectives we (indiscernible) -- we hope -- John and hope we've given you a good comprehensive overview of those key resources you're going to need to get (indiscernible) early on in your planning process. Again, don't wait until your planning process is actually operating. This is stuff you can do well before your RMP effort is initiated. And we did talk -- we tried to talk in clear detail for you what is required and what is recommended. We wanted folks to be (indiscernible) aware that not all the stuff is necessary, but you could get yourself into a very difficult bind situation later on if you fail to incorporate some required information or direction into your RMP process. And also we hope by providing this with you that we've provided

you with a good way to help make your -- operate your efforts efficient and effective in getting organized for your planning effort and again not waiting until the last minute to start this work to find all these materials and get them organized.

In many ways we know the effort you're going to be involved in as a biologist or botanist or Resource Specialist in an RMP planning effort is probably the most difficult, challenging and overwhelming thing you might undertake in your career in the BLM. However, when you consider the life span of a plan, which can be 20 years or longer, it's perhaps the most significant and influential thing that you can undertake as a professional for priority species and vegetation. And so John and I hope today we've provided you with a good place to start and some good resource information for you to take on this challenge and be very successful.

And, John, any other (indiscernible) --

CARLSON: Yeah, I hope that -- I suspect that many of you and your planning team are new to the planning process. I know in my team a lot of us had never been through a planning process before, and I hope through this presentation, these materials that we're giving you that you feel a little more comfortable about the venture you're starting off on and you get more out of it and are able to proceed through it a little bit more smoothly.

HILL: So good luck to all of you.

CARLSON: Thank you.