WARD: Hello, my name is Joni Ward. And I am here today to teach the session on selecting priority species and vegetation.

I work for the Nature Conservancy, and have been with the organization for about eight years. And previous to that, I was at Utah State University for five years where I received my Ph.D. in Ecology.

During my eight years at the Nature Conservancy, I have regularly applied regional scale planning methodologies and so the subject that we're going to talk about today is one that I'm very familiar with.

And the objective of this session today is to teach you an approach for identifying your priority species and vegetation for your planning area. And once you learn the simple systematic approach, then you will be able to include BLM required species as well as coarse scale priority vegetation and fine scale priority species.

So, during the course overview, during another online training session, you learned about the five fundamental steps that we're going to go through during this course.

And the first one is the subject of this session today, which is identifying priority species and vegetation. And it really forms the linchpin for the rest

of the planning that you're going to be doing during this course. And so it's a very important step.

But it's also important to keep in mind that you don't have to get it right the first time, that it's really about drafting a list and then being flexible about that list and having the ability to either add or remove priority species and vegetation as we go through the remainder of the course and your planning.

And so, the approach that we use to identify your priority species and vegetation is pretty simple and straightforward, and it involves three fundamental steps.

It starts with first making sure that you account for the species and vegetation that the BLM requires you to include in your resource management plan.

And then once we understand what those species and vegetation types are, then we simply apply a coarse filter/fine filter method to your planning area.

And so what we're going to do for the rest of this session is simply walk through each one of these steps.

And so the first step of making sure that you account for all of the species and vegetation that you need to, according to your BLM regulations, we've already covered that in two different sessions. We discussed it a

bit, Katie and myself, during the course overview.

But you got a lot of guidance from John Carlson and Barb Hill in their session on gathering key guidance direction and resources. And so I'm not going to repeat all of the information that they already gave you.

Strongly encourage you to go and view those online sessions again to make sure that you have a full understanding of how to account for those BLM required species.

But two key points that I wanted to bring up today to make sure that you keep in mind from your BLM requirements. And they are simply that you must account for all federally listed species.

And you also must account for any BLM sensitive species. And the BLM species would include those that are identified by your state game and fish agency, as well as any identified by your BLM state director.

And so, once you've got your BLM required species and vegetation identified, then the coarse filter/fine filter method is applied to your planning area.

And the fundamental premise of the coarse filter/fine filter approach is simply that it's not possible for you to plan for every single species and vegetation type that occurs within your planning area.

It's inefficient, it's overwhelming. You would quickly be subsumed by massive amounts of information that you couldn't ever prioritize any management actions out of that.

And so, really, what we have to do is select a subset of species and vegetation that, when we plan for those, we will insure that all species and vegetation throughout your planning area will be sustained through time.

And so in doing that process, we start first with the coarse filter. And that simply means identifying those broad vegetation types that characterize your planning area. So, is your planning area dominated by grasslands, is it dominated by sage brush steppe, is it dominated by pinon juniper, or all of the above?

There really is no magic number of coarse scale vegetation types for you to identify in your planning area. It's going to be up to you how specifically you want to define that coarse scale vegetation or how much you want to group them together.

But one major factor to think about, as you are grouping your coarse scale vegetation types, is to think about the disturbance regimes that are responsible for sustaining those vegetation types through time.

Disturbance regimes such as grazing, fire, flood, etc. Those are important to keep in mind because if you understand what those disturbance regimes are, then you can potentially group different kinds of vegetation together, such as different grassland systems. If they're really dominantly characterized by grazing, then you can probably group those grassland systems together for planning purposes, rather than splitting them out.

And then you would have a different coarse scale vegetation, perhaps for shrub lands or for pinon juniper, for example.

It's also important to make sure that you understand those dominant disturbance regimes because you're going to need to be developing management strategies in your plan to make sure that those disturbance regimes are present in your planning area, so that they are functioning and those vegetation communities are sustained through time.

So once we have applied the coarse filter, all that's left is applying our fine filter. And that is the place where typically those species that fall through that coarse filter, those that require special management, their needs will not be met by managing for a coarse filter vegetation community alone. And so have you to pull them

out and think about their needs specifically.

Typically, this is where we capture things, like federally listed species, but in your case, you will have already accounted for them because you will have needed to because of your BLM planning requirements.

So in this step, there may not be very many species left here in the fine filter, but think about those that may still be distributed throughout your planning area. They could be rare plant communities, they could be amphibians, fish or other invertebrates.

And so by applying this simple three step process of starting with your BLM required species and vegetation and then the coarse filter, and finally the fine filter to capture those last species that may need special attention, it's an objective approach and it's a scientifically defensible approach that you can rely on in order to develop your list of priority species and vegetation that will form the foundation of your planning as we move forward.

And so it may seem a little bit daunting to develop your list of priority species and vegetation and so perhaps it's best to just start with some simple questions and develop a preliminary list.

So the first question you have to ask yourself

is: What species and vegetation am I required to include in my resource management plan?

So again, refer back to the session taught by Barb and John to get complete guidance on this subject.

And then ask yourself, what coarse scale vegetation characterizes my planning area? And when you answer this question, it would be very helpful for you to map your vegetation throughout your planning area. This is something that Barb and John mentioned in their session that really, I'm sure all of you have spacial data for your planning areas and when you're thinking about coarse scale vegetation, looking at it on a map, it's a very good way to make sure that you're not missing any major vegetation types.

And then finally, ask, am I missing any rare species or vegetation communities within my planning area that I haven't already accounted for within my coarse filter or my BLM required species or vegetation?

As you develop this draft list, keep in mind two important things. One, recall that the proper selection of priority species and vegetation forms the foundation for your plan, and so it's very important to get it right, as I mentioned at the beginning of this training.

And the second part is, it's also likely that

you're not going to get it exactly right the first time through. And that's okay. This happens all the time.

Planning is a dynamic process. While we do go through these linear steps, it's also true that as you go to the subsequent steps of describing the health of your priority species, thinking about factors that might impact their health, you might find that there are particular species or vegetation communities that you actually need to pull out and you can lump them and pull them together or you might drop some species off, add some species.

And that is very typical, especially in the early stages of planning. And so you should get comfortable with that sort of dynamic interplay between having a draft list of priority species and vegetation as you move through these various planning steps.

And so as you apply this simple approach, you will develop your preliminary list of priority species and vegetation. When do you that, you're going to have achieved several things. First, you will have accounted for all BLM required species and vegetation. You will also have captured the major vegetation types that are representative and characterize your planning area.

You will also account for other species that require special attention within your planning area.

And finally, by doing so, this is not a comprehensive list of priority species and vegetation that you're going to generate, but it is representative of the planning area.

And it's intentional that it's not comprehensive because as I mentioned a moment ago, it's simply not possible to plan and manage for every single species.

And so we have to come up really with an optimization approach that will help you come up with a manageable list and you can develop your management strategies and prioritize them for your planning area.

And that's what the coarse filter/fine filter approach will do for you.

So, returning to our session objective, you now have the knowledge to develop a preliminary list of priority species and vegetation for your planning area. And that is going to be your homework assignment associated with this training session.

The specific guidance for that homework assignment will be available to you on the BLM website, through the training center for this course. So please go there to find out the specific instructions.

But generally, we're going ask you to draft a preliminary list. And in that list, you need to be sure

that you've accounted for BLM required species, you've thought about the coarse scale vegetation that characterizes your planning area, and you've also thought about any fine scale species or vegetation communities that you may also need to add to the list. And this is information that you're going to present during the on-site session of this course.

And so next steps in our species and vegetation planning course are really to get ready for the on-site training. By viewing this last online training session, you've completed the online portion of the course and now you just need to get ready for our on-site training. And in doing so, you have several homework assignments. Again, refer to the BLM website for this course to get specific instructions.

But you do have three home work assignments that need to be done in preparation for our on-site training. That includes gathering biological information, as well as generating a planning area overview that you will give as a presentation when you get to the with myself and your BLM colleagues for our on-site training.

And then included in that planning area overview we want you to have ready to present a draft list of priority species and vegetation.

And so that concludes this session for today. And I wish you luck in that drafting your first list of species and vegetation. Again, keep in mind that list is going to change.

And I look forward to seeing you in our on-site training.