

NEW MEXICO ENDEMIC SALAMANDER WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the September 5-6, 1990, Meeting

Persons present:

Russ Romme -----	Lincoln S.O.
Tim Meyer -----	Cloudcroft R.D.
John Peterson -----	Lincoln S.O.
Marilyn Altenbach -----	Jemez R.D.
Bill McKinney -----	Jemez R.D.
Charlie W. Painter -----	N.M. Game and Fish
Danney Salas -----	Cloudcroft R.D.
Mary Orr -----	Espanola/Coyote R.D.
Duane H. Fisher -----	Santa Fe S.O.
Norm Scott -----	Fish and Wildlife Service
Jerry Burton -----	Fish and Wildlife Service

Purpose of the Meeting:

To review the research Norm Scott is conducting on Sacramento Mountains salamander (SMS), give all working group members a feel for habitat preferences of SMS by conducting on-the-ground surveys, and develop a outline of positive actions, negative actions, and recommendations. The outline was used as a means of determining where research and management for New Mexico's two endemic salamanders has been and where it should be headed. Below is the outline as drafted by the group:

Lincoln National Forest

POSITIVE ITEMS:

1. Excellent commitment from top to bottom to SMS research and monitoring.
2. Good in providing funds for research and logistics.
3. Survey methodology produces quality results which need to be maintained.
4. Adequate funding provided for manpower and inventory work.
5. Have a standard of impacting no more than 25 percent of SMS habitat.
6. Show strong continued support for the working group.

NEGATIVE ITEMS:

1. Sometimes exceed standards by entering more than 25 percent of occupied habitat.
2. Provide funds to researchers late in FY.

3. Getting good survey crew people to return year after year. Reasons: low pay, some are volunteers, lack of housing, and many are transient workers.
4. Accelerated timber program.
5. No written protocol for inventory work.
6. No cumulative effects analysis is being conducted. This should be done since they are entering occupied habitat.
7. Other species need to be looked at. Are too focused on spotted owls and salamanders.

Recommendations:

POSITIVE ITEMS:

1. Need to develop line commitment to a standard policy. Working group will develop recommended policy on things such as slash management and entering 25 percent of the occupied area. These policies will be finalized at the October 9-10 meeting in Albuquerque.
2. Continue to support research with both funding and logistical support.

NEGATIVE ITEMS:

1. Need to develop a formal policy for only entering 25 percent of occupied habitat. Also need to collect ecological data since it would be a good idea to collect as much data as possible.
2. An MOU should be drafted to provide funding to research in a timely manner.
3. Consistency of surveyors can be improved if funds for seasonals are provided, consistent hiring is practiced and recruitment procedures are developed.
4. Conduct a reassessment of the accelerated timber program; also need to assess what happens next, i.e., after the accelerated timber program decelerates.
5. Draft written protocol at the October 9-10 meeting in Albuquerque.
6. Conduct a study which will define the scope of cumulative effects and continue research aimed at long-term validation of impacts of forest management practices on SMS.

Santa Fe National Forest:

POSITIVE ITEMS:

1. N areas, such as Oat Canyon, have been set aside for Jemez Mountains salamander (JMS).

2. USFS is not allowing areas to be logged in which JMS are found.
3. Inventory standards are established and seem to work.
4. Districts are supporting research and districts are generally cooperative.
5. Forest supports the task group.
6. Sales are being delayed until inventories are completed.

NEGATIVE ITEMS:

1. USFS doesn't follow through with research plans such as the cutting of experimental plots.
2. Wildlife crews are supplied with inadequate vehicles.
3. There is lack of communication within the USFS concerning sensitive species.
4. There is a lack of line commitment over sensitive species at the district level and up. This results in inadequate surveys being conducted in response to management needs.
5. There is no standardized response in recognizing salamanders, such as how they respond to potential logging activity in areas where JMS are found.
6. A better system of defining occupied habitat and determining the boundaries should be developed.
7. There is not enough USFS biologists to do the required inventories and assist with research efforts.

Recommendations

POSITIVE ITEMS:

1. Better define N areas to include all occupied habitat and provide increased protection of that habitat.
2. Official policy for the Santa Fe should include dropping of all occupied habitat from harvest consideration except for research or needs of the salamander.
3. Inventories are generally adequate, however, they need to be more extensive and more timely. Increased flexibility is needed in order to cover more ground. More lead time should be provided to plan inventories. Large-scale surveys should be performed only during optimal times.

4. Adequate surveys must be completed before a project is completed. The EA should not be signed until all surveys are completed and the biological evaluation is signed.
5. The Forest is supporting research with funding and a crew, but are not supporting it with adequate vehicles and are not cutting research units. Experienced survey personnel do not return each year because of poor housing.
6. District personnel are generally cooperative in logistical support, and should push to get experimental plots cuts.
7. Biologist and researchers should review all contracts to make sure time and specification needs are met.
8. Forest should continue to support the working group by paying travel and funding research.

NEGATIVE ITEMS:

1. Forest Service should pursue contract negotiations to get study plots cut.
2. Supply sufficient vehicles, and types of vehicles, to efficiently operate inventory crews.
3. Improve communications within the Forest concerning sensitive species. Be sure each habitat modification activity has a BE or biological checkoff.
4. The working group will develop a protocol document which will give line managers a suggested forest policy for conducting inventories and managing for salamanders. Included will be a discussion of current problems and proposed solutions. Line managers must be aware that a lack of commitment affects on-the-ground resource management, i.e., less public support, more appeals, potential for federal listing, and less management options. More commitment is needed to catch up on needed salamander inventories.
5. The working group has to be able to identify occupied habitat, i.e., define the boundaries and design methodology to identify occupied habitat including nonsurveyed areas.
6. Inadequate surveys and indefensible BE's will get bogged down in court. Better quality and quantity information is needed. this may equate to hiring more biologists and providing more funding for salamander work.

Biggest problem to individuals working JMS

Marilyn - Separation of research and surveys
Charlie - Line commitment to JMS surveys and research
Duane - Identification of occupied habitat
Bill - Identification of occupied habitat
John - Not enough biologists (manpower)

SALAMANDER WORKING GROUP
Mailing List
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MEMBERS

Charles W. Painter
New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish
Villagra Building
Santa Fe, NM 87503
(505) 827-9901

John Peterson
Lincoln National Forest
11th and New York
Alamogordo, NM 88310
(505) 437-6030

Norm Scott
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Museum of Southwestern Biology
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131
(505) ~~277-5340~~
766-3903

Duane H. Fisher
Santa Fe National Forest
P.O. Box 1689
Santa Fe, NM 87504
(505) 988-6940

Jerry Burton
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
3530 Pan American Hwy., NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
(505) 883-7877

Leon Fisher
U.S. Forest Service
517 Gold Ave., SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
(505) 842-3262

John P. Hubbard
New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish
Villagra Building
Santa Fe, NM 87503
(505) 827-9925

CONSULTANTS

Bill McKinney
Jemez Ranger District
Santa Fe National Forest
P.O. Box 98
Jemez Springs, NM 87025
(505) 829-3535

Marilyn Altenbach
1024 La Font Road, SW
Albuquerque, NM 87105
(505) 873-3113

Danney Salas
Cloudcroft Ranger District
P.O. Box 288
Cloudcroft, NM 88317
(505) 682-2551

Ed Wessman
Mayhill Ranger District
Lincoln National Forest
P.O. Box 5
Mayhill, NM 88339
(505) 687-3411

Mary Orr
Espanola/Coyote Ranger District
P.O. Drawer R
Espanola, NM 87532
(505) 753-7331

Richard Byles
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306
(505) 766-3972

Sandy Knight
U.S. Forest Service
517 Gold Ave., SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
(505) 842-3262