

SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

The Ashley National Forest presented the draft list of Species of Conservation Concern at the 5 meetings they held in August of 2016. The meetings were in Green River WY, Vernal, Manila, Duchesne and Salt Lake City, Utah. The process and rationale for selection of the species was provided and any questions people had were answered by the USFS Biologist. Members of the public that attended the meetings were asked if there are any plant, wildlife, fish or reptile species that they felt were missing from the list, or if they knew of any of those identified that were on or, had been seen on the Forest especially in any abundance. They also discussed peoples concern in having a species identified on the list - these concerns are identified below.

While discussing the list at the public meetings the USFS Biologist asked if someone was aware of any current or past studies that focused on one of the species and if the data or information could be reviewed & shared. This did not turn up any information at the time of these meetings that has not previously identified. Opportunities to add new information will continue to be part of the Biologist role to vet & review the selected species. Some people wrote comments (summarized below) and other discussed their questions with the Biologist. In the early stage of Forest Plan Revision and at the point of these meetings the list is considered "proposed" and until the public is given an opportunity to review and comment and until all analysis is finished it remains in draft form. To help explain the process that drove the decision to identify a species as a Species of Conservation Concern, an illustrated flowchart was prepared see Figure 1.

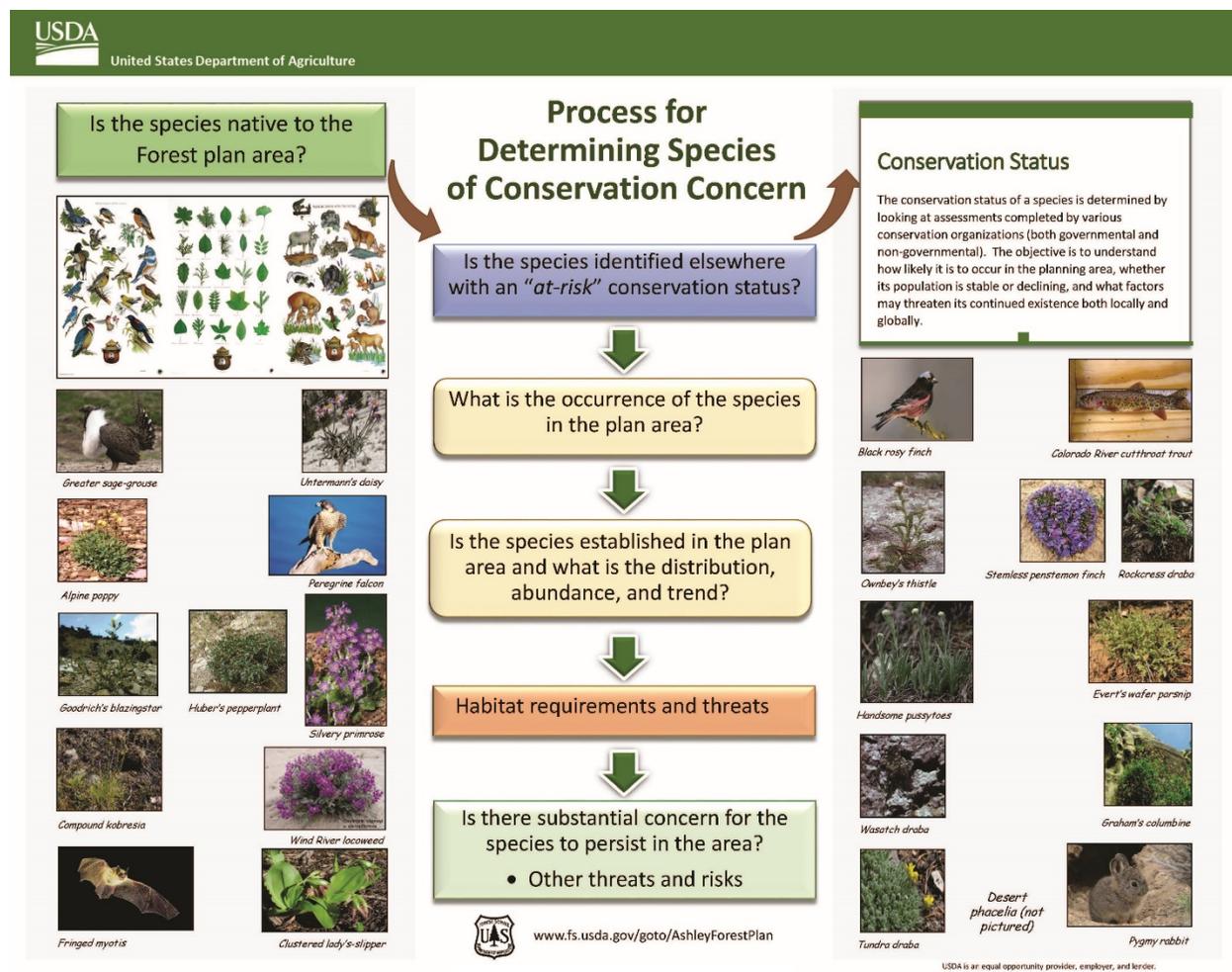


Figure 1.

FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS BROUGHT UP BY PEOPLE ATTENDING THE MEETING – they were discussed with the USFS Biologist at the meeting.

Wildlife	There are populations of some of these species, such as sage-grouse on tribal lands abutting the Forest. These populations should be taken into account. Can the USFS coordinate with the Tribe to do so?	The Forest Service will be coordinating with and requesting information from the Tribe during the Forest Plan Revision Process.
Wildlife	Consider State of Wyoming sensitive species, specifically the Northern tree lizard and midget-faded rattlesnake. Also consider BLM RMP and raking Wyoming Game and Fish management of big game, especially mule deer.	The northern Tree lizard and midget-faded rattlesnake were considered for SOCC. The distribution for both these species clips the SW corner of the WY/NRA, thus the respective S2/S1 ranking in Wyoming for these species. The Northern tree lizard is secure in all other states, including Utah, where it's core distribution occurs. Midget-faded rattlesnake habitat is abundant in northeastern Utah and Utah has not ranked this species. There is very little threat to these species from Forest management activities. Other agencies lists of special designated species, including the States of Utah and Wyoming, were considered during the SOCC evaluation process. Species of interest, such as mule deer, will be evaluated during the analysis phase of the Forest Plan revision process.
Wildlife	Need habitat maps of SOCC and inventory data. Small population do not lend itself to reestablishing population.	Species distribution maps and population trends are provided within each species evaluation. Habitat maps will be provided for those species on the final SOCC list.
Wildlife	Squirrels and rabbits are not as abundant as they have been. Changes in habitat.	The pygmy rabbit is recommended as an SOCC. Other small mammals such as squirrels will be evaluated during the analysis phase of the Forest Plan revision process.

Wildlife	I would like to know why the boreal owl did not make it on the current SOCC list.	The species is secure in its core distribution. The planning unit is adjacent to the southern extent of the species range and only few occurrences, which are likely transient or accidental, are recorded on the planning unit. The species is not ranked in Utah, likely because of so few occurrences of this species in the State. It is ranked an S2 in Wyoming, however there is no habitat for this species on the Wyoming portion of the planning unit.
Wildlife	Possibly consider certain species that may not be native as a potential "species of concern". As an example, kokanee salmon are the primary sportfish and forage fish (for lake trout) in Flaming Gorge. A large spawning aggregation occurs in Sheep Creek. It's also an important location where kokanee are trapped, stripped of eggs, raised in hatcheries, and stocked into the Gorge. A concern is how a catastrophic fire in upper Sheep Creek would impact the kokanee spawning habitat in the drainage below. Management activities should be developed that will protect or possibly enhance kokanee in this case or likely other species that may be native and/or a species of concern.	We recognize the importance of this species to Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Kokanee salmon do not meet the criteria for species of conservation concern. However because it is a species of interest the Forest will consider the species needs during the Forest Plan Revision process.
Wildlife	How will the sage grouse amendment be used in Forest Plan Revision?	We acknowledge the current (2015/16) new management direction for greater sage grouse. While this is considered the best available science, consideration and the ultimate selection of SCC is not based on current Forest Plan management direction but rather current Forest Plan revision direction as directed by the Forest Service Handbook. Species that start out as SCC may be removed at a later date if certain removal criteria are met.
Wildlife	With the sage grouse amendment, how will habitat management for sage grouse potentially conflict with potentially new Wilderness areas.	It is possible, but moderately to highly unlikely that sage grouse habitat and the associated activities and infrastructure surrounding sage grouse areas and potential Wilderness areas will overlap because of the differing attributes of sage grouse habitat/areas and potential new Wilderness areas.

Wildlife	The Uintas is part of the Greater Yellowstone connection corridor for T&E wildlife like the Canada lynx and wolverine.	The Canada Lynx is listed as a threatened species and the wolverine is proposed for federal listing. As such, these species are already federally protected and are not listed as an SOCC. These species will be evaluated during the analysis phase of the Forest Plan Revision process.
Wildlife	There may be impacts of Forest Plan components for SOCC, specifically sage-grouse, on people's activities on the Forest and/or their livelihoods.	The analysis phase of the Forest Plan Revision process will analyze potential impacts of SOCC Plan components on activities that occur on the Forest.
Wildlife	The grazing standards in the Sage Grouse Amendment are unreasonable. Concerned that those standards will be in the New Forest Plan	We acknowledge the current (2015/16) new management direction for greater sage grouse. While this is considered the best available science, consideration and the ultimate selection of SCC is not based on current Forest Plan management direction but rather current Forest Plan revision direction as directed by the Forest Service Handbook. Species that start out as SCC may be removed at a later date if certain removal criteria are met.
Wildlife	Do not want to see wolves as an SOCC.	Wolves are not known to occur on the Ashley Forest. They are federally protected and as such are not on the potential list of SOCC.

THE FOLLOWING ARE A SUMMARY OF CONVERSATIONS (not written comments) heard by Forest Service presenters at August 2016 public meetings

reptiles	Did we the consider Northern Plateau Tree Lizard and the Midget Faded Rattlesnake? Denning for both these species is occurring on the FGR/NRA. Why didn't we include boreal toad as an SCC?
wildlife	There were feelings from the public that sage grouse should not be on the SCC list. That it was already covered with state management plans, and because of the past several years of conservation efforts from the states they should not be a SOCC.
fisheries	When reviewing the fish species listed in the SOCC table a discussion focused on whether any are going to affect the management of flows on the Green River below the Flaming Gorge dam. Wondered if CRCT would have any effect on their grazing permit.
plants	Wanted to know if any of the SOCC plants were located on the allotments that they graze cattle on and that they were concerned about the potential for those plants affecting their permit. Some were asking where the identified plants are located on the Forest. A couple of individuals asked how a

	thistle and locoweed could qualify for conservation concern?
general comments	Concerned that SOCC may drive designation of more wilderness areas as a tool to protect SOCC. Concerned that SOCC would restrict what people can do on the Forest because they feel it has happen before. Stated that SOCC is a good thing to keep species from being federally listed. There was concern expressed that SOCC would further damage the local economy because they would be a means by which the federal government would hinder multiple use and economic activities.

ADDITIONAL FAQ's about the topic of SOCC

Q. What is a Species of Conservation Concern?

A. A species of conservation concern (SCC) is a plant or animal for which we have concerns about its ability to remain on a landscape for a long time. Each forest plan has its own SCC list, which is approved by the Regional Forester. The Regional Forester has not yet approved these draft proposed lists.

Q. What is the difference between an "SCC" and a Threatened or Endangered species?

A. SCC is a Forest Service-specific term that comes from the 2012 Planning Rule and Forest Service Handbook. The regulations help us determine if there is a concern about a particular species' ability to persist within the forest. If there is a concern, we design elements of the forest plan to provide the habitat conditions that will enable the species to persist on the forest. An SCC is not a federally threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. We create an SCC list using the best available science in a proactive step intended to prevent species from becoming federally listed.

Threatened and endangered species are federally designated under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This Act was created to protect critically imperiled species from extinction. Similarly to how we address SCCs, if species that are listed or candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act are present on the forest, then the forest plan must contain direction designed to prevent the species from further decline and contribute to their recovery. Even if the federally listed species is not currently present on the forest but habitat critical to their recovery has been identified on the forest, our forest plan must contain direction to maintain that habitat.

Q. How do SCCs influence forest plan revisions?

A. Once we have an SCC list, we determine the habitat needs of each species. We then design forest plans to guide management that sustains habitat to support or restore secure SCC populations to the extent we are capable of doing so. Forest plans help us maintain a forest that provides SCCs with the habitat they need to survive. For instance, each forest plan will have certain components, including standards or guidelines, to sustain or restore ecosystem diversity and habitats. We consider these elements "coarse" filter plan components. If the coarse filter plan components do not provide the habitat conditions each SCC population requires to persist on the forest, then we

include additional species-specific plan components to provide habitat conditions necessary for the species. These second components are “fine” filters.

Q. What does “substantial concern” mean?

A. Substantial concern means there is credible evidence that there is a concern about a particular species' ability to persist within the forest. This evidence can include: The species has been identified as imperiled as a result of status reviews described in the scientific literature and listed in widely accepted databases such as NatureServe, a nonprofit organization that provides proprietary wildlife conservation-related data, tools, and services. Significant threats, such as climate change or competition from exotic species, threaten SCC populations or their habitat. Field surveys have documented declining SCC populations or habitat in the forest plan area. The species is known to have low population numbers or restricted habitat within the forest plan area.

Q. How were SCC selected & is it a final decision? How do SCC work to help us manage the Forest?

A. Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) is the term used for wildlife, fish, reptiles and plants that warrant a concern over the likelihood of long-term persistence in the planning area. They were selected using multiple criteria such as:

- Is the species native to the planning unit or not?
- What is the Global and State status of each species?
- In the past 20 years, how many occurrences and what year was the last occurrence for each species on the planning unit?
- Are the species occurrences accidental or transient on the planning unit?
- Is the species established or becoming established on the planning unit?
- What is the distribution, abundance, and trend of the species on the planning unit?
- What threats and risks does the species face on the planning unit?
- What habitat requirement does the species have?
- Finally, if present, is there substantial concern for this species to persist on the planning unit?

SCC will be monitored so that FS management does not contribute to a downward trend or federal listing. The Forest works with the RO to narrow down the SCC list, the RF and his/her staff make the final decision on SCC on which species are SCC. Species can be added or removed from the list when new information becomes available.

Q. What is the difference between MIS (management indicator species) and SCC (species of conservation concern) and threatened and endangered species?

A. Management Indicator Species are species that through monitoring can indicate a potential problem within the ecosystem. They will show the effects of management either positive or negative and represent other species in the same ecosystem. For example: A shift in stream dwelling insects from clean water to a more sediment tolerant environment may mean something is going on in the watershed that is causing increased erosion and sediment flow into a stream. Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) is the term being used for Forest Service to identify species where there is substantial concern over continued persistence. These species may be low in numbers, native to the planning area and there is concern for the species remaining in the area. T&E species are federally protected species because of their low numbers and at potential risk because of a trend or threat in the environment. These species are identified with different Endangered Species Act status and overseen by the USFWS working with the various other state and federal agencies.

Q. What will we do with your input on the SCC list?

A. We will consider all the input we receive. When we review the feedback, we will ask ourselves if the input offers valid scientific information we have yet to consider. If so, we may remove or add species from the list based on the valid scientific information we receive. Such changes will be documented in the SCC list released in either the draft forest plans or the final forest plans.

Q. When does the Forest Service have to select SCC and why does it need to involve the public?

A. The 2012 Planning rule requires the Responsible USFS Official to identify potential species of conservation concern and to assess existing information for them in the assessment (36 CFR 219.6 (b)(5)). FSH 1909.12, Chapter 20, Section 21.22a requires the agency identify the SCC and to work with the public in doing so. The Directive currently states the USFS has the responsibility to identify SCC early enough to expedite the planning process. This should occur during the planning development phase but may occur at any time. Whenever SCC are identified the rationale must be given. The best available scientific information (BASI), will be used and made available to the public along with any supporting information before release of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) and early in the process (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 20, Section 21.22a). The intent is to allow the Forest Service to engage with the public about their concerns regarding the SCC before release of the DEIS. Early identification of SCC will also provide the public with critical information to better inform their participation in the development plan components.