

The Great Basin Research and Management Partnership (GBRMP)

CHARTER

As approved by the GBRMP Executive Committee, April 20, 2010

I. Background and Need

The Great Basin is considered to be one of the most endangered ecoregions in the United States. The human population is expanding at the highest rate in the nation, and major sociological and ecological changes are occurring across the region. These changes can be attributed to numerous interacting factors including urbanization, changing technology and land use, climate change, limited water resources, altered fire regimes, invasive species, insects, and disease. The consequences have been large-scale vegetation type conversions, losses of watershed function, and degradation of stream, riparian and aquatic ecosystems. Biodiversity has decreased, and a high number of species are at risk of extinction or extirpation. Ecosystem services such as water resources for agriculture and fish, habitat for aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals, forage and browse for native herbivores and livestock, and recreational opportunities are being lost at a rapid rate. These losses have had adverse social and economic impacts on urban, suburban and rural areas. Managers across the Great Basin are increasingly challenged to maintain or improve the ecological condition of these systems and the services that they provide while meeting the needs of a growing number of user groups with diverse and often opposing interests.

Sustaining the ecosystems, resources and human populations of the Great Basin will require strong collaborative partnerships among research and management organizations in the region. In November, 2006, a workshop on “Collaborative Watershed Management and Research in the Great Basin” was held in Reno, Nevada. It was attended by nearly 200 individuals representing federal, state, tribal and local-government land and resource management agencies; non-governmental organizations; representatives of federal legislators; federal, state, university and non-governmental researchers; and other partners of interest. The results of the workshop are summarized in a US Forest Service General Technical Report which includes: (1) overviews of the critical research and management issues facing the Great Basin; and (2) a summary of the workshops sessions on developing collaborative management and research programs to address critical Great Basin issues and devising mechanisms for organizing and communicating (Chambers et al. 2008; http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr204.html). In addition, the workshop website (www.cabnr.unr.edu/GreatBasinWatershed/Default.aspx) contains speaker presentations, a list of participants, and other relevant information. There was consensus among the workshop participants that comprehensive and immediate action was needed to address the many urgent issues facing the Great Basin and that these actions required active collaboration among research and management organizations in the region. An integrated collaborative framework was proposed to develop and implement these collaborations and to improve communication and information sharing among research and management entities in the Great Basin. This was viewed as an initial step in developing collaborations among all of the organizations in the region necessary for maintaining sustainable ecosystems in the Great Basin.

The Great Basin Research and Management Partnership (GBRMP) was developed in response to the collaborative workshop. The desired outcome of GBRMP is to facilitate collaboration among researchers and managers to reverse current ecosystem losses, and to sustain long-term productivity, resource values and services of both natural and managed ecosystems. In general, GBRMP provides an integrated organizational framework to promote comprehensive and complementary collaborations, and to provide leadership, commitment and guidance to ensure that the collaborations are effective. GBRMP utilizes the existing USGS National Biological Information Infrastructure, developed as part of the Great Basin Information Project, to expand information sharing among researchers, managers, the public and other partners on: 1) the ecological and socio-economic issues facing the Great Basin; 2) the research and management organizations and the existing collaborative efforts addressing those issues; and 3) the available information on the solutions to those issues. It facilitates communication through a list server to provide continuous communication to GBRMP members, and forums/chatrooms to aid in the development and implementation of specific projects.

The Great Basin has been delineated in various ways, but the focus of this effort is on the Great Basin as defined by similar climatic and floristic relationships (Figure 1). This region encompasses a five state area that is experiencing similar sociological and ecological concerns and includes most of the state of Nevada and parts of California, Oregon, Idaho and Utah. Because issues that affect the region do not always follow map boundaries, the collaborative efforts of GBRMP extend to adjacent areas that influence ecosystem sustainability within the Great Basin.

The vision for GBRMP is inter-disciplinary, multi-organizational teams working together to develop solutions to the region's ecological and socio-economic issues using existing management and research frameworks. Many excellent collaborative research and management programs and projects already exist within the region. These include those associated with federal (USDI, USDA, DOD, DOE, EPA, NASA) and state research labs and management agencies, universities, local agencies, tribal governments and non-governmental organizations. They also include collaborations developed to address specific research and management needs in the Great Basin. Examples of these types of collaborative efforts include the Great Basin Restoration Initiative which is a USDI Bureau of Land Management program focused on restoration of rangeland ecosystems, and the Great Basin Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit which is consortium of federal agencies and universities addressing research needs within the region. GBRMP does not replace these existing collaborations, but builds upon their strengths by increasing coordination and communication among them. GBRMP provides a mechanism for assembling the diverse research and management groups working in the Great Basin to: (1) obtain consensus in identifying and prioritizing regional issues; (2) expand and help focus existing collaborative efforts; and (3) facilitate new teams to address emerging issues. It also provides critical information sharing capacity for both existing collaborations and new teams.

Although good progress has been made in understanding Great Basin ecosystems and in developing effective management techniques, the diversity and magnitude of the issues currently facing the Great Basin require innovative approaches. Researchers and managers alike need to address both larger spatial scales and longer time scales than have typically been addressed in the past. Collaborative projects need to be developed that cross administrative boundaries,

incorporate the many diverse public entities and address the underlying causes of undesirable ecosystem change. Specific areas that need research and management attention include:

- **Science-based information and large-scale assessments** on the interacting effects of primary ecosystem drivers, such as urbanization, changing land use, climate change, fire and invasive species, on Great Basin ecosystems (vegetation type conversion, watershed function, stream, riparian and aquatic systems, and biodiversity).
- **Prediction and modeling** of the rates and magnitude of change, areas affected, and consequences for the future.
- **Management tools** to address the ongoing and predicted changes in Great Basin ecosystems.
- **Demonstration projects and pilot projects** that illustrate science-based adaptive management using collaborative frameworks involving researchers, managers and stakeholders.

Close collaboration between managers and researchers is needed to identify and prioritize focal issues and to develop effective collaborative efforts. Large-scale management “experiments” and ongoing adaptive management that involve the public and other partners are proven approaches for answering science questions and for developing widely-accepted management techniques. Science information serves as a basis for management planning efforts, for meeting NEPA and regulatory requirements, and for inventories, assessments, and trend monitoring. Increased management and research collaboration will ensure that accurate and reliable information is available to managers and decision makers. Increased involvement of the public and other partners will ensure that these decisions are acceptable to the public.

Historically, both research and management activities in the Great Basin have been severely under-supported. Monitoring information, for example precipitation, ground water and stream gauging data, is the sparsest in the nation, and the Great Basin is the only major ecoregion in the nation that does not have a National Science Foundation sponsored Long-Term Ecological Research site. Emphasis on research and management collaboration through GBRMP will make it possible to leverage limited funds, reduce overlap, and increase efficiency. Having a mechanism in place for effective collaboration will facilitate efficient use of new funds that may become available.

Several well-defined outcomes are anticipated that are consistent with the mission, goals and organizational structure of GBRMP. These include:

- An organizational structure to facilitate research and management collaboration.
- A mechanism for identifying and obtaining consensus on priority research and management issues.
- Information on research and management groups and collaborative projects in the region, their mission and goals, and their relationships to one another.
- An information clearinghouse to expand information sharing among researchers, managers, the public and other partners.

- Science and technical working groups operating within the existing research and management structure that synthesize existing information, and obtain needed information in areas where gaps are identified.
- Data and information that can be used for science-based management and to develop recommendations for actions by participating agencies, NGOs and other partners.
- A mechanism to monitor and communicate the results of research and management collaborations to citizens, managers, and policy makers.

II. Mission and Goals

The Great Basin Research and Management Partnership promotes comprehensive and complementary research and management collaborations to sustain ecosystems, resources and communities across the Great Basin. The specific goals of the GBRMP are to:

1. Maximize integration of science and management through partnerships and enhanced science translation and delivery
2. Provide leadership and commitment through an integrated organizational framework that links science and management to addresses priority natural resources issues in the Great Basin.
3. Expand and facilitate inter-disciplinary, multi-organizational teams focused on solving these issues through collaborative management and research.
4. Increase efficiency and leveraging of limited resources, minimize duplication, and support collaborative efforts in pursuit of shared goals.
5. Implement communication and information sharing that enhances problem solving, demonstrates measurable results, and increases public support for Great Basin sustainability.

III. Outcomes

It is essential that the Partnership produce measurable and meaningful outcomes in support of its mission and goals. Toward this end, an Action Plan will be developed, reviewed, and implemented on a routine basis. Based upon the November 2006 Great Basin Collaborative workshop and the elements in this Charter, the core action items of an initial Action Plan have been developed as the basis for achieving meaningful outcomes (Appendix I).

IV. Organization and Operations

A three-tiered organizational structure has been identified to help ensure success in meeting the overall goals of the partnership (Appendix II). The organizational structure is comprised of an Executive Committee, Coordinating Committee and individual Working Groups. The envisioned composition and role of each group are described below:

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee provides guidance, oversight and authority for meeting the goals of this charter and provides direction to the Coordinating Committee.

Major responsibilities of the Executive Committee:

- Provide leadership, commitment and authority for the collaborative partnership and projects and activities.
- Pursue and allocate internal resources (staff, facilities, funds) to facilitate effective participation of Member Organizations, create incentives for participation of personnel from Member Organizations, and develop strategies to generate support from Member Organizations for the collaborative partnership.
- Ensure that only high priority issues of regional importance are addressed by the Partnership.
- Review actions recommended by the Coordinating Committee.
- Evaluate progress in goal achievement of the coordinating committee and working groups and ensure a transparent reporting process.

Executive-Committee Membership. The Executive Committee is comprised of representatives from federal agencies, state universities, state and local agencies, tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations that are signatory to the GBRMP Memorandum of Understanding. These members will be individuals who are the chief administrative official for their agency or organization at the regional, state, tribal or local level. Executive-Committee membership is envisioned as follows:

Federal Agencies: One member of each of the following federal agencies will have continuous representation on the Executive Committee: USDA Agencies: Forest Service Research Program, National Forest System, Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service; USDI Agencies: Geological Survey; Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service; Other Agencies: Environmental Protection Agency, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

State University Systems: One member each from the state university systems in Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada will have representation on the Executive Committee.

State Agencies: State agencies will have continuous representation on the Executive Committee. Two or three members will be selected from among the state agencies signatory to this agreement.

Local Agencies, Tribal Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations will have representation on the Executive Committee if they are signatory to the MOU. Membership of non-signatory organizations (Non-signatory Organizational Membership) in GBRMP, however, will be open to any organization that chooses to register their interest in the GBRMP-Participant Directory

Procedures. The Executive Committee will meet annually in person and will conduct business through conference calls as necessary. An initial task of the Executive Committee will be to review and revise charter goals and objectives. The Executive Committee will elect a chair and define its operating procedures including terms of service, meeting schedule, record keeping, and selection of a Partnership manager. The chair or co-chairs of the Coordinating Committee and

the Partnership Manager will attend Executive Committee meetings in a non-voting capacity, to provide information to the Executive Committee. Representation of all entities is important, and if an Executive Committee member is unable to attend the annual meeting or conference calls then a temporary replacement will be appointed to represent the member.

The Executive Committee leadership will consist of a Chair, Chair-elect, and Past-chair, each of whom will have a one-year term. A Chair-elect will be selected by vote of Executive-Committee members at the annual meeting and will begin their term as Chair at the following annual meeting. The Chair-elect and Past-chair will assist the Chair in planning and executing the agenda of the Executive-Committee. Service of members as Chair, Chair-elect, and Past-chair will be limited to two rotations.

The Executive Committee will pursue funding for a full-time Partnership Manager and necessary support staff (initially a clerical position), to be recruited, appointed, and supervised by the Coordinating Committee to manage GBRMP development. The Partnership Manager will (1) assist the coordinating committee in identifying priority issues and developing Working Groups; (2) coordinate activities of the Working Groups and oversee day-to-day operations of the Partnership; (3) monitor performance and accomplishments of Partnership Working Groups and projects; (4) maintain program and project performance records; and (5) coordinate GBRMP meetings. The Partnership Manager will report to the Coordinating Committee and will be an integral part of annual reporting to the Executive Committee.

Coordinating Committee

The purpose of the Coordinating Committee will be to assist signatory agencies and organizations and non-signatory cooperators in carrying out GBRMP activities..

Major responsibilities of the Coordinating Committee:

- Report annually or as needed to the Executive Committee and GBRMP members on Partnership activities and progress toward goals.
- Provide recommendations to the Executive Committee for Partnership projects and activities.
- Anticipate information, strategy and policy needs of the Executive Committee.
- Identify needs, issues, and potential problems that need to be addressed by the Executive Committee.
- Respond to requests for information and implement action items identified by the Executive Committee.
- Interpret and communicate decisions of the Executive Committee.
- Devise strategies to facilitate existing and new collaborations among Partnership participants.
- Approve formation of Working Groups, participate in development of Working Group charters, and oversee progress toward Working Group and Partnership goals.
- Ensure that progress toward achieving goals of the Partnership is monitored and that a system for reporting is implemented

Coordinating-Committee Membership. The Coordinating Committee will have the same organizational representation as the Executive Committee. Coordinating Committee members

will be selected by the Coordinating Committee in consultation with the Executive Committee from a pool of interested applicants from each membership category. Membership on the Coordinating Committee will be limited to five years, and members will not serve more than two consecutive terms.

Procedures. The Coordinating Committee will meet in person at least semi-annually, and will conduct additional meetings by conference call no less than quarterly. An initial task of the Coordinating Committee will be to elect a chair or co-chairs and define its operating procedures, including terms of service, meeting schedule and record keeping.

The Coordinating Committee leadership will consist of a Chair, Chair-elect, and Past-chair, each of whom will serve a one-year term. A Chair-elect will be selected by vote of Coordinating-Committee members at the annual meeting and will begin their term as Chair at the following annual meeting. The Chair-elect and Past-chair will assist the Chair in planning and executing the agenda of the Coordinating-Committee. Service of members as Chair, Chair-elect, and Past-chair will be limited to two rotations.

It is the goal that all decisions and recommendations of the Coordinating Committee will be made by consensus. When this is not feasible, a majority vote will be used as an alternate means of arriving at a decision.

Working Groups

Working Groups are comprised of researchers, managers, stakeholders and other interested parties who will work together to address specific research, management, organizational or implementation issues for the Partnership. New Working Groups can be suggested by the Executive Committee, Coordinating Committee members or Partnership participants to the Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee will evaluate the need for Working Groups, and recommend approval to the Executive Committee. If the Executive Committee approves the formation of a Working Group, a workplan will be developed, and the Working Group will be implemented through the Coordinating Committee and Partnership Manager.

Working Groups will fall under two categories: (1) science and technical; and (2) operational. Science and technical Working Groups will address priority issues and make recommendations to ensure sustainability of Great Basin ecosystems. Operational Working Groups will be formed to perform Partnership tasks including facilitating internal and external information transfer and communication. An Information Management Working Group has been established to facilitate information sharing and communication to the Partnership and is responsible for providing technical supervision of the GBRMP website. Other Working Groups will be established when needed as the Partnership develops.

OPERATIONAL WORKING GROUPS

Information Management Working Group (IMWG)

The purpose of the IMWG is to facilitate communication and information sharing in support of Partnership goals. This Working Group will facilitate development and maintenance of a web-based clearinghouse and other communication tools.

Membership. The IMWG is comprised of federal, state and local government, university, non-governmental organization, and private landowner representatives. Membership in the IMWG will not be limited to any specific group or organization but will be based on willingness to participate and contribute to achieving IMWG and Partnership goals.

Procedures. An IMWG chair will be appointed by the Coordinating Committee to facilitate IMWG activities. The IMWG chair will be responsible for developing an annual implementation plan; reporting IMWG activities to the Coordinating Committee; and coordinating activities with other Working Groups. The IMWG will hold teleconference meetings no less than quarterly to conduct business.

SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS

Science Working Groups address priority research issues, such as urbanization, changing land use, climate change, fire, invasive species, insects, and disease, while technical Working Groups address priority management issues like land use planning, water resources and restoration. When appropriate the functions of these groups will be combined. These groups assemble experts in the area of interest to synthesize existing information and to obtain needed information in areas where gaps are identified using a collaborative research and management framework. Science and technical groups develop recommendations that will provide a basis for action by participating agencies, NGOs, and others to ensure sustainability of Great Basin ecosystems.

Membership. Members of technical working groups will include researchers and managers who are recognized experts in the area of interest and who have a desire to contribute to the sustainability of the Great Basin. Ideally, each science and technical working group will include socio-economic representation and a communications specialist.

Procedures. A chair will be appointed by the Coordinating Committee to facilitate the activities of each science and technical working group. The working group chair will be responsible for developing an annual implementation plan; reporting working group activities to the Coordinating Committee; and for coordinating activities with other working groups. These working groups will hold annual meetings and teleconference meetings as needed to conduct business.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN GBRMP

The following membership categories will be established and managed through the Partnership/Experts database on the GBRMP website:

- MOU-Signatory Membership

This category of membership requires participation in the GBRMP Memorandum of Understanding and assignment of an individual to participate on the GBRMP Executive or Coordinating Committees.

- Organizational Membership

This category of membership pertains to local, state, tribal and NGO entities that want to register their interest and participation by submitting their organizational information to the GBRMP Partnership Directory, and by identifying an organizational representative to serve as a point of contact. The organizational contact will be responsible for keeping their information up to date in the web directory, and will receive information from GBRMP for dissemination to other interested people within their organization.

- Individual Participants

This category of membership is open to any interested individual who wishes to post their contact information, expertise and interests in the GBRMP Participant/Experts Directory. Participant information will be available to all other members and non-members of GBRMP through a directory search engine on the website.

This Charter will periodically be updated by the Coordinating Committee to reflect the current status of GBRMP organizational structure and function. The most current version of all GBRMP information and documentation is available on the website at:

<http://greatbasin.wr.usgs.gov/gbrmp/>



Figure 1. Map of the Great Basin Floristic Province.

Appendix I. Action Items

It is essential that the Partnership produce measurable and meaningful outcomes in support of its mission and goals. These will be achieved through strategies and actions developed and coordinated by the Partnership Coordinating Committee through a GBRMP action plan. To provide the initial basis for an action plan, the following items have been extracted from the GBRMP charter. This list reflects the common priorities of November 2006 Workshop participants and demonstrates the Partnership's intent to pursue concrete and achievable outcomes. The following list includes both strategic and tactical items which will be more clearly described for implementation in the GBRMP action plan.

- Establish a mechanism for identifying and obtaining consensus on priority research and management issues.
- Identify and agree-upon galvanizing issues to provide vision, unifying themes, and common commitment.
- Identify research and management groups working in the region, their mission and goals, and their relationships to one another.
- Identify and implement ways to link existing collaborative efforts and programs, recognizing different levels of issues and solutions and the inter-connection among issues.
- Develop an information clearing house to expand information sharing among researchers, managers, the public and other partners. This could include an interactive, searchable website with many components such as a research catalog and database; database of "expert" contacts working on regional problems; directory and links for information; funding source directory.
- Develop a comprehensive communications plan to include components to promote collaboration, information sharing, and effective science delivery.
- Generate the necessary information for science-based management by participating agencies, NGOs and other partners.
- Establish science and technical working groups within the existing research and management structure to synthesize existing information, obtain needed information in areas where gaps are identified and develop recommendations that will provide a basis for action by participating agencies, NGOs and other partners.
- Define and implement metrics of progress and success, and communicate results to citizens, managers, and policy makers.
- Promote 'face to face' time between managers, scientists and other stakeholders through mechanisms such as workshops; regularly scheduled meetings; citizen science, joint fact finding, and details/work exchanges between organizations.

Appendix II. Organizational Structure

