

Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network

For Implementation of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Records of Decision for Greater Sage-Grouse Plan Amendments

Nevada is a unique and diverse state characterized by approximately 86 percent public land where implementation of federal policy and regulation is best understood and accomplished by incorporating local science and knowledge provided by those closest to the land. In order for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to successfully implement the actions described in the greater sage-grouse plan amendments for Nevada, a collaborative network of state, federal, and local partners operating in an adaptive management environment is essential.

The premise for the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) is that our best results for effective conservation and economic viability will be accomplished by working collaboratively at the ground level and from the bottom up. The NCCN is a process to enhance meaningful communication within a network structured to support local, diverse stakeholder groups who adopt a collaborative planning approach to conservation that incorporates best science with local knowledge.

The objective of the NCCN is to enhance the connectedness of communities to land management agencies because of their valuable contributions to conservation and resource management, and to create an environment to work across boundaries to mitigate conflict at the local level before turning to other options such as litigation. If situations arise where resolution of differences cannot be found at the local level, the dispute can be referred to the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council for their review and deliberation; ultimately resulting in consensus recommendations for a path forward. The success of this approach is exemplified by long standing groups like the Blackfoot Challenge in Montana, The Blue Mountain Forest Collaborative in Oregon, the Diablo Trust in Arizona, and the Shoesole group in northeastern Elko County, Nevada.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

NCCN will operate within and between three levels including local land users, agency field managers, and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC). The role of each level is to expand understanding and communication concerning implementation of the sage-grouse plan amendments (SGPA), and to identify management and conservation opportunities at the ground level. The NCCN will operate through collaboration to transparently exchange data, other information, and ideas that will create viable and practical recommendations for successful implementation of the SGPA to effectively conserve our sagebrush ecosystems. Recommendations formulated collaboratively through the NCCN based on intersecting local knowledge, best science, and existing regulations will be formally submitted to the federal management agencies who retain the decision-making authority on public lands.

LEVEL ONE – LOCAL

Where they currently exist, Local Area Working Groups (LAWG) and Community Based Organizations (CBO) are characterized as diverse stakeholder groups that include local land users, conservationists, state, and federal resource managers, tribal members, and others with interests in a geographically designated area, who voluntarily work collaboratively to evaluate and plan for landscape scale conservation. These groups are usually geographically connected through conservation districts, sage-grouse population management units (PMU), Biologically Significant Unit boundaries (BSU), counties, or rural ranch communities. Local/community groups may also be formed based upon interests in a common issue. Local/community groups may be activated at the request of field managers or conservation districts as needed to address specific management issues. Or, they may be formed on their own initiative to expand their involvement and participation in conservation and natural resource management at the ground level.

LAWG and CBO Responsibilities

Community needs and values are best communicated at the local level where land owners and users work with field managers and staff to understand specific ground level threats, identify opportunities, and design conservation treatments. LAWG and CBO provide logistical support for conservation actions, and work alongside state and federal agencies to prioritize and implement conservation projects on the ground. Groups that currently exist, and groups that are established in the future, will participate in SGPA implementation conducted at the field level. When conflict arises and resolution cannot be reached at the local level, LAWG/CBO will participate with field managers in referring issues to the attention of the SEC for resolution.

LEVEL TWO - STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAM AND FIELD MANAGERS - INTERAGENCY

The interagency level resolves technical issues related to implementation and connects technical experts with BLM and USFS line officers and other federal and state agency field staff with the intent of ensuring consistent implementation across agencies and geographic boundaries.

The interagency level has two components. The first is a *core group* of state and federal agency sage-grouse coordinators that meets bi-monthly or as needed to address technical questions. The Interagency Core consists of sage-grouse program managers and other key implementation staff from BLM, USFS, USFWS, NDOW, and the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Sagebrush Ecosystem Program who will collaborate to evaluate new science and interpret monitoring results for SGPA implementation. The core group is responsible for disseminating best science to the field managers, the SEC, and the LAWG/CBO.

The second component of level two is the state and federal Field Managers, who convene semiannually, as needed, via teleconference for updates on implementation procedures, to receive guidance on specific implementation questions, and to provide early notification of emerging issues. The Field Managers group is the interface for communication among technical experts, local stakeholders, and agency staff and serves to maintain consistency in communication within and between management agencies.

The Field Managers group includes BLM and USFS local line officers with sage grouse habitat, the State Conservation District Program Regional Staff Specialists, USFWS sage-grouse biologists, NRCS sage-grouse biologists, and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team. Program Managers will ensure involvement of other appropriate staff as necessary. This expanded group brings additional expertise and resources for implementation and will provide a diverse perspective that can assist in resolving implementation challenges at the ground level.

Interagency Core and Field Manager Responsibilities

The Interagency Core Group meets monthly or bi-monthly to address technical issues of implementation, convenes the Field Managers group on a semiannual or as-needed basis, and provides a report on its actions, decisions, and upcoming agendas to the SEC during regularly scheduled public meetings as a standing agenda item.

Field Managers reach out to and participate in LAWG/CBO for field level coordination to further clarify and improve implementation effectiveness relative to SGPA implementation. Field Managers are responsible for communicating information from the SEC and Interagency Core Group to the ground level, and vice-versa.

LEVEL THREE - SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL

The SEC will provide support and conflict resolution functions of the NCCN. The SEC members include resource agency Directors from the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDOA), Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), BLM Nevada State Director, USFS Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor, US Fish and Wildlife Service Nevada State Director, Natural Resources Conservation Service Nevada State Director, and gubernatorial appointed representatives from users of public lands, conservation groups, and local government. State and federal agency directors participating in the network retain both the authority and responsibility to make decisions within their jurisdictions based on law, regulation and policy, best available science, and other relevant sources of information.

The SEC is authorized by law to fulfill their role in the NCCN. As stated in Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 232.162, the Council shall:

NRS 232, 7(h) Coordinate and facilitate discussion among persons, federal and state agencies and local governments concerning the maintenance of sagebrush ecosystems and the conservation of the greater sage-grouse.

NRS 232, 7(g) Provide information and advice to persons, federal and state agencies and local governments concerning any strategy, system, program, or project carried out pursuant to this section or NRS 321.592 or 321.594.

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Responsibilities

The SEC provides the opportunity to include broad, statewide management and stakeholder input to deliberate on challenges, identify opportunities to support local collaborative efforts, and to evaluate

opportunities for conflict resolution and serve as a state review board. The SEC also has access to resources necessary for implementation of collaborative solutions.

The SEC will provide oversight and facilitate discussion and recommended resolution of state-wide issues, as well as unique or controversial local issues relevant to the SGPA that are brought to their attention. The SEC will also engage in topics at their discretion that pertain to the SGPA to coordinate and collaborate on matters that may include:

- Coordinating and prioritizing greater sage-grouse conservation actions throughout the state;
- Developing conservation credits on public land;
- Effectiveness of the Nevada Conservation Credit System and other mitigation strategies used by the federal agencies;
- Effectiveness of the actions in the SGPA for inclusion in the five-year review by US Fish and Wildlife Service;
- Resolution of state-wide issues and unique or controversial local issues if they come up from the Field Managers' discussions;
- Organization of Special Task Teams, as needed; and
- Support for LAWG/CBO and Conservation Districts.

The SEC members can effectively communicate recommended implementation strategies and budget concerns both up the chain of command to Washington, D.C. and to the Nevada Governor's Office, as well as down the chain of command to the field levels. Consensus-based recommendations from the SEC appointed and ex-officio members will be conveyed to the Director of DCNR and forwarded to the federal agencies responsible for SGPA implementation. The SEC will not forward recommendations if consensus cannot be reached.