

Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage-Grouse Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Frequently Asked Questions related to the Project within Nevada

Questions

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What is RCPP?

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a relatively new, partner-driven, locally led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrates the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation. For more information, check out the RCPP section of the official Nevada NRCS website at

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/nv/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

In a nutshell, what is the Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage Grouse RCPP effort all about?

The Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage-Grouse RCPP is a collective effort from a number of partners in Nevada and Colorado that aims to improve greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitats as well as efforts to quantify and report on the uplift to GRSG habitats achieved through successful habitat conservation projects. Another objective is to solidify efforts by the states to implement habitat exchange programs to ensure net conservation gain of GRSG habitats is achieved. EQIP dollars will be spent on conservation projects that aim to improve GRSG habitats. The Nevada Conservation Credit System (CCS) Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) will be used to assess pre- and post-project habitat value and credit potential. Project proponents who are awarded EQIP contracts will be encouraged to ultimately enroll credits into the CCS for long term protection of GRSG habitat. For more information, check out the official USDA announcement at

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/nv/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCSEPRD1333815>

What groups are involved in this RCPP effort as partners?

Project partners include the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Partners for Western Conservation (PWC), Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Incentives, and the State of Nevada, specifically the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program, Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT), and Conservation Districts program.

How will this RCPP effort be implemented in Nevada?

Funding will be made available for producers within greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat for projects which seek to improve and/or protect GRSG habitat. Applicants are required to complete a Credit Site Validation Checklist with the Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage Grouse RCPP Addendum to show interest in generating credits within the Nevada Conservation Credit System (CCS) and have a credit estimate completed by the SETT to preliminarily assess the credit potential of the project area. Selected applicants should anticipate cooperating with the State of Nevada on their project to ensure all of the goals of the RCPP can ultimately be met. The Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) will be utilized pre- and post-project to assess habitat quality and uplift as well as Conservation Credit System (CCS) credit potential. Awarded producers are also expected to attend a workshop and encouraged to ultimately enroll credits into the CCS for long term protection of GRSG habitat. Some improvement efforts may be mutually beneficial to GRSG and ranch operations. See more about project and practice eligibility below.

What projects are eligible?

Eligible projects must be located within greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat. Conservation practices and management actions may include, but are not limited to, sagebrush establishment, perennial grass and/or forb seeding, riparian or meadow enhancements, cross-fencing, off-stream watering for livestock and wildlife, and other potential practices, many of which are likely to be mutually beneficial to GRSG and the producer's current ranch operations. In addition, the practices may provide landowners the opportunity to enhance and develop habitat that may qualify for the Nevada CCS. Please request the list of approved practices from NRCS for further details.

What is the Nevada Conservation Credit System?

The Nevada Conservation Credit System (CCS) has been created to preserve, enhance, and restore greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat on private and public lands, while still maintaining the multiple-use concept on public land.

The CCS is an innovative tool developed to quantify and account for impacts to GRSG habitat and the conservation actions put in place to offset these impacts. This mitigation approach has been developed to ensure a net conservation benefit to GRSG. Impacts to greater sage-grouse habitat, defined by the CCS, are new anthropogenic disturbances, such as mines, geothermal facilities, energy development, transmission lines, and other temporary or permanent developments which occur on federally managed land. Ranching and farming activities are not considered impacts and can be beneficial to conservation actions. Conservation actions include activities that maintain, enhancement, and/or restore high quality habitat that improves the value of habitat to GRSG.

Landowners will have an opportunity to participate in the CCS, by maintaining, enhancing, and/or restoring GRSG habitat. This creates the credits for sale to those industries that are required to offset their disturbance to GRSG habitat.

The CCS is one component of a proactive plan, developed by the State of Nevada in conjunction with various stakeholders, to conserve GRSG habitat while responsibly maintaining the economic viabilities of industry and protecting other responsible uses of the natural resources.

How does the Nevada CCS function?

In general, impacts from disturbance (debits) are offset by conservation actions of the CCS project (credits).

Disturbance projects are evaluated for the number of debits incurred. Credit projects are evaluated for the number of credits conserved. Those creating debits will need to purchase credits in an amount necessary to

offset their impacts. For a given project site, the quality (function) of habitat is multiplied by the quantity of habitat (acres), and this results in a determination of functional acres for the project. Functional acres are then translated into credits or debits. Credit developers can make a profit on the credits that they sell.

For additional information on the Nevada CCS, check out the following websites:

<http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/CCS/ConservationCreditSystem/>

<https://www.enviroaccounting.com/NVCreditSystem/Program/Home>

For further questions on RCPP and EQIP implementation, please contact the District Conservationist for NRCS at your local USDA Service Center located in: Ely, Elko, Winnemucca, Fallon, Lovelock, Minden, Nevada or for Northern Washoe County landowners, the USDA-NRCS District Conservationist in Alturas, California.

For further questions on the Nevada CCS, the implementation of the HQT, and the expectations of the State of Nevada for producers participating in this RCPP effort, please contact:

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