
# 2014 Nevada Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan

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Presented To:
Governor Brian Sandoval

Prepared Under the Direction of the:
Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

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# 1 LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AML** | Appropriate Management Levels |
| **AMP** | Allotment Management Plans |
| **AUM** | Animal Unit Months |
| **BAR** | Burned Area Rehabilitation |
| **BIA** | Bureau of Indian Affairs |
| **BLM** | Bureau of Land Management |
| **CCS** | Conservation Credit System |
| **CDP** | Conservation Districts Program |
| **DCNR** | Department of Conservation and Natural Resources |
| **DOD** | Department of Defense |
| **DRI** | Desert Research Institute |
| **EIS** | Environmental Impact Statement |
| **ERT** | Expert Review Team |
| **ES** | Emergency Stabilization |
| **ESA** | Endangered Species Act |
| **ESD** | Ecological Site Description |
| **FIAT** | Fire and Invasives Assessment Team |
| **HA** | Herd Areas |
| **HMA** | Herd Management Areas |
| **HTNF** | Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest |
| **HQT** | Habitat Quantification Tool |
| **HSI** | Habitat Suitability Index |
| **LAWG** | Local Area Working Group |
| **LUP(A)** | Land Use Plan (Amendment) |
| **MOU** | Memorandum of Understanding |
| **NAC** | Nevada Administrative Code |

| | |
|---|---|
| **NBMG** | Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology |
| **NDA** | Nevada Department of Agriculture |
| **NDEP** | Nevada Division of Environmental Protection |
| **NDF** | Nevada Division of Forestry |
| **NDOW** | Nevada Department of Wildlife |
| **NEPA** | National Environmental Policy Act |
| **NGO** | Non-governmental Organization |
| **NOAA** | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration |
| **NRCS** | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| **NRS** | Nevada Revised Statutes |
| **NWCG** | National Wildfire Coordination Group |
| **PFC** | Proper Functioning Condition |
| **P-J** | Pinyon and juniper |
| **PMU** | Population Management Unit |
| **ROW** | Right-of-Way |
| **RSF** | Resource Selection Function |
| **SAP** | Strategic Action Plan |
| **SD** | Standard Deviation |
| **SEC** | Sagebrush Ecosystem Council |
| **SEP** | Sagebrush Ecosystem Program |
| **SETT** | Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team |
| **SEZ** | Solar Energy Zone |
| **SGMA** | Sage-grouse Management Area |
| **SUA** | Special-Use Authorization |
| **TNR** | Temporary Non-Renewable |
| **UNR** | University of Nevada, Reno |
| **USDA – ARS** | U.S. Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Research Service |

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|---|---|
| **USDA-APHIS** | U.S. Department of Agriculture - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service |
| **USFS** | US Forest Service |
| **USFWS** | US Fish and Wildlife Service |
| **USGS** | US Geological Survey |
| **WAFWA** | Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies |
| **WHBT** | Wild Horse and Burro Territories |

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nevada has been proactive in conservation of greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; hereafter, sage-grouse) since 2000 when then Governor Kenny Guinn appointed a task force representing various interest groups and agencies to develop a plan that would conserve and protect Nevada's sage-grouse and their habitat. In October 2001 the Nevada Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy identified challenges, offered potential solutions, and laid the groundwork for the formation of local area working groups (LAWG) and Population Management Units (PMU). It provided guidance for developing conservation plans and subsequent legislative endorsements in 2004 and 2010 reinforced Nevada's commitment to conserve the species.

From 2001 to 2004 the Governor's Sage-grouse Conservation Team under leadership of the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) completed an intensive planning effort for the State in which LAWGs developed plans for their respective areas and PMUs. In June 2004, the *1st Edition of the Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California* (2004 State Plan) was completed. Between 2004 and the present, resource management agencies have implemented conservation projects and instituted policies to support the conservation goals in the 2004 State Plan.

On March 23, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), but precluded due to higher priority species. Consequently, sage-grouse were placed on the federal candidate species list. The USFWS later entered into a court settlement with several environmental groups, which included a schedule for making listing determinations on over 200 candidate species, including the sage-grouse. A proposed decision for sage-grouse is scheduled for September 2015.

In response, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) developed their National Greater Sage-grouse Planning Strategy in late 2011, a process

to revise existing land use plans (LUPs) in order to provide regulatory mechanisms to conserve sage-grouse and their habitat. Secretary Salazar invited the states impacted by a potential sage-grouse listing to develop state-specific regulatory mechanisms to conserve the species which could be considered as an alternative in the BLM and USFS LUP revision process.

On March 30, 2012, Governor Sandoval fortified Nevada's commitment to sage-grouse conservation, by issuing Executive Order 2012-09, which established the Governor's Greater Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) with a directive to provide updated recommendations for sage-grouse conservation in Nevada in order to preclude the need to list sage-grouse under the ESA and provide an alternative for consideration in the BLM/ USFS LUP revision process for Nevada. Those efforts resulted in the *Strategic Plan for Conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada* (2012 State Plan), completed on July 31, 2012, which consisted of a list of primary threats to sage-grouse in Nevada and recommendations to the Governor on strategies and actions to conserve sage-grouse in Nevada.

One of the main recommendations of the 2012 State Plan was the creation of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program (SEP), which consists of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT; see Section 5.0). The SEC was originally established under Executive Order 2012-19, on November 19, 2012, and later solidified into state statute under NRS 232.162. The SETT began work on February 11, 2013. On April 22, 2013, the SEC directed the SETT to further develop the recommendation in the 2012 State Plan into a more comprehensive and detailed strategy. The SEC considered proposed revisions over a series of meetings starting in July 2013. Each SEC meeting was held in compliance with the Nevada Open Meeting Law, including multiple opportunities for public comment. The result of those efforts is this document, the *2014 Nevada Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan* (2014 State Plan).

The 2014 State Plan represents the best available scientific information, as well as stakeholder input, to develop a sage-grouse conservation plan specific to Nevada. This is meant to be a "working document" that will be updated as new science emerges and lessons are learned through implementation of the 2014 State Plan, through an adaptive management framework. This document will be updated periodically, as needed.

In addition to the 2014 State Plan, Nevada is in the process of developing a *Nevada Sage-grouse Strategic Action Plan* (SAP). The 2014 State Plan provides broad goals, objectives, and management actions to ameliorate the primary threats to sage-grouse in Nevada. The SAP will be a companion document to the 2014 State Plan and will go into greater detail and identify areas to focus conservation efforts in order to achieve the broad goals and objectives outlined in the 2014 State Plan. The SAP will identify where the primary threats to sage-grouse habitat are located across the landscape and provide specific guidance on how to ameliorate these threats based on local area conditions, resistance and resilience regimes, and ecological site descriptions. The SAP will help guide how and where the management efforts identified in the 2014 State Plan are prioritized in order to achieve landscape-scale conservation of sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem.

## 2.0 DEFINITIONS

**Acts of Nature** – An event resulting from natural processes of the earth which occur outside human control and may be unpredictable, such as wildfires or drought.

**Anthropogenic Disturbance** – Any human-caused activity or action and/ or human-created physical structures that may have adverse impacts on sage-grouse and/ or their habitat. The term anthropogenic disturbance and its associated conservation policies will include, but not limited to the following project categories: mineral development and exploration and its associated infrastructure; renewable and non-renewable energy production, transmission, and distribution and its associated infrastructure; paved and unpaved roads and highways; cell phone towers; landfills; pipelines; residential and commercial subdivisions; special use permits; right-of-way applications; and other large-scale infrastructure development. Livestock operations and agricultural activities and infrastructure related to small-scale ranch and farm businesses (e.g. water troughs, fences, etc.) are not included in this definition.

**Conservation** – The preservation, enhancement, or restoration of the natural environment; including: ecosystem processes, vegetation, and wildlife.

**Conservation Credit System (CCS)** – A pro-active solution to ensure impacts from human activities generate a net benefit for the species, while enabling human activities vital to the Nevada economy and way of life. The Credit System creates new incentives for 1) human activities to avoid and minimize impacts to important habitat for the species, and 2) private landowners and public land managers to preserve, enhance, restore, and reduce the threat of wildfire to important habitat for the species.

**Enhancement** – Manipulation of existing habitat to improve specific habitat functionality.

**Habitat** – An area that provides food, cover, water, and space for an organism. It is the resources and conditions present in an area that are required by a species to carry out its life. Habitat implies more than just vegetation or vegetation structure; it is the sum of the specific resources that are needed by an organism. Other resources that influence habitat include physical and biological characteristics, such as: climate, precipitation, elevation, topography, water availability, soil type, etc.

*Specific to this State Plan:*

**Suitable Habitat** – Areas identified through the habitat suitability index (Section 6.0) with index values greater than 1.5 standard deviations below the mean value of the index. These areas are identified as generally meeting the needs for sage-grouse to survive and reproduce.

**Non-Habitat** – Areas identified through the habitat suitability index (Section 6.0) with index values less than 1.5 standard deviations below the mean value of the index. These areas are identified as generally not meeting the needs for sage-grouse to survive and reproduce.

**Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT)** – The method for quantifying impacts ("debits") or benefits ("credits") to sage-grouse habitat characteristics generated by participants in the Nevada CCS. It is intended to provide an effective means for targeting credits and debits to the most beneficial locations for the sage-grouse, and tracking the contribution of the CCS to sage-grouse habitat and population goals.

**Invasive Plants** – A non-native plant that effectively reproduces, is able to outcompete native plants, may alter ecosystem processes, and may be difficult to control or eradicate. Invasive plants can be considered by the State Quarantine Officer for the designation of "noxious".

**Lek** – Traditional courtship display and mating areas attended by sage-grouse in or adjacent to sagebrush dominated nesting habitat. Leks are generally situated on gentle terrain in relatively open areas with less herbaceous and shrub cover than surrounding areas (Connelly et al 2004).

**Noxious Weeds** – Any species of plant which is currently or likely to become detrimental, destructive and/or difficult to control and is designated by the State Quarantine Officer as "noxious". These weeds are regulated by Nevada Revised Statute 555.130 – 555.201 and the designation and categorization of noxious weeds can be found in Nevada Administrative Code 555.010.

**Population Management Units (PMUs)** – General delineations of sage-grouse populations for management in Nevada. PMUs are based on aggregations of leks, understanding of habitat, and potential boundaries to populations (such as mountains and valleys). These were developed by NDOW for the 2001 State plan and refined in the 2004 State Plan.

**Preservation** – Maintenance or retention of existing habitat currently used by or in close proximity to habitat used by greater sage-grouse through variety of management tools, both active and passive.

**Reclamation** – This term has two definitions in this State Plan: 1)Re-vegetation of a site to achieve basic ecological functions, such as preventing soil erosion, but which does not return a site to its reference state according to its ecological site description. 2) A requirement of mining projects to return a site to pre-disturbance conditions after mining actives cease.

**Resource Selection Function (RSF)** – Any model that yields values proportional to the probability of use of a resource unit. RSF models often are fitted using generalized linear models (GLMs) although a variety of statistical models might

be used. RSFs were used in the development of the habitat suitability model (Section 6.0; Boyce et al. 2002).

**Restoration** – The reestablishment of ecologically important habitat or other ecosystem resource characteristics and function(s) at a site where they have ceased to exist, or where they exist in a substantially degraded state, and that renders a positive biological response by the habitat.

**Sage-Grouse Management Area (SGMA)** – The spatial extent of sage-grouse management in Nevada. The overarching objective of Nevada's plan is to achieve conservation through no net unmitigated loss of sage-grouse habitat due to anthropogenic disturbances within the SGMA.

**Core Management Areas** – Areas of high estimated space use in suitable sage-grouse habitat in the State of Nevada. These areas represent the strongholds (or "the best of the best") for sage-grouse populations in the State and support the highest density of breeding populations.

**Priority Management Areas** – Areas that are determined to be highly suitable habitat for sage-grouse as well as areas of high space use that are not contained within the Core Management Areas.

**General Management Areas** – Areas determined to be suitable habitat for sage-grouse, though less suitable than Priority Management Areas, and are not contained within the Core Management Areas.

**Non-Habitat Management Areas** – Areas within the SGMA determined to be unsuitable for sage-grouse.

**Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features** – Measures or actions designed to minimize adverse effects to sage-grouse and their habitat due to disturbances.

**Space Use Index** – Continuous surface mapping developed based on lek attendance and density coupled with probability of sage-grouse occurrence relative to distance to nearest lek.

**WAFWA Management Zones** – Range-wide sage-grouse management delineations based on populations within floristic provinces. These were developed to guide sage-grouse conservation goals and range-wide management outlined in the 2006 Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy developed by WAFWA.

## 3.0 CONSERVATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The State's goal for the conservation of sage-grouse in the Sstate of Nevada is to provide for the long-term conservation of sage-grouse by protecting the sagebrush ecosystem upon which the species depends. Redundant, representative, and resilient populations of sage-grouse will be maintained through amelioration of threats; enhancement and/ or ~~protection~~ preservation of key habitats; mitigation for loss of habitat due to anthropogenic disturbances; and restoration or rehabilitation of habitat degraded or lost due to Acts of Nature.

The State's goal for the conservation of sage-grouse will provide benefits for the sagebrush ecosystem and for many other sagebrush obligate species. Sage-grouse are known to be an "umbrella species" for many sagebrush obligate and associated species. The enhancement and restoration measures that bring resiliency and restore ecological functions to sagebrush ecosystems will also serve to ensure quality habitat for sage thrasher, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sagebrush vole, pygmy rabbit, pronghorn antelope, mule deer, and many other species.

The State's goal will be met through conservation objectives for anthropogenic disturbances and Acts of Nature, principally large acreage wildland fires and subsequent invasion by non-native~~s~~ species. This combined strategy creates the regulatory framework through which sage-grouse habitat can be conserved and the decline of sage-grouse populations can be stopped in the Sstate of Nevada. This section of the Plan details related polices and an adaptive management approach that will provide guidance to achieve these objectives.

The guiding principles that create the balanced foundation and vision for a coordinated, management approach for conservation of sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem in

Nevada are as follows:

- Conserve sage-grouse and their habitat in Nevada while maintaining the economic vitality of the State.
- Due to the broad reach of sage-grouse habitat, effective management and implementation of sage-grouse conservation actions must be conducted through a collaborative, interagency approach that engages private, non-governmental, local, state, Tribal and federal stakeholders to achieve sufficient conservation of the sage-grouse and their habitat.
- Adaptive management will be employed at all levels of management in order to acknowledge potential uncertainty upfront and establish a sequential framework in which decision making will occur in order to learn from previous management actions.

## 3.1 Anthropogenic Disturbances

*3.1.1 Conservation Objective – No net unmitigated loss due to anthropogenic disturbances*

The overarching objective of Nevada's plan is to achieve conservation through no net unmitigated loss of sage-grouse habitat due to anthropogenic disturbances within the Sage-Grouse Management Area (SGMA; Figure 1) in order to stop the decline of sage-grouse populations. No net unmitigated loss is defined as the State's objective to maintain the current quantity of quality of sage-grouse habitat within the SGMA at the state-wide level by protecting existing sage-grouse habitat or by mitigating for loss due to anthropogenic disturbances. Mitigation requirements are determined by the Conservation Credit System. This objective will be measured by the credit to debit ratio.

Anthropogenic disturbance is defined here as any human-caused activity or action and/ or human-created physical structures that may have adverse impacts on sage-grouse and/ or their habitat. The term anthropogenic disturbance and its associated conservation policies will include, but not limited to the following project categories: mineral development and exploration and its associated infrastructure; renewable and non-renewable energy production, transmission, and distribution and its associated infrastructure; paved and unpaved roads and highways; cell phone towers; landfills; pipelines; residential and commercial subdivisions; special use permits; right-of-way applications; and other large-scale infrastructure development. Livestock operations and agricultural activities and infrastructure related to small-scale ranch and farm businesses (e.g. water troughs, fences, etc.) are not included in this definition, though Section 6.5 and Appendix A address how to minimize impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat from these activities.

*3.1.2 Conservation Policies – "Avoid, Minimize, Mitigate"*

***The State of Nevada's overriding policy for all management actions within the SGMA is to "avoid, minimize, and mitigate" impacts to sage-grouse habitat.***

This is a fundamental hierarchical decision process that seeks to:

**Avoid** – Eliminate conflicts by relocating disturbance activities outside of sage-grouse habitat in order to conserve sage-grouse and their habitat. Avoidance of a disturbance within sage-grouse habitat is the preferred option.

**Minimize** –If impacts are not avoided, the adverse effects will need to be both minimized and mitigated. Impacts will be minimized by modifying proposed actions and/ or developing permit conditions to include measures that lessen the adverse effects to sage-grouse and their habitat. This will be accomplished through Site Specific Consultation - Based Design Features (Design Features), such as reducing the disturbance footprint, seasonal use limitations, co-location of structures, etc. Minimization does not preclude the need for mitigation of a disturbance. Any disturbance in habitat within the SGMA will require both minimization and mitigation.

**Mitigate** – If impacts are not avoided, after required minimization measures are specified, residual adverse effects on designated sage-grouse habitat are required to be offset by implementing mitigation actions that will result in replacement or enhancement of the sage-grouse habitat to balance the loss of habitat from the disturbance activity. This will be accomplished through the Conservation Credit System.

Proposed anthropogenic disturbances within the SGMA will trigger timely consultation with the SETT for assessment of impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat and compliance with SEC and other relevant agency policies. All currently mapped sage-grouse habitat is located within the SGMA. ~~Project proponents considering projects in sage-grouse habitat not located within the SGMA are encouraged to contact the SETT for voluntary project planning guidance to avoid, minimize, and mitigate potential disturbances.~~ Specifics of the SETT Cconsultation ~~are~~ will be detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the applicable State and Federal agencies, still under development ~~in Appendix XX~~. SETT Cconsultation is designed to provide a regulatory mechanism to ensure that sage-grouse conservation policies are applied consistently throughout the State and streamline the federal permitting process.

Determination of sage-grouse habitat will be based on the Nevada~~USGS~~ Habitat Suitability Map (Figure 2). At the onset of a proposed project, habitat evaluations or "ground-truthing" of the project site and its surrounding areas shall be conducted by a qualified biologist with sage-grouse experience using methods as defined in Stiver et al (2010) to confirm habitat type. Evaluations can be conducted by the SETT or NDOW at the request of the project proponent.

The specific steps for the implementation of the "avoid, minimize, mitigate" policy are as follows:

***Avoid***

Project proponents must first seek to avoid disturbance in sage-grouse habitat within the SGMA. If the project is located entirely outside of habitat, but within the SGMA it will still be analyzed for indirect effects, such as noise and visual impacts. A project will only be considered to have avoided impacts if it is physically located in non-habitat and

it is determined to have no indirect impacts effecting designated habitat within the SGMA. If this is determined, no further consultation with the SETT is required.

It is important to note that the avoid step is not an "all or nothing" concept. If the entirety of a project cannot be relocated to non-habitat, alternatives will be explored to relocate portions of the project to non-habitat. (For example, if a mine cannot be relocated into non-habitat, power distribution lines associated with the project may be relocated to non-habitat.) This may reduce minimization and mitigation requirements for the project proponent.

Anthropogenic disturbances should be avoided within the SGMA. If avoidance is not possible, the project proponent must demonstrate why it is not possible in order for the SETT to consider minimization and mitigation alternatives. The process to demonstrate that avoidance is not possible (the "avoid process") is determined by four management categories (Figure 3), which consider both sage-grouse breeding population density and habitat suitability within the SGMA. This approach was taken in order to conserve large and functioning sage-grouse populations, as well as the habitat needed to support sage-grouse survival. Definitions and methods for developing the management categories are provided in Section 6.0.

The burden of proof to demonstrate that avoidance is not possible within the SGMA will be on the project proponent and will require the project proponent to demonstrate the specified criteria listed in Table 3-1 as determined by the management categories the proposed project is located in. Exemptions to the avoid policy will be granted if all the criteria in Table 3-1 is met. A higher burden of proof is set for project proponents to demonstrate that avoidance is not possible in areas that have higher densities of sage-grouse populations and suitable habitat.

**Table 3-1. The "Avoid Process" for Proposed Anthropogenic Disturbances within the SGMA**

Anthropogenic disturbances should be avoided in habitat within the SGMA. If project proponents wish to demonstrate that a disturbance cannot be avoided, exemptions will be granted if the criteria listed in the table can be met for the applicable management category.

| Core Management Areas ("best of the best") | Priority Management Areas | General Management Areas | Non-habitat Management Areas |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;<br>• Demonstrate that the individual and cumulative impacts of the project would not result in habitat fragmentation or other impacts that would cause sage-grouse populations to decline through consultation with the SETT;<br>• Demonstrate that sage-grouse population trends within the PMU are stable or increasing over a ten-year rolling average;<br>• Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible;<br>• Develop Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and<br>• Mitigate unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System. Mitigation rates will be higher for disturbances within this category. | • Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;<br>• Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible. If co-location is not possible, siting should reduce individual and cumulative impact to sage-grouse and their habitat;<br>• Demonstrate that the project should not result in unnecessary and undue habitat fragmentation that may cause declines in sage-grouse populations within the PMU through consultation with the SETT;<br>• Develop Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and<br>• Mitigate for unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System. | • Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;<br>• Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible;<br>• Develop Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and<br>• Mitigate for unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System. | • Demonstrate that the project will not have indirect impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat . If it cannot be demonstrated, the project proponent will be required to develop Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features to minimize impacts and compensatory mitigation will be required. |

*Core Management Areas*

The Core Management Areas supports areas of high densities of sage-grouse and areas of high estimated space use in suitable habitat in the State of Nevada. These areas include approximately 85% of space use by sage-grouse in the State of Nevada. These areas represent the strongholds (or "the best of the best") for sage-grouse populations in the State of Nevada and support the highest density of breeding populations. Thus, the management strategy is to conserve these areas by avoidance of anthropogenic disturbances in order to maintain or improve current sage-grouse population levels.

Project proponents must seek to avoid disturbances within the SGMA. If the project proponent wishes to demonstrate that avoidance is not possible within these areas, exemptions will be granted to this restriction as part of the SETT Cconsultation. The project proponent must demonstrate that all of the following criteria listed below (also

see Table 3-1) are met as part of the SETT Cconsultation process in order to be granted an exemption:

- Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;
- Demonstrate that the individual and cumulative impacts of the project would not result in habitat fragmentation or other impacts that would cause sage-grouse populations to decline through consultation with the SETT;
- Demonstrate that sage-grouse population trends within the PMU are stable or increasing over a 10-year rolling average;
- Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible;
- Develop Site Specific Consultation -Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and
- Mitigate unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System. Mitigation rates will be higher for disturbances within this category.

*Priority Management Areas*

The Priority Management Areas encompass areas that are determined to be highly suitable habitat for sage-grouse by the ~~USGS~~ Nevada Habitat Suitability Model and areas of high space use that are not contained within the Core Management Areas.

Management in these areas provide more flexibility to project proponents, though avoidance in these areas is still the preferred option and project proponents are encouraged to develop outside of these areas whenever possible. Anthropogenic disturbances will be permitted in these areas if the criteria listed below (also see Table 3-1) are met as part of the SETT Cconsultation process:

- Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably or feasibly accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;
- Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible. If co-location is not possible, siting should reduce individual and cumulative impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat;
- Demonstrate that the project should not result in unnecessary and undue habitat fragmentation that may cause declines in sage-grouse populations within the PMU through consultation with the SETT;
- Develop Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and
- Mitigate for unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System.

*General Management Areas*

The General Management Areas encompass areas determined to be suitable habitat for sage-grouse, though less suitable than Priority Management Areas and are not contained within the Core Management Areas. Management of these areas provides the greatest flexibility to project proponents. Anthropogenic disturbances will be permitted in these areas if the criteria listed below (also see Table 3-1) are met as part of the SETT C~~c~~onsultation process:

- Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably or feasibly accomplished elsewhere – the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative location;
- Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing disturbances to the greatest extent possible;

- Develop Site Specific Consultation -Based Design Features to minimize impacts through consultation with the SETT; and
- Mitigate for unavoidable impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System.

*Non-Habitat Management Areas*

The Non-Habitat Management Areas encompass areas determined to be unsuitable for sage-grouse by the ~~USGS~~ Nevada Habitat Suitability Model. As specified above, all proposed projects within the SGMA, including in non-habitat within SGMAs must conduct habitat evaluation or ground-truthing to confirm presence or absence of sage-grouse habitat. If areas are confirmed by habitat evaluations to be non-habitat, an analysis for indirect impacts on sage-grouse within their habitat in the SGMA will be required to determine if Site Specific Consultation -Based Design Features to minimize impacts and compensatory mitigation are necessary as part of the SETT C~~c~~onsultation process (also see Table 3-1).

***Minimize***

If a project cannot avoid adverse effects (direct or indirect) to sage-grouse habitat within the SGMA, the project proponent will be required to implement Site Specific Consultation -Based Design Features (Design Features) that minimize the project's adverse effects to sage-grouse habitat.

Minimization will include timely consultation with the SETT to determine which ~~Site Specific Consultation Based~~ Design Features would be most applicable to the project when considering site conditions, types of disturbance, etc. Some general examples could include: reducing the footprint of the project, siting infrastructure in previously disturbed locations with low habitat values, noise restrictions near leks during breeding

season, and washing vehicles and equipment to reduce the spread of invasive species. Land use specific ~~Site-Specific Consultation-Based~~ Design Features are included in Appendix A.

A list of ~~Site-Specific Consultation-Based~~ Design Features for the project must be specified and agreed upon by the SETT and project proponent prior to the start of the project and will become part of the permit/ contract requirements issued for the project. The project proponent will be required to implement, maintain, and monitor the required ~~DFs~~ Design Features in good working order throughout the duration of the project.

***Mitigate***

Mitigation involves the successful restoration, ~~or~~ enhancement, or preservation of sage-grouse habitat and is designed to offset the negative impacts caused by an anthropogenic disturbance. Mitigation will be required for all anthropogenic disturbances impacting sage-grouse habitat within the SGMA. Mitigation requirements will be determined by the State's Conservation Credit System (Section 8.0).

Options for mitigation will be identified in the State's Strategic Action Plan ~~for Mitigation~~. The State's Strategic Action Plan ~~for Mitigation~~ will identify prioritized areas on public and private lands to implement a landscape scale restoration effort. This will spatially identify where the primary threats to sage-grouse habitat are located throughout the State and provide management guidance for how to ameliorate the threats~~se~~ based on local area conditions and ecological site descriptions. The prioritization includes efforts to use mitigation funding in areas where sage-grouse will derive the most benefit, even if those areas are not adjacent to or in the vicinity of impacted populations. This Strategic Action Plan ~~for Mitigation~~ will be updated at least

every five years to reflect improvements in understanding and technology for mitigation activities.

*3.1.3 Adaptive Management*

The SETT, in close coordination with applicable federal and state agencies will evaluate and assess the effectiveness of these policies at achieving the objective of no net unmitigated loss and will provide a report to the SEC annually. The objective will be considered to have been met if there is a positive credit to debit ratio within the Conservation Credit System on an annual basis. ~~The State acknowledges that this may be difficult to achieve within the first five years of the Conservation Credit System due to an initial lag in the start of the program, but by leveraging funds, credits should outweigh debits over time.~~ If the State falls short of its objective, the SEC will reassess and update polices and management actions based on recommendations from the SETT using the best available science to adaptively manage sage-grouse habitat.

**3.2 Acts of Nature – Fire and Invasive Species**

*3.2.1 Conservation Objectives* –

The overarching objectives of Nevada's plan is to achieve conservation through the following short and long term objectives for Acts of Nature in order to stop the decline of sage-grouse populations and restore and maintain a functioning sagebrush ecosystem:

*Short Term:*

- *Reduce the amount of sage-grouse habitat loss due to large acreage wildfires and invasion by non-native ~~species~~plants.*

*Long Term:*

- *Maintain an ecologically healthy and intact sagebrush ecosystem that is resistant to the invasion of non-native ~~species~~ plants and resilient after disturbances, such as wildfire.*

- *Restore wildfire return intervals to within a spatial and temporal range of variability that supports sustainable populations of sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.*

The Greater Sage-grouse Advisory Committee, using the best available science, identified fire and invasive plant species, principally cheatgrass, as the primary threat to sage-grouse and their habitat in the S~~s~~tate of Nevada. The State acknowledges these threats must be adequately addressed in order to achieve the conservation goal for sage-grouse within the S~~s~~tate of Nevada; however, it is not economically or ecologically feasible to restore all fire damaged or invasive species dominated landscapes at this

point, nor is it possible to prevent all fires. The State will put forth a best faith effort to reduce the rate of sage-grouse habitat loss due to fire and invasive plant species. This objective will be measured by evaluating the amount of habitat lost due to fire and subsequently invaded by non-native plant species over a five year period.

*3.2.2a Conservation Policies – Fire Management: Paradigm Shift*

~~1.~~ In order to address the threat of fire and invasive species, which has long challenged land managers throughout the western United States, the State proposes a paradigm shift. This would entail a more proactive, rather than reactive approach, to stop the dominance of invasive species and restore fire to within a range of variability to support sustainable populations of sage-grouse. For specific management actions associated with these policies, refer to Section 7.1 of this State Plan. ~~These policies include:~~

~~2. A shift in focus and funding from wildland fire suppression to pre-suppression.~~

~~3. Dedicate federal, state, and local funding for pre-suppression activities separate from funding for suppression and post-fire rehabilitation activities. Post-fire rehabilitation/restoration funding should be available for up to three years following each incident in order to monitor effectiveness and to accommodate for poor initial success.~~

~~4. "Hold the line" against fire and invasive species near priority sage-grouse habitat. Develop a prioritized pre-suppression plan that focuses on priority sage-grouse habitat, similar to the Wildland Urban Interface planning analysis.~~

~~5. Emphasize "Strategic Fuels Management". Location of fuels management projects should be identified at the broad landscape level to provide protections to areas of sage-grouse habitat that have compromised resilience, resistance, and heterogeneity. They should also be implemented to protect against catastrophically large wildfires and allow for repeated attempts to suppress~~

active fires. Provide consistent funding for maintenance of fuels management projects. Establish effective monitoring plans to learn from implementation of these tools and subsequent effectiveness during suppression. Fuels management tools may include: fuels reduction treatments, including proper livestock grazing; greenstripping; brownstripping; and maintaining riparian areas as natural fuels breaks by managing for Proper Functioning Condition (PFC).

6. Support robust, coordinated, and rapid fire suppression management using a diversity of agencies, including federal, state and local government, as well as empowering local landowners, such as through Rural Fire Protection Districts and Wildfire Support Groups.
7. Wildland fire should be used strategically and should not be suppressed in all instances. Allow fires to burn naturally if located in areas that may benefit sage-grouse habitat and would not risk the spread of invasive species, but only if human lives and property are not at risk. Continue to suppress wildland fires that may cause the spread of invasive species into sage grouse habitat. Use ecological site descriptions and associated state and transition models to identify such areas.
8. Manage wildland fires in sage grouse habitat to retain as much habitat as possible. Interior islands of vegetation in areas of habitat should be protected through follow-up mop-up of the island's perimeter and interior, when fire crew safety and welfare are not at risk.
9. Post fire rehabilitation efforts should be collaborative and strategic in approach. A wide variety of agencies, representing multiple disciplines should be involved in order to leverage funding opportunities and provide knowledge on appropriate site specific treatments. Rehabilitation efforts should focus on preventing the spread of invasive species, particularly in or near sage-grouse habitat.

~~10.~~1. ~~Emphasize continued research and provide funding to enhance knowledge and understanding of how to prevent catastrophic wildfire, the invasion of cheatgrass, and reclamation/ restoration techniques.~~

*3.2.2b Conservation Policies – Invasive ~~Species~~Plants: Prevent, Detect, Control, Restore, and Monitor*

~~1.~~ While wildfire is commonly the vector for the spread of invasive ~~species~~plants, such as cheatgrass, invasive ~~species~~ plants are currently widespread throughout the Great Basin and can spread without the aid of wildfire. In order to address the general threat of invasive plants~~species~~, the State proposes a policy of Prevent, Detect, Control, Restore, and Monitor. For specific management actions associated with these policies, refer to Section 7.1 of this State Plan. ~~These policies include:~~

~~2. ***Prevent*** the establishment of invasive species into uninvaded sage-grouse habitat. This will be achieved by conducting systematic and strategic detection surveys, data collection, and mapping of these areas and engaging in early response efforts if invasion occurs. This will be achieved by further developing federal and state partnerships and working with local groups, such as Weed Control Districts, Cooperative Weed Management Areas, and Conservation Districts. This is the highest priority for the state of Nevada.~~

~~3. ***Control*** invasive species infestations in sage-grouse habitat already compromised by invasion. Control techniques may include: biomass removal by means such as strategic and targeted grazing, mowing, or using herbicides. In addition, the State will continue to support research in the development of biological control agents and deploy emerging technologies in Nevada as they become available.~~

4. ***Restore*** ecologically functioning sagebrush ecosystems in sage-grouse habitat already compromised by invasion. Restoration may include revegetating sites with native plants cultivated locally or locally adapted, non-native plant species where appropriate. Control of invasives must be accompanied by ecosystem restoration.

5. Ecological site descriptions and associated state and transition models will be used to identify target areas for resiliency enhancement and/ or restoration. Maintaining and/or enhancing resilience should be given top priority. In the Great Basin sagebrush-bunchgrass communities, invasion resistance and successional resilience following disturbance are functions of a healthy perennial bunchgrass component. Therefore a combination of active and passive management will be required to ensure this functionality. Areas that are in an invaded state that will likely transition to an annual grass monoculture if a disturbance occurs and are located within or near sage-grouse habitat should be prioritized for restoration efforts to increase resistance and resilience.

6.1. ***Monitor*** and adaptively manage to ensure effectiveness of efforts to prevent, control and restore.

*3.2.3 Adaptive Management*

Fire and the subsequent reestablishment of plant species (native or not) is a natural process, and consequently this threat is extremely challenging across the western United States as humans are still limited in our ability to directly control this cycle. However, scientific understanding of ecological processes and resource management techniques continue to improve. A commitment by the State to address this issue through adaptive management will lead to a greater understanding of the ecological mechanisms that drive these processes and will subsequently lead to improvements in

resource management practices that prevent catastrophic wildfire and the subsequent invasion of cheatgrass.

The SETT will evaluate and assess the effectiveness of these policies at achieving the stated short and long term objectives and will provide a report to the SEC annually. The objectives will be met if there is a decrease or leveling off of the amount of habitat loss due to fire and subsequent invasion by annual grasses over a five year period. If the State and federal agencies fall short of this objective, the SEC will reassess and update polices and management actions based on recommendations from the SETT using the best available science to adaptively manage sage-grouse habitat.

## 4.0 HABITAT OBJECTIVES FOR GREATER SAGE-GROUSE IN NEVADA

The purpose of the habitat objectives for sage-grouse is to describe what is generally considered to be the highest quality seasonal habitat for greater sage-grouse, specific to Nevada. The objectives do not outline what is and what is not habitat, but depict the characteristics of seasonal habitats that sage-grouse in Nevada are using most successfully, based on research in Nevada. The objectives are appropriate at the site-scale and do not address landscape-scale patterns and characteristics.

The State of Nevada will work to maintain and manage sage-grouse habitat to meet these objectives across the sagebrush ecosystem in the state. The habitat objectives will be used to evaluate management actions that are proposed in sage-grouse habitat to ensure that 1) habitat conditions are maintained if currently meeting objectives, or 2) habitat conditions move toward these objectives if the current conditions do not meet these objectives. All proposed sage-grouse habitat mitigation, restoration, reclamation, or enhancement projects will incorporate these characteristics as project habitat objectives and will be the basis for determining success of these projects through long-term monitoring and adaptive management. When habitat within the state is identified as not meeting these objectives, the State will work with land managers to recommend adjustments in management to work towards these objectives, including an assessment of the causal factors. The proposed habitat objectives themselves are not regulatory, but are intended to help guide planning and adaptive management.

These objectives were developed by a team consisting of representatives from the USFWS, NDOW, USFS, USGS and BLM. The team reviewed and the Connelly et al. (2000) guidelines adding considerable detail and making adjustments based on regionally and locally derived data and analysis by the USGS. The State of Nevada's Science Work Group also reviewed these objectives before they were included in the State Plan. These habitat objectives are specific to Nevada and based on research conducted within

the State. Additional information on the development of these objectives in provided in Appendix B.

The State of Nevada recognizes that a resilient and resistant sagebrush ecosystem should be heterogeneous across the landscape and that achievement of these objectives resulting in a large-scale homogenous landscape is not desirable within the State of Nevada. These objectives are intended to be used as guidelines at the site-level and do not apply as objectives at the landscape-level.

[[Table 4-1 is the same as Table 2-6 in the BLM sub-regional EIS. The SETT would recommend that these habitat objectives be the same for the state and federal agencies. Table 2-6 is still undergoing review by a collaborative group (USGS, USFS, BLM, NDOW, USFWS) and changes are still possible. To this end, the SETT recommends that the Council approve this table with the caveat that the final Table 2-6 will be brought to the Council (anticipated end of August) for review and incorporation in the September Meeting. ]]

**Table 4-1. Habitat Objectives for Greater Sage-Grouse**

| Life Requisite | Habitat Indicator | Objective | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GENERAL** | | | |
| All life stages | Rangeland Health Indicator Assessment | Meeting all standards[1] | |
| **LEK** | | | |
| Cover | Availability of sagebrush cover | Has adjacent sagebrush cover | Connelly et al. 2000<br>Blomberg et al. 2012 |
| Security | Proximity of trees > 1 meter above shrub canopy | Within 1.86 miles (3 km):<br>• none within line of sight of the lek | Connelly et al. 2000 (modified) |
| | Tree cover | Within 1.86 miles (3 km):<br>• <3.5% conifer land cover | |
| **NESTING** | | | |
| Cover | Sagebrush canopy cover (%) | ≥20 | Kolada et al. 2009a<br>Kolada et al. 2009b |
| | Sagebrush species present | Includes *Artemesia tridentata* subspecies | Coates et al. 2011<br>Kolada et al. 2009a |

| Life Requisite | Habitat Indicator | Objective | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Kolada et al. 2009b |
| | Residual and live perennial grass cover (%) | ≥10 if shrub cover <25[2] | Coates et al. 2011<br>Coates and Delehanty 2010 |
| | Annual grass (%) | <5 | Blomberg et al. 2012 |
| | Total shrub cover (%) | ≥30 | Coates and Delehanty 2010<br>Kolada et al. 2009a<br>Lockyer et al. In review |
| | Conifer encroachment (%) | <5 | Casazza et al. 2011<br>Coates et al. In prep (A) |
| Security | Proximity of tall structures | None within 3 miles (5km) | Coates et al. 2011 |
| **BROOD-REARING/SUMMER** | | | |
| Cover | Sagebrush canopy cover (%) | ≥10 | Connelly et al. 2000 |
| Cover and Food | Perennial forb canopy cover (%) | >5 arid<br>>15 mesic | Casazza et al. 2011<br>Lockyer et al. In review |
| Food | Riparian Areas/Meadows | Manage for PFC | |
| | Plant Species Richness ~~Perennial forb availability~~ (in the vicinity of riparian areas/meadows) | ≥ 5 plant species present[3] | Casazza et al. 2011 |
| Security | Conifer encroachment (%) | <3 phase I (>0% to <25% cover)<br>No phase II (25 – 50% cover)<br>No phase III (>50% cover)<br>within 0.53-mile (850-meter) buffer of microhabitat plot | Casazza et al. 2011<br>Coates et al. In prep (A) |
| | Riparian Area/Meadow Interspersion with adjacent sagebrush | Perimeter to area ratio of 0.~~15~~ 20 within ~~522~~656-foot (~~159~~200-meter) buffer from the center of data collection~~of the microhabitat~~ plot | Casazza et al. 2011 |
| **WINTER** | | | |
| Cover and Food | Sagebrush canopy cover (%) | ≥10 | Connelly et al. 2000 |
| | Sagebrush height in centimeters(cm) | ≥25 | Connelly et al. 2000 |
| | Conifer encroachment (%) | <5 phase I (>0% to <25% | Coates et al. In prep (A) |

| Life Requisite | Habitat Indicator | Objective | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | cover)<br>No phase II (25 – 50% cover)<br>No phase III (>50% cover)<br>within 0.53-mile (850-meter) buffer of microhabitat plot | Coates et al. In prep (B) |
| | Sagebrush extent (%) | >85% sagebrush land cover within 0.53-mile (850-meter) buffer ~~of the microhabitat~~from center of data collection plot | Coates et al. In prep (B) |
| | Sagebrush species comp (%) | *A. t. tridentata* sites >50%<br>*A. arbuscula* sites >25%<br>*A. t. vaseyana* sites >25% | Coates et al. In prep (B) |

[1]Upland standards are based on indicators for canopy and ground cover, including litter, live vegetation, and rock, appropriate to the ecological potential of the site. ~~The Rangeland Health Indicator Assessment is already implemented on BLM lands. The assessment process will not trigger specific land use decisions, but instead will provide information to determine if further action is necessary.~~

[2]Assumes upland rangeland health standards are being met.

[3]Standard considered in addition to PFC. Measured ESD/Daubenmire (25cm x 50cm frame). Includes all mesic plant species~~, not only perennial forbs~~.

## 5.0 IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES

The creation of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program (SEP) was one of the main recommendations of the 2012 Governor's Sage-grouse Advisory Committee. The SEP consists of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT). The program is established under the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Division of State Lands. The program is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach, charged to carry out programs to preserve, restore, and enhance sagebrush ecosystems in the Sstate of Nevada. In addition, the SEP will work with Local Area Working Groups (LAWGs) and Conservation Districts to help identify and implement on-the-ground sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystem conservation efforts. Also, though urbanization is currently not a major threat to sage-grouse in Nevada, the SEP will work with local governments to avoid future conflicts.

**Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC)**

The SEC was originally established under Executive Order 2012-19 and later solidified into state statute under NRS 232.162. The SEC consists of a nine voting member board, appointed by the Governor with representatives from the following interests: agriculture, energy, general public, conservation and environmental, mining, ranching, local government, Native American tribes, and Board of Wildlife Commissioners. In addition, the state directors of the Nevada Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Wildlife (NDOW), and Agriculture (NDA), as well as the state directors for the federal agencies of BLM, USFWS, and HTNF will serve as ex-officio members. The SEC is responsible for determining policy associated with the sagebrush ecosystem and sage-grouse.

The objective of the SEC is to establish and guide a consistent, transparent process to coordinate disturbance and conservation activities and set policy in the SGMA in order

to provide for a resilient and resistant sagebrush ecosystem and stable or increasing sage-grouse populations.

The specific duties of the SEC include:

- Consider the best science available in its determinations regarding the conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems in this State;
- Establish and carry out strategies for: 1) the conservation of the sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems in this State; and 2) managing land which includes those sagebrush ecosystems, taking into consideration the importance of those sagebrush ecosystems and the interests of the State;
- Establish and carry out a long-term system for carrying out strategies to manage sagebrush ecosystems in this State using an adaptive management framework and providing for input from interested persons and governmental entities;
- Oversee the SETT;
- Establish and set policy for the Conservation Credit System (CCS);
- Solicit suggestions and information and, if necessary, prioritize projects concerning the enhancement of the landscape, the restoration of habitat, the reduction of nonnative grasses and plants and the mitigation of damage to, or the expansion of, scientific knowledge of sagebrush ecosystems;
- If requested, provide advice for the resolution of any conflict concerning the management of the sage-grouse or a sagebrush ecosystem in this State;
- Coordinate and facilitate discussion among persons, federal and state agencies, and local governments concerning the maintenance of sagebrush ecosystems and the conservation of the sage-grouse;
- Provide information and advice to persons, federal and state agencies and local

governments concerning any strategy, system, program or project carried out under this State Plan;

- Provide direction to state agencies concerning any strategy, system, program or project carried out pursuant to this State Plan and resolve any conflict with any direction given by another state board, commission, or department jointly with that board, commission or department, as applicable;
- Submit reports twice a year to the Governor;
- Pursuant to the "Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc. Resolution & Letter of Support," (Appendix C) integrate Tribal participation in the statewide conservation effort, and acknowledge traditional Tribal ecological knowledge when available to update SGMA;
- Establish policies for the identification and prioritization of landscape-scale enhancement, restoration, fuel reduction, and mitigation projects based upon ecological site potential, state and transition models, and other data that will contribute to decision making informed by science to increase resiliency; and
- Encourage and facilitate land management education and training for all user groups of sage-grouse habitat.

**Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT)**

The SETT is a multi-disciplinary, interagency team with representation from DCNR – Divisions of State Lands and Forestry, NDOW, and NDA. The SETT serves as staff to the SEC and advises them on the best available science.

The objective of the SETT is to implement a multi-disciplinary approach for the administration of this State Plan that incorporates various scientific and technical expertise and provides a well-defined process for assessing impacts and permitting activity in the SGMA.

The specific duties of the SETT include:

- Serve as staff to the SEC and advise the SEC on the best available science in order for them to set policy;
- Develop a comprehensive State Plan based on the recommendations from the Governor's Sage-grouse Advisory Council;
- Oversee the day-to-day implementation of the goals, objectives, and management actions established under this State Plan. Propose revisions to the State Plan as needed;
- Coordinate the development of the ~~Conservation Credit System~~CCS. In accordance with SEC policy, administer and operate the CCS once it is established;
- Work with the USGS and other technical experts to development sage-grouse habitat and management maps;
- Establish and manage a process in cooperation with applicable federal and state agency partners to update sage-grouse habitat and management maps using the best available science;
- Coordinate with the BLM and USFS and other federal and state agencies on the development of the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS);
- Enter into an MOU with the BLM and USFS for agency coordination on sage-grouse management and administration of the CCS;
- Compile and submit state-wide data for the USFWS data call for the sage-grouse listing decision;
- Work with scientific and technical experts for advise on the best available

science for implementing and updating management actions;

- Identify and prioritize landscape-scale enhancement, restoration, fuel reduction, and mitigation projects based upon ecological site potential, state and transition models, and other data that will contribute to decision making informed by science to increase resiliency following wildfire;

- Provide timely consultation for project proponents who want to conduct activities in the SGMA to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to sage-grouse. This may include robust ground-truthing for the presence or absence of habitat. Foster and maintain collaborative processes with state and federal agencies to expedite permitting, while providing for the conservation of sage-grouse;

- Secure grants and other funding opportunities to implement habitat enhancement and restoration projects;

- Develop and oversee a monitoring and adaptive management program and provide recommendations to the SEC on how to update policies based on new information learned; and

- Establish a geographic database repository to maintain the inventory of development and mitigation projects, population data, and monitoring results.

**Local Area Working Groups (LAWGs)**

The LAWGs provide all stakeholders with an opportunity to work together in actively managing and restoring landscapes across boundaries. Even with collaboration there is a realization that to be successful there is a need for more investment from all sources to achieve sage-grouse conservation objectives. LAWG membership includes representation from private land owners, tribes, federal land management agencies, local governments, conservation districts, USFWS, USGS, NDOW, NGOs, USDA-ARS, UNR, ~~USDA~~ NRCS, DOD, sportsmen, mining, energy, OHV users, agricultural and

environmental interests.

The SEP will work with the LAWGs to:

- Develop and implement site-specific plans to accomplish enhancement and restoration projects in areas that are identified by the SEP important areas for sage-grouse conservation;
- Monitor and adaptively manage conservation actions;
- Identify potential habitat enhancement and restoration projects; and
- Provide local, site-specific expertise on a variety of issues.

**Conservation Districts Program (CDP)**

The CDP provides administrative support to the State Conservation Commission, which develops policy and regulations for Nevada's twenty-eight locally elected conservation districts. The CDP is comprised of a program coordinator and three staff specialists stationed in Ely, Winnemucca, and Elko. The CDP's role in the implementation of this State Plan is to assist in the development of on-the-ground conservation projects.

The SEP will work with the CDP to:

- Implement on-the-ground conservation and mitigation projects identified by the SEP and LAWGs. Provide recommendations to the SEP on possible additional projects; and
- Facilitate communication between individual CDs, SEP, LAWGs, and other stakeholders in order to more effectively achieve on-the-ground conservation.

**Local Governments**

Thirteen of Nevada's sixteen counties, as well as several cities are located within the SGMA. The SEP will work with local governments to address any potential urbanization

conflicts with sage-grouse habitat.

The SEP will work with local governments to:

- When a county or city considers a change to its master plan for a land use of higher intensity affecting a SGMA, the county or city should consult with the SETT.

## 6.0 MAPPING

The SEP contracted with the USGS to serve in a lead technical role and science advisory capacity for the development of a habitat suitability index (HSI) for sage-grouse in Nevada using resource selection function (RSF) modeling. The SEP used the HSI to develop habitat and management maps to be implemented through this State Plan. The SETT assembled an Expert Review Team, comprised of local sage-grouse technical experts from the UNR, BLM, NDOW, USFWS, and HTNF to advise the SETT on technical aspects of the mapping process.

Methods

The State's process for developing spatially explicit maps for sage-grouse habitat and sage-grouse management areas was completed in four stages: 1) development of the HSI; 2) classification of the HSI into suitability categories; 3) development of a space use index; and 4) merging the habitat suitability categories and space use index to develop management categories. The methods for each of these stages are outlined below.

*Habitat suitability index*

Model averaged RSFs were used to develop HSIs that ranked areas of the State based on a continuum of sage-grouse selection, from highly selected for to strongly avoided. The modeling is driven by actual location data obtained using radio-telemetry information, informed by >31,000 telemetry locations from >1,500 radio-marked sage-grouse across 12 study areas within Nevada and California collected over a 15-year period, and by environmental factors including land cover composition, water resources, habitat configuration, elevation, and topography, each at multiple spatial scales that are relevant to sage-grouse movement patterns. The modeling process contrasted these environmental factors for sites used by sage-grouse (telemetry data) with available sites (randomly generated locations). Contrasting the environmental factors of used versus

available sites provided information about what factors were correlated with greater sage-grouse selection or avoidance (e.g., streams, pinyon-juniper).

RSFs were applied to calculate an overall probability of use per pixel[1]. This created a single sage-grouse HSI and resulted in a surface of predicted use by sage-grouse across Nevada. This surface, the HSI, is represented by probability values that range across a continuous spectrum of 0.0 to 1.0 (Figure 4).

*Habitat Suitability Categories*

To identify suitable habitat, the HSI described above was classified into three categories of suitability (high, moderate, and non-habitat) using cutoff values based on the standard deviation (SD) from the mean HSI ($\bar{x}$) value. High suitability habitat was comprised of all HSI values greater than 0.5 SD below $\bar{x}$. Moderate suitability habitat was comprised of HSI values between 1.5 and 0.5 SD below $\bar{x}$. Non-suitable habitat was comprised of HSI values 1.5 SD below $\bar{x}$. This bottom cut-off point was validated by a cost-benefit ratio looking at the trade-off between additional area to telemetry points. The equalization point occurs at 1.5 SD. The resulting habitat categories were then aggregated at the 1 km scale to account for corridors and smoothed at the 1.2 km scale to remove "islands" (Figure 2).

*Space use index*

An index of space use was developed based on lek attendance and density coupled with probability of sage-grouse occurrence relative to distance to nearest lek. This index was then categorized in to two categories high use and low to no use area. High use areas consisted of areas that included up to 85 percent of the highest SUI density and low-to-no use area consisted of areas with less than 15 percent.

*Management Categories*

[1] Pixels are the 30 x 30 meter resolution of the RSFs.

To create a management prioritization for the implementation of this State Plan, the habitat suitability classes were intersected with the space use categories as follows:

**Core Management Areas** – areas of suitable sage-grouse habitat use found within areas of estimated high space use;

**Priority Management Areas** – high suitability habitat that is found in areas of estimated low space use, and areas of non-habitat that overlap with areas of estimated high space use;

**General Management Areas** – moderate suitability habitat that is found in areas of estimated low space use; and

**Non-habitat Management Areas** – non-suitable habitat that is found in areas of estimated low space use (Figure 3).

Full methods for the development of the Nevada HSI, Habitat Suitability Map, and Management Category Map are detailed in "Spatially Explicit Modeling of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat in Nevada and Northeastern California: A Decision Support Tool for Management" (Coates et al. 2014).

The Nevada sage-grouse habitat and management mapping process is a product of the SETT and is a collaborative group process with state and federal agency review and input and with the USGS serving as the scientific contractor on the habitat suitability model.

Map revisions

The habitat and management mapping process will be reviewed and refined every 3 to 5 years. New or improved spatial data (*e.g.*, additional sage-grouse telemetry data, updated or improved vegetation community data) will be incorporated during the

refinement process. The review and refinement process will be scientifically based and included review and input from SETT, NDOW, BLM, USFS, and USFWS. It is anticipated that the habitat suitability modeling processes will be the basis for refinements, unless more rigorous methods are developed.

# 7.0 THREAT ASSESSMENT—GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Threats to sage-grouse and their habitat in Nevada were based on those identified in USFWS' 2010 proposed rule for sage-grouse and further developed in their Conservation Objectives Team Report, as well as from input by local areas experts. The list of threats and proposed actions was originally determined by the Advisory Committee and further developed in greater detail by the SEP.

## 7.1 Fire and Invasive Plants

In 2012, Nevada's Greater Sage-grouse Advisory Committee, using the best available science, identified fire and invasive plants, principally cheatgrass, as the primary threat to sage-grouse and their habitat in the state of Nevada. Wildland fires and the subsequent invasion by cheatgrass and other invasive plants continue to create large-scale habitat loss and fragmentation. This current rate of habitat loss is not sustainable for long-term sage-grouse population persistence.

While the vast majority of fires in sage-grouse habitat are suppressed in the initial attack phase, the continued loss of large areas in sage-grouse habitat occurs most often during periods of 'Extreme Fire Danger Conditions' when fire behavior has the greatest impact on suppression capabilities. These 'Extreme' conditions can exist simultaneously over large areas of the western U.S, creating a shortage of regional/national firefighting assets due to pre-existing large fires with greater values at risk (Murphy et al. 2013).

The State acknowledges these threats must be adequately addressed in order to achieve the conservation goal for sage-grouse and actions must be taken to increase overall preparedness, strategically ~~locate~~locating fuels management projects~~,~~ using resistance and resilience concepts (Chambers et al. In preparation), increase local suppression capabilities, ~~improve~~and improving rehabilitation/restoration capabilities.

To this end, the State has begun to address these threats by creating the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program, composed of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, with its attendant Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, to develop and approve a state plan that facilitates best available science review and technology transfer to State and local agencies and works in coordination with federal land managers and other public and private partners. In addition, the State has also approved and is implementing the Nevada Division of Forestry's (NDF) Wildland Fire Protection Program, which allows for full implementation of Nevada Revised Statute 472, improving delivery of financial,

technical and equipment/human resources to Nevada counties in fuels reduction planning and implementation, wildfire management and suppression, and restoration of burned areas.

Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 555 and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 555 address both noxious and invasive plants, their status, and any regulations regarding the control of such plants. The State has established a priority list of noxious weeds that require some form of control. Other widespread invasive plants, such as cheatgrass, while not on the noxious weed priority lists, pose a significant threat to Nevada's landscapes and habitats and will be addressed on a priority basis, particularly when it is compromising sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0).

The introduction of exotic invasive plant species in Nevada has likely been occurring since the early European settlers arrived and has been knowingly and unknowingly occurring since that time. While some species may go seemingly unnoticed, many currently pose significant threats to the sagebrush ecosystem, wildlife habitats, and our landscape in general. While all of these identified species are currently considered by the State as invasive plants, some warrant further declaration as 'noxious'. Noxious weeds are defined in NRS 555.130 as: "Any species of plant which is likely to be detrimental, destructive and/or difficult to control, but is not already introduced and established in the State to such an extent as to make its control or eradication impracticable in the judgment of the State Quarantine Officer". Plants that do not meet this definition are generally considered to be invasive or nuisance weeds. Cheatgrass falls into the 'invasive' category due to its expansive footprint within Nevada's sagebrush ecosystem.

Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) is an exotic species from the Middle East that was introduced in North America in the late nineteenth century and has become one of the most adaptive and dominant invasive plants in the Western U.S. This is especially true

following fire and other major ground disturbing activities in sagebrush ecosystems, particularly at lower elevations and precipitation zones in Nevada.

Many factors will be considered when prioritizing treatments for fire and invasive plants (i.e. noxious weed presence, sage-grouse breeding densities, habitat suitability (abundance, quality, and connectivity), existing additional threats, resistance, resilience, ecological site description, state and transition models, etc.). Additionally, further prioritization may be determined by the type of action required (conservation related, prevention based, or restoration or rehabilitation activities), presence of or proximity to sage-grouse habitat, and the amount of funding available for treatment in a given year.

**Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

The overarching direction of Nevada's plan is to stop the decline of sage-grouse populations and restore and maintain a functioning sagebrush ecosystem. Currently, it is not economically or ecologically feasible to restore all fire damaged or invasive plant dominated landscapes, nor is it possible to prevent all fires, though the State acknowledges that this threat must be addressed in order to provide for the conservation of sage-grouse. In order to achieve this goal, the State will take a phased approach through a series of short term and long term objectives and management actions. The State will first seek to reduce the amount of habitat loss, with the long-term objective of restoring ecosystem functions and processes. This will require a concerted and consistent commitment to achieve these objectives over the long-term.

The State has already taken steps to achieve these objectives through statewide adoption and implementation of the Nevada Division of Forestry's Wildland Fire Protection Program, creating a tiered system that gives equal priority to cooperative pre-suppression fire prevention projects; adopting and incorporating National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) approved training and firefighting techniques that can help

preserve habitat; and, cooperative post-suppression rehabilitation and restoration activities in and around areas of important habitat.

**Goal 1:** Ameliorate the threat of fire and invasive plants in order to provide for the conservation of sage-grouse and their habitat.

*Short term objectives and management actions:*

**Objective 1.1:** Reduce the amount of sage-grouse habitat loss due to large acreage wildfires and invasion by non-native plants.

*Pre-suppression*

In order to address the threat of fire and invasive plants, which continues to challenge land managers throughout the western United States, the State proposes a paradigm shift. This entails a shift in focus from the current suppression-centric approach to a more nuanced, cost effective, and proactive approach focusing on pre-suppression activities; which if adequately supported, will contribute greatly to Federal, State and local efforts to stop the dominance of invasive plants, reduce catastrophic wildfire incidence, and restore fire to within a range of variability to support sustainable populations of sage-grouse in Nevada.

***Management Action 1.1.1a:*** Develop, and provide sustainable, predictable federal, state, and local funding sources for pre-suppression activities (including maintenance) separate from ~~and independent of~~ funding for suppression and post-fire rehabilitation activities.

***Management Action 1.1.1b:*** Dedicated funding will be used to plan and implement cost effective pre-suppression activities with an emphasis on

strategic, scalable cooperative projects informed by best available science; utilizing cost efficient methods and tools; and followed up with effective, repeatable monitoring.

***Management Action 1.1.1c:*** Pre-suppression planning and fuels management projects will be informed by the best available science. This information will be incorporated into the planning process to inform locations of landscape and local scale fuels management projects and to provide protection to areas of sage-grouse habitat that have compromised resilience, resistance, and heterogeneity (see Appendix {X} for modeling and planning tools commonly used).

***Management Action 1.1.1d:*** Prioritize pre-suppression fuels management projects, fire prevention planning, and invasive plant control activities in and around Core and Priority Management Areas. Pre-suppression projects will be identified, designed and prioritized so that they facilitate firefighter safety, protect private property, prioritize important sage-grouse habitat, and work to maintain natural resource functions.

***Management Action 1.1.1e:*** Establish, maintain, and fund an effective, repeatable pre-suppression monitoring and adaptive management program that informs future project planning and implementation.

*Suppression*

State and federal agencies will provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs that support the conservation of sage-grouse habitat through collaborative planning, coordination, training, staffing, resource allocation, and fire management oversight.

***Management Action 1.1.2a:*** Support robust, coordinated, and rapid fire suppression management using a diversity of agencies, including federal, state, tribal and local government, as well as creating, empowering and training (to latest Nevada and National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) standards) Rural Fire Associations, Fire Protection Districts and Wildfire Support Groups.

***Management Action 1.1.2b:*** Support and improve interagency wildfire prevention activities and education statewide, including: interagency agreement updates, wildfire workshops, demonstration projects, and public service announcements on wildfire and sage-grouse habitat loss.

***Management Action 1.1.2c:*** When prioritizing wildland firefighting actions in the Sage Grouse Management Area (SGMA), top priority should be given to Core Management Areas, followed by Priority and General Management Areas during fire operations.

***Management Action 1.1.2d:*** Wildland fire can be used strategically to accomplish resource management objectives. Fire may not have to be suppressed in all instances. Resource and fire managers should consider beneficial fire use if located in areas that may benefit sage-grouse habitat, but only if:

- it would not risk the net spread of invasive plants;
- human lives, property, and important natural resource functions are not at risk;
- wildland fires exhibit prescribed/desired fire behavior characteristics and are located in designated sage-grouse habitats appropriate for beneficial fire use; and

- will not increase the net spread of invasive plants into sage-grouse habitat

***Management Action 1.1.2e:*** Manage wildland fires in sage-grouse habitat to retain as much habitat as possible. Interior unburned islands of vegetation in areas of habitat should be protected through follow-up mop-up of the island's perimeter and interior, when fire crew safety is not at risk.

*Post-Fire Restoration/ Rehabilitation*

Emergency stabilization (ES) and burned area rehabilitation (BAR) funding streams are instrumental in the process of stabilizing soils and reestablishing adapted perennial vegetation on federal lands post-fire. Currently, these programs typically provide funding for rehabilitation treatment immediately post-fire usually, which does not reflect the need to accommodate for poor initial success due to lack of precipitation and other environmental variables.

***Management Action 1.1.3a*** Work with federal, tribal, and local governments to develop dedicated funding sources that allow for up to five years of additional post-fire restoration treatments in order to better insure projects meet goals and objectives.

***Management Action 1.1.3b*** Until such time as dedicated funding sources for multi-year post-fire restoration treatments can be developed, federal, state, tribal, and local governments should submit budget requests and projections that reflect the need for funding that will cover actual and contingent yearly costs associated with successful multiyear post-fire rehabilitation efforts.

***Management Action 1.1.3c:*** Use the concepts of resistance and resilience and products developed by BLM's FIAT (Fire and Invasives Assessment Team) group to determine if post-fire restoration actions are necessary to achieve sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0).

***Management Action 1.1.3d:*** Control the spread of invasive plants post-fire.

***Management Action 1.1.3e:*** Post-fire rehabilitation efforts in sage-grouse habitat should be collaborative and strategic in approach. Federal, state, tribal and local agencies should coordinate and collaborate on rehabilitation projects in sage-grouse habitat where responsibilities and land ownership interests intersect.

***Management Action 1.1.3f:*** Post-fire restoration treatments in Core, Priority, and General Management Areas should be designed to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0). Consider the use of native plant materials based on availability and probability of success. When native plant materials are not available or the probability of success is low, use non-native plant materials that will best meet sage-grouse habitat objectives. All seed used on rehabilitation and restoration projects must be certified weed-free.

***Management Action 1.1.3g:*** Monitor post-fire restoration treatments to ensure long term persistence of restored habitat, and that the monitoring continues at least until treatment objectives are met.

*Invasive plants*

While wildfire is commonly the facilitator for the domination of invasive plants, such as cheatgrass, invasive plants are currently widespread throughout the

Great Basin and can spread without the aid of wildfire. In order to address the general threat of invasive plants, the State will pursue a strategy of Prevent, Detect, Control, Restore, and Monitor, using the best available science. The Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) will utilize its EDDMaps program to assist the State in the implementation of these efforts.

***Management Action 1.1.4a*****:** *Prevent* the establishment of invasive plants into uninvaded sage-grouse habitat. This will be achieved by conducting systematic and strategic detection surveys, data collection, and mapping of these areas and engaging in early response efforts if invasion occurs. This will be achieved by further developing federal and state partnerships and working with counties, cities, and local groups, such as Weed Control Districts, Cooperative Weed Management Areas, and Conservation Districts. This is the highest priority for ~~the state of Nevada for~~ invasive plant control in the state of Nevada.

***Management Action 1.1.4b:*** Proposed anthropogenic disturbance should employ Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features (see Appendix A) in order to minimize land disturbance and prevent the spread of invasive plants.

***Management Action 1.1.4c:*** Require anthropogenic disturbance proponents to monitor for the existence of invasive plants pre-disturbance and to report all findings to the NV EDDMaps database. Pre- and post-disturbance activities must include prevention strategies prior to entering sites, control, restoration, and monitoring for one full growing season following the disturbance. All sites must be certified weed free prior to any relinquishment of obligations that authorized the disturbance.

***Management Action 1.1.4d:*** *Detect* new invasive plant infestations, whether it is a single plant or a small patch. If it can be detected and mapped early in the invasion and control begins immediately, then the likelihood for eradication will increase dramatically. NDA will use its EDDMaps program to assist in the effective and efficient implementation of this action.

***Management Action 1.1.4e:*** Within sage-grouse habitat, and where funding may be a limiting factor, the first priority will be to control invasive plants that are compromising attainment of sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0).

***Management Action 1.1.4f:*** *Restore* ecologically functioning sagebrush ecosystems already compromised by invasion to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0). Restoration may include revegetating sites with native plants cultivated locally or locally adapted, and/or non-native plant species where appropriate. Control of invasives must be accompanied by ecosystem restoration.

***Management Action 1.1.4g:*** Ecological site descriptions and associated state and transition models will be used to identify target areas for resiliency enhancement and/or restoration. Maintaining and/or enhancing resilience should be given top priority. In the Great Basin sagebrush-bunchgrass communities, invasion resistance and successional resilience following disturbance are functions of a healthy perennial bunchgrass component. Therefore a combination of active and passive management will be required to ensure this functionality. Areas that are in an invaded state that will likely transition to an annual grass monoculture if a disturbance occurs and are located within or near sage-grouse habitat should be prioritized for pre-fire

management favoring native and adapted perennials and post-fire restoration efforts to increase resistance and resilience.

***Management Action 1.1.4h:*** Engage climatological and meteorological professionals and their agencies to identify opportunities to increase both effectiveness and efficiency in the timing of restoration activities. Additional activities could include weather augmentation through cloud seeding, and assistance with both short term and longer term weather prediction model guidance or shorter term weather indicators.

***Management Action 1.1.4i:*** *Monitor* and adaptively manage to ensure effectiveness of efforts to prevent, detect, control and restore. Use the resource mapping functions within EDDMaps to identify and map infestations as well as any preventive, restoration, or rehabilitation efforts.

*Long term objectives and management actions:*

**Objective 2a:** Maintain an ecologically healthy and intact sagebrush ecosystem that is resistant to the invasion of non-native species and resilient after disturbances, such as wildfire.

**Objective 2b:** Restore wildfire return intervals to within a spatial and temporal range of variability that supports sustainable populations of sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species.

***Management Action 1.2.1*** Develop consistent and dedicated funding sources in order to provide a consistent commitment to pre-suppression, suppression, post-fire restoration, and invasive plant management actions described above.

***Management Action 1.2.2:*** Federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as well as private entities should work collaboratively to consistently implement the management actions described above.

***Management Action 1.2.3:*** Monitor and adaptively management all management actions to evaluate and assess the effectiveness at achieving objectives.

***Management Action 1.2.4:*** Emphasize continued research and provide funding to enhance knowledge and understanding of how to further reduce the prevalence of catastrophic wildfire, the invasion of annual grasses (primarily cheatgrass), fire behavior, and reclamation/ restoration techniques.

**7.2 Pinyon-Juniper Encroachment**

In Nevada, pinyon and juniper (P-J) woodlands are composed of single leaf pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*) and Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*). In northwestern Nevada pinyon and Utah juniper are replaced with western juniper (*J. occidentalis*). P-J woodlands currently cover 13% of Nevada, or approximately 9.1 million acres (Mitchell and Roberts 1999). Of the 9.1 million acres in Nevada, approximately 64% is found on BLM land, 26% on USFS land, 5% on private land, and the remaining 5% on other lands (DOD, NRC, USFWS, BIA, etc.)(DCNR-NDF 2010).

From a historical standpoint, the area occupied by pinyon and/or juniper has increased 125 to 625 percent since 1860. The increase in trees is a result of infill into shrub-steppe communities that contained low numbers of trees, and expansion of P-J into areas that previously did not support trees. (Miller et al. 2008). Potential reasons for the expansion may include: altered fire regimes, improper livestock grazing, natural range expansion, and changing climate (Romme et al. 2009).

In Nevada, P-J encroachment is ranked as the second highest threat to sage-grouse, after fire and invasive plants. This continued woodland expansion is a challenge for land and wildlife managers, with two primary concerns being the continuing steady conversion of sagebrush habitat to woodland and increased risk of large area destructive wildfires that may convert woodlands to monocultures of invasive annual grasses and other weedy species.

*Pinyon – Juniper Woodland Encroachment into Sagebrush Communities – Characterization*

P-J woodland encroachment is characterized by three phases (Miller et al 2005):

Phase I – Trees are present but shrubs and herbaceous vegetation are the dominant vegetation that influences ecological processes on the site;

Phase II – Trees are co-dominant with shrubs and herbaceous vegetation and all three vegetation layers influence ecological processes on the site; and

Phase III – Trees are the dominant vegetation and the primary plant layer influencing ecological processes on the site.

If a wildfire occurs before Phase III is reached, the original vegetation community has an opportunity to return to the site via successional pathway that is dependent upon the fire's surviving plant species, seed produced by the remaining shrubs, surviving herbaceous vegetation, and/or their viable seed remaining in the soil seed bank. This return to the original community is also dependent on the native plants being abundant enough to out compete any on-site invasive annual grasses like cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) or medusahead grass (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) and perennial invasive weeds (knapweeds, etc.) following the fire.

With time, and little or no fire, these invaded brush communities become Phase III woodlands, characterized by very little understory, the only evidence of the former plant community being skeletons of sagebrush and other woody brush species and a sparse population of weakened herbaceous plants . At this point, run-off from the soil surface of spaces between trees increases, due to the loss of herbaceous ground cover. In turn, the increased rate and speed of soil erosion can trigger difficult to reverse changes to the biogeochemical cycles of the plant community. If a fire burns through the woodland at this point, the potential for the area to return to a sagebrush plant community is greatly reduced, particularly if cheatgrass, medusahead, and/or perennial invasive weeds are present in the understory.

In the Great Basin there are approximately 100,000 + acres a year moving into Phase III woodlands. (Miller et al.2008). At this rate of encroachment, management of sagebrush habitats becomes a race between a potentially permanent loss of sagebrush habitat to

P-J woodland versus how much Phase I and II woodlands can reasonably be treated each year before they reach Phase III.

Land managers have to consider removal of trees from areas that historically have been sagebrush dominated as a priority activity. Numerous studies have documented the expansion of P-J woodlands into sagebrush communities (Cottam and Stewart 1940; Adams 1975; Burkhardt and Tisdale1976; Tausch et al. 1981; Tausch and West 1988, 1995;Gedney and others 1999; Miller and Rose 1995, 1999; Miller et al. 2005). In recent years, research has looked at woodland dynamics and new approaches to measure the extent that P-J has replaced or are encroaching sagebrush communities, versus dynamics on sites that have supported woodlands in the past (Miller et al.2008).

Another area of recent research increasing land managers understanding of vegetation dynamics and increasing decision making options is the inclusion of concepts of resistance and resilience. These concepts can be used in conjunction with sage-grouse habitat requirements to develop lists of appropriate management actions and to identify effective management strategies at landscape scales (Wisdom and Chambers 2009 & Chambers et al. in preparation).

*Pinyon – Juniper Woodland Encroachment into Sagebrush Communities – Greater Sage-grouse Impacts*

The continued expansion of woodland has become a primary threat to greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate wildlife species. In the instance of sage-grouse, woodland expansion contributes to the loss of important seasonal habitats. It also increases raptor presence and predation associated with the coniferous trees (Commons et al. 1999). Several studies that demonstrate that sage-grouse avoid areas encroached by P-J, P-J removal will increase sage-grouse habitat quality, and some evidence that sage-grouse will return to an area once P-J is removed:

- During both the breeding and summer seasons, sage-grouse preferred cover types with less than 5% juniper canopy cover compared to those same cover types with greater than 5% juniper canopy cover. (Freese 2009).

- Juniper can also indirectly influence birds' avoidance of habitats through its influences on plant community compositional and structural changes, such as a reduction in the herbaceous understory (Knapp and Soule 1998, Miller et al. 2000).

- Sage-grouse avoided conifer at the 0.65 km scale (850m x 850m). Sage-grouse avoided mixed sagebrush/tree (≤40 trees/ha) at scales of 7.3 and 159.2 ha. Avoidance was most statistically supported when patch widths exceeded 200 m (Doherty 2008).

- Sage-grouse avoid areas encroached by P-J at scales of 7.9 ha to 226.8 ha (Casazza et al 2011).

- Recent modeling efforts by the Sage-grouse Initiative have shown that no leks remained active when P-J cover exceeded >4% and recommended focusing P-J removal treatments in Phase I stands (Baruch-Mordo et al 2013).

- Research focused on treatment effectiveness indicated that mechanical tree thinning increased native understory biomass by 200 percent (Brockway et al 2002).

- Removal, by cutting, of pinyon- juniper trees/shrubs in association with brush-beating to reduce height of mountain big sagebrush and deciduous brush resulted in doubling numbers of male sage grouse counted on treatment leks in years 2 and 3 post-treatment (Commons 1999).

**Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Establish and maintain a resilient sagebrush ecosystem and restore sagebrush vegetation communities in order to provide for the conservation of sage-grouse and their habitat.

**Objective 1.1:** Reduce the expansion of P-J woodlands into otherwise suitable sage-grouse habitat.

***Management Action 1.1.1:*** Inventory and prioritize areas for treatment of Phase I and Phase II encroachment that is contiguous with suitable sage-grouse habitat in Core, Priority, and General Management Areas in order to achieve sage-grouse habitat objectives (Table 4.1). Treat areas that have the greatest opportunity for recovery to suitable sage-grouse habitat based on ecological site potential.

***Management Action 1.1.2:*** Prioritize areas for treatment of Phase III pinyon-juniper encroachment in strategic areas only to break up continuous, hazardous fuel beds, create movement corridors, or connect habitats. Treat areas that have the greatest opportunity for recovery to suitable sage-grouse habitat based on ecological site potential. Old growth trees should be protected on woodland sites.

***Management Action 1.1.3****:* Aggressively implement plans to remove Phase I and Phase II encroachment in areas contiguous with suitable sage-grouse habitat. Only treat areas in Phase III encroachment to reduce the threat of severe conflagration, create movement corridors, or connect habitats. Phase III treatments may need additional rehabilitation actions if perennial understory vegetation is absent.

***Management Action 1.1.4:*** Allow temporary road access to P-J encroached treatment areas. Construct temporary access roads where access is needed with

minimum design standards to avoid and minimize impacts. Remove and restore temporary roads upon completion of treatment.

***Management Action 1.1.5:*** Seek sufficient resources to address habitat loss and degradation in the next ten years.

***Management Action 1.1.6:*** Share project funding among all appropriate agencies and jurisdictions by designing and completing NEPA for large-scale, watershed-based treatments over a period of years.

***Management Action 1.1.7*****:** Incentivize and assist in the development of bio-fuels and other commercial uses of pinyon and juniper resources, where utilization is appropriate and can expand site-specific restoration and rehabilitation goals and objectives

***Management Action 1.1.8:*** Increase the incentives for private industry investment in biomass removal, land restoration, and renewable energy development by authorizing stewardship contracts for up to 20 years.

***Management Action 1.1.9:*** Work with federal, state, local, tribal, and private partners to treat at least 100,000 acres annually. Monitor, adaptively manage, and report progress to the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council.

***Management Action 1.1.10:*** Use pre-suppression fuels management treatments in strategic areas so fire in P-J areas can be managed appropriately.

***Management Action 1.1.11:*** Work with federal, state, and local fire management partners to pre-plan for fire use and prescribed natural fire where and when appropriate.

## 7.3 Predation

Predation is a natural factor operating on all sage-grouse populations. Historically, given appropriate quality and quantity of habitat, sage-grouse populations have persisted despite naturally high levels of predation with which they evolved (Schroeder and Baydack 2001, Hagen 2011). Prey species have evolved ways to avoid predation such as coloration that conceals them, behavioral adaptations, and specialized reproductive strategies. Sage-grouse populations typically mitigate impacts of predation through cryptic nesting, increased chick production, re-nesting efforts, and response to annual habitat variation. When population levels become depressed below a particular threshold, quantity and quality of habitat may be diminished, or predator populations may become abundant enough to serve as a limiting factor, the behaviors and life-history strategies of prey species may not be able to compensate for losses from predators depending on numerous factors influencing predator densities and effects. These factors include: predator search efficiency, prey switching, and food subsidies (Cote and Sutherland 1997, Schroeder and Baydack 2001, Hagen 2011).

### Predator Species

Predators can affect sage-grouse during various life stages in three ways: 1) nesting success, 2) survival of chicks during the first few weeks after hatch, and 3) annual survival of breeding age birds (Schroeder and Baydack 2001). Table 7-1 outlines potential predator species in Nevada that may influence each life stage.

**Table 7-1 Potential Sage-grouse Predator Species in Nevada**

| | Life Stage | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Predator Species** | **Nest** | **Chick** | **Juvenile and Adult** |
| American badger (*Taxidea taxis*) | X | | X |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) | X | | |
| Coyote (*Canus latrans*) | X | | X |
| Fox (*Vulpes* spp.) | X | | |
| Great Basin gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*) | | X | |
| Raptors (*Buteo* spp., *Aquila* spp. *Circus* spp, etc.) | | | X |
| Common raven (*Corvus corax*) | X | X | |
| Weasels (*Mustela* spp.) | X | X | |

(Connelly et al. 2004, Coates et al. 2008, Lockyer et al. 2013)

None of these predators depend on sage-grouse as their primary prey species. Many depend primarily on rodents or lagomorphs but will opportunistically consume sage-grouse, especially during specific life phases (e.g. badgers during the nesting season (Coates and Delehanty 2010).

The common raven (*Corvus corax*) is identified as the most frequent predator during nesting season in sage-grouse predator studies conducted recently in the Great Basin (Coates et al. 2008, Lockyer et al. 2013). Raven populations have increased over 200 percent from 1992 to 2012 in both the Great Basin and in Nevada, based upon USGS Breeding Bird Survey results (Sauer et al. 2014). Subsidized food sources such as landfills and road kill; elevated nest platforms provided by transmission lines; and landscape alterations such as transitions to annual grasses, can increase raven populations (Boarman 2003, Boarman and Heinrich 1999, Webb et al. 2004). Raven abundance is often tied to habitat quality, particularly in areas where recently burned areas abut unburned habitat (Howe et al. 2014, Coates et al., In Review). Raven control has been shown to be an effective, short-term, tool during the early nesting season to gain increased survival through the nesting and early brood life cycle stages (Coates et

al. 2007) when ravens are the limiting factor affecting nest success. Long-term effects at the population level are still not understood.

Given that ravens have been found to be increasing across the West and juvenile survival of ravens is tied to anthropogenic subsidies (Webb et al. 2004), localized lethal efforts are not likely to be successful in reducing state-wide populations (Webb et al. 2004). Thus, effective raven management needs to also include efforts to reduce food, water, and nesting subsidies.

**Current State Predation Management Efforts for Sage-grouse**

The following presents information on the State of Nevada's current predator control efforts to benefit sage-grouse populations.

*Predator control*

NDOW is partnered with USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services for predator control focusing on carnivores (primarily badgers and coyotes) and ravens. NDOW currently has a depredation permit from the FWS for 2,500 ravens. Much of the take under this permit is conducted using poisoned eggs (hard-boiled chicken eggs that contain DRC-1339, an avicide). Poisoned eggs are placed at specific leks for ravens as a means of limiting raven populations during the sage-grouse nesting season. (See Appendix D for additional details regarding FWS depredation permits for ravens.)

*Road kill removal*

In cooperation with NDOT, county road crews, USFWS, and UNR, NDOW has hired wildlife technicians to experimentally remove road carrion from three treatment areas in northern Nevada, in and around priority sage-grouse nesting habitat.

*Landfill management*

NDOW is working in cooperation with city and county municipalities, private entities, and the USFWS in Humboldt, Eureka, and Lander Counties to improve waste stream policies to minimize access by predator species and to increase the frequency of food waste and dead animal pit burials.

**Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Reduce sage-grouse mortality due to predation where predation mortality is likely additive or is a limiting factor influencing sage-grouse populations.

The following three objectives should be carried out concurrently as part of an integrated predator management plan.

The management actions identified under Objective 1.1 should be carried out at the state-wide level, or at a more localized, targeted scale, as appropriate.

**Objective 1.1:** Reduce anthropogenic subsidies to ravens, such as food sources (e.g. road kill, landfills), and nesting substrates (e.g. power lines), especially cognizant in landscapes with heterogeneous land cover, such as burned and unburned areas.

***Management Action 1.1.1****:* Coordinate with NDOT and local governments to identify high density road kill areas to focus interagency road kill removal efforts. Provide information to agency staff that explains the need for the effort and outlines disposal options and procedures.

***Management Action 1.1.2****:* Work with city and county governments to develop and adopt procedures that minimize availability of refuse in the urban interface that acts as food and water sources for predators.

***Management Action 1.1.3****:* At landfills and waste transfer facilities, work with Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and facility managers to develop and adopt procedures that eliminate food and water sources for predators.

***Management Action 1.1.4****:* Work with livestock owners, land managers, and regulatory authorities to develop and implement effective methods to reduce or eliminate exposed animal carcasses or other livestock by-products that may provide a food subsidy for predators.

***Management Action 1.1.5****:* Collaborate with and provide informational material to stakeholders, such as Nevada Association of Counties, League of Cities, sportsmen's groups, Nevada Cattlemen's Association, and the general public on raven subsidy issues; such as refuse in urban areas, livestock carcasses and by-products, and wildlife carcasses (coyote, squirrels, rabbits).

***Management Action 1.1.6****:* Research and develop management techniques to limit or reduce the availability of water subsidies to ravens. This may be very challenging and will likely require new technologies and techniques given Nevada's arid environment, distance between natural water sources, and the need for anthropogenic watering sites accessible to both livestock and wildlife.

***Management Action 1.1.7:*** Reduce and eliminate artificial hunting perches and nesting substrate for aerial predators (e.g., removal of non-operational fences and power lines, installation of anti-perch devices on existing and new power lines).

***Management Action 1.1.8:*** Encourage continued research in the development of more effective perching and nesting deterrent options.

***Management Action 1.1.9:*** Monitor the effects of efforts to reduce anthropogenic subsidies on raven populations and adapt management accordingly.

Objectives 1.2 and 1.3 should be implemented in localized areas where predation has been identified as a limiting factor on sage-grouse population. Use the "Process to

Prioritize Integrated Predator Management Projects" (See Appendix E) before engaging in Objectives 1.2 and 1.3. .

**Objective 1.2:** Maintain or improve habitat integrity by increasing visual cover to reduce detection by predators or by reducing fragmentation to limit habitat for ravens.

***Management Action 1.2.1:*** Maintain a mosaic of shrub cover conditions with ≥20% sagebrush cover and ≥30 percent total shrub cover and decreasing opportunities for large fires using pre-suppression strategies in nesting habitat to provide increased cover for nesting and escape (Gregg et al. 1994, Coates and Delehanty 2010).

***Management Action 1.2.2:*** Maintain residual grass cover in nesting habitat to provide increased cover for nesting and escape (Gregg et al. 1994, Gregg and Crawford 2009, Coates and Delehanty 2008). This factor is more important if shrub cover is low.

***Management Action 1.2.3:*** Where appropriate, begin recovery of degraded sites to decrease edge of non-native annual grasses next to intact Core or Priority Management Areas and to reduce fragmentation.

***Management Action 1.2.4:*** Minimize disturbance activities near leks during lek season (i.e., when males are inattentive and most vulnerable to predation) and near nest sites during nesting season that may result in adults flushing off nests or away from young. (In this instance, disturbance activities are anything that may cause birds to flush such as startling noise [explosions], road traffic, human presence, etc.). Use seasonal restrictions on activities, when appropriate, to minimize disturbances.

**Objective 1.3:** Conduct targeted predator control, based on monitoring and adaptive management. Objective 1.3 should be implemented pursuant to steps to achieve objectives 1 and 2.

***Management Action 1.3.1****:* From the outcome of the Process to Prioritize Integrated Predator Management Projects (see below), establish a predator control program based on biological assessments appropriate to local conditions. Conduct predator control to coincide with the life stage impacted by predation. Program development needs to include specific goals and objectives and identification of triggers or endpoints for management practices. Monitor pre- and post-treatment predator numbers or densities as appropriate, and effects of predator control on sage-grouse vital rates and adapt control strategies accordingly.

***Management Action 1.3.2:*** When conducting raven control programs using DRC-1339, the methods outlined in Coates et al. (2007) should be adhered. The ~~f~~following points should be evaluated when conducting raven control programs:

- The assumed ratio of number of ravens removed to baited eggs placed
- Need for pre-baiting to accustom ravens to their presence
- Length of time eggs should be left in the environment
- Spacing of egg and number of eggs placed together
- Consideration to implement treatment yearly, based on monitoring of raven population response
- Treatment should be conducted early in sage-grouse incubation period (within the first 40 days following first average nest initiation for the season) to coincide with greatest raven predation period (Coates and Delehanty 2008, Lockyer 2013)

~~[[This management action will be further fleshed out to provide a "how to" guide based on best available science. Still to be developed .]Following objectives 1, then 2, then 3.]~~The SETT will work with subject experts (USGS, NDOW, Wildlife Services) to develop a standardized protocol for effective raven removal efforts.

***Management Action 1.3.3****:* Consider option to oil or addle eggs in nests of territorial ravens found on anthropogenic structures as part of raven control program, when appropriate.

***Management Action 1.3.4:*** Document success through a rigorous monitoring, analysis, and reporting of population responses to control efforts. For raven control programs, if there is a demonstrated benefit to sage-grouse via scientifically valid documentation, submit a request to USFWS for increased allowable take of ravens, assuming personnel availability from NDOW and Wildlife Services to appropriately identify locations and conduct work.

## 7.4 Wild Horses and Burros Management

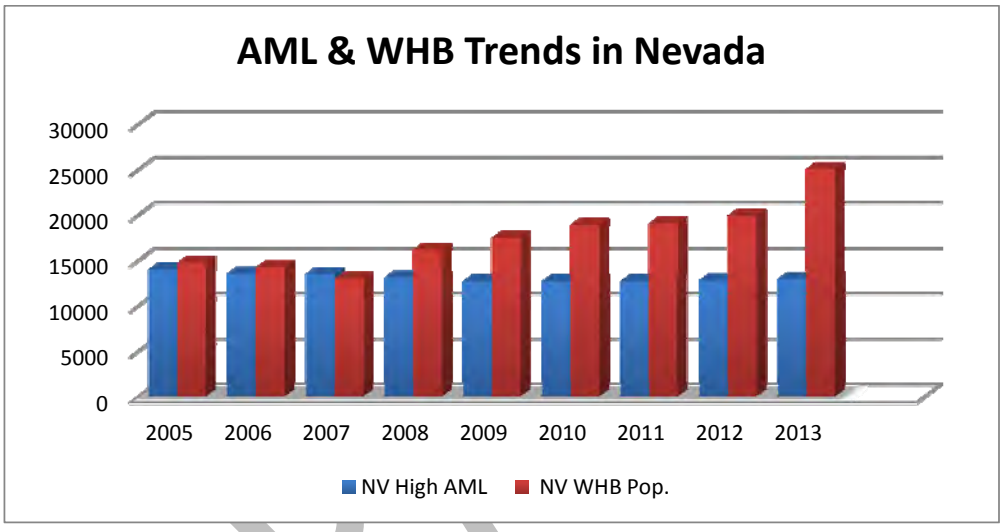
The State of Nevada supports multiple uses on public lands and the responsible and active management of those lands uses, including wild horses and burros, which are protected by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (the Act) of 1971. While that Act protects them from harassment and unjustified removal or destruction, it also allows for the proper management of wild horse and burro populations within the Herd Management Areas (HMAs) on BLM land and Wild Horse and Burro Territories (WHBTs) on USFS land that are within Herd Areas (HAs). Proper management of herd populations serves to protect their health as well as that of the habitat they and other species rely upon. The Act acknowledges the need to maintain the wild horses and burros within established Appropriate Management Levels (AML). This State supports the Act as it was initially authorized and offers recommendations for alternative management actions necessary to attain and maintain herd sizes that promote the continued health and diversity among wild horses and burros and allows for a sustainable sagebrush ecosystem that is mutually beneficial to all land uses and users.

### How HAs, HMAs, WHBTs, and AMLs are established

Under the Act, BLM and USFS are required to manage wild horses and burros only in HAs where they were found when the Act passed in 1971. Through land use planning, the BLM and USFS evaluated each HA to determine if it had adequate food, water, cover, and space to sustain healthy and diverse wild horse and burro populations over the long-term. The areas which met these criteria were then designated as HMAs and WHBTs (BLM 2013, BLM 2014).

BLM and USFS also evaluated each HMA to determine how much forage is available for use. The available forage is then allocated among wildlife, wild horses and burros and domestic livestock. The number of horses and burros which can graze without causing damage to the range is called the AML (BLM 2013, BLM 2014).

**Nevada's annual AMLs as compared to Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) population estimates**
**(http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/herd_management/Data.html 2/28/1014)**




**Current estimates of wild horses from the BLM and USFS are as follows (Shepherd 2014, BLM 2013):**

- National: 37,300
- Nevada: 24,000-26,500
- National AML: 26,600
- Nevada AML: 12,688
- 84.3 percent of Nevada HMAs are at or exceed AML
- 70 of the 83 HMAs statewide are at or exceed AML
- 49 of the 62 HMAs overlapping sage-grouse habitat are at or exceed AML
- 10 of the 14 WHBTs overlapping sage-grouse habitat are at or exceed AML
- Nationally, over 50,000 horses are currently held in captivity in either short term holding facilities or long term private pastures

Wild horses are capable of increasing their numbers by 18 percent to 25 percent annually, resulting in the doubling of wild horse populations about every 4 years (Wolfe et al. 1989; Garrott et al. 1991). Wild horses are a long-lived species with survival rates estimated between 80 and 97 percent (Wolfe et al. 1980; Eberhardt et al. 1982; Garrrott and Taylor 1990) and they are a non-self-regulating species. There are 62 HMAs and 14 WHBTs that overlap with sage-grouse habitat in Nevada (BLM 2013, BLM 2014).

While nationally more than 220,000 wild horses and burros have been adopted by private citizens since the program began in 1971, the levels of adoption have decreased dramatically since 2007 (Shepherd, personal communication). In 2013 nationally there were 4,221 horses removed and 2,400 were either adopted or sold. In 2013 in Nevada there were 2,787 horses removed and 89 were adopted or sold (Shepherd 2014). In order to maintain current population levels in Nevada (most are currently near or exceeding the high range of AML), approximately 4,300 – 6,600 horses would need to be removed annually statewide, in the absence of using effective population growth suppression techniques.

The State of Nevada will work closely with federal agencies to develop new, and expand on existing strategies, policies, and best management practices to attain sustainable wild horse and burro populations within HMAs and WHBTs. The State of Nevada will also engage Congressional representatives and their staff to secure assistance in the implementation of the management activities authorized within the Act.

**Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Support, promote, and facilitate full implementation of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, as amended, including to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship, without alternation of its implementation by subsequent Congresses or Presidential administrations.

Recognizing that if action is not taken until herd health has become an issue, the range and water resources are likely to be in a highly degraded and potentially irreversible state. Non-active management (e.g. let nature take its course, wait until horse health or resource conditions are critical) is not acceptable management. Non-management will negatively impact or potentially create irreversible habitat impacts within the SGMA; therefore, use all tools available to actively manage wild horses and burros within HMAs and WHBTs.

**Objective 1.1:** Maintain healthy and diverse wild horse and burro populations in the State of Nevada in a manner that meets sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1).

***Management Action 1.1.1:*** Focus expenditures of appropriated funds on management of wild horses and burros on public lands over care in captivity.

***Management Action 1.1.2:*** Even if current AML is not being exceeded, yet habitat within the SGMA continues to become degraded, at least partially due to wild horses or burros, established AMLs within the HMA or WHBT should be reduced through the NEPA process and monitored annually to help determine future management decisions. Unless already meeting the lowest established AML level, during periods of drought, AMLs should be reduced to a level that is consistent with maintaining sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1).

***Management Action 1.1.3:*** Methods that were used to initially establish AMLs should be reevaluated to determine if they are still sufficient to achieve sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1).

***Management Action 1.1.4:*** Use professionals (botanists, rangeland ecologists, wildlife biologists, hydrologists, etc.) from diverse backgrounds to conduct land health assessments, and riparian proper functioning condition.

***Management Action 1.1.5:*** Conduct annual site specific wild horse and burro grazing response indices assessments, and habitat objective assessments.

***Management Action 1.1.6:*** When implementing management activities, water developments, or rangeland improvements for wild horses or burros, consider both direct and indirect effects on sage-grouse and use the applicable Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features (Design Features; see Appendix A) to minimize potential impacts or disturbances.

***Management Action 1.1.7:*** In order to expedite recovery time and enhance restoration efforts following wildfire or sage-grouse habitat enhancement projects, consider a significant reduction and temporary removal or exclusion of all wild horses and burros within or from burned areas where HMAs and WHBT overlap with sage-grouse Core, Priority, and General Management Areas. Wild horse grazing behaviors and specialized physiological requirements make unmanaged grazing on recently burned/treated areas problematic for reestablishment of burned and/or seeded vegetation (Arnold and Dudzinski 1978, Rittenhouse et al. 1982, Duncan et al. 1990, Hanley 1982, Wagner 1983, Menard et al. 2002, Stoddart et al. 1975, Symanski1994).

***Management Action 1.1.8:*** If current AML is being exceeded, consider emergency short-term measures to reduce or avoid degradation of sage-grouse habitat from HMAs or WHBT that are in excess of established AML levels within the SGMA.

Plan for and implement an immediate reduction in herd size to a level that would enable the area to recover to meet the habitat objectives in Table 4.1 and

to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship in that area. Consider lowering the AML levels to prevent future damage.

***Management Action 1.1.9:*** If monitored sites are not meeting sage-grouse habitat objectives in Table 4.1, even if AML is being met, and it is determined that wild horses or burros are the primary causal factor, then implement protective measures as applicable in addressing similar emergencies (e.g. fire, flood, drought, etc.).

Consider exclusionary or controlled use pasture fencing of riparian or other mesic sites and implement water developments (following the Design Features as described in Appendix A) to ensure dispersal or avoidance of sites heavily impacted by wild horses (Feist 1971, Pellegrini 1971, Ganskopp and Vavra 1986, Naiman et al. 1992). A water source should be provided, as horses traditionally do not leave known water sources just because they are fenced.

***Management Action 1.1.10:*** As climate data become available, adjust wild horse and burro and rangeland management practices to allow for Core, Priority, and General Management Areas to sustain or increase the sagebrush ecosystem resiliency and resistance.

***Management Action 1.1.11:*** Collaborate with weather and climate professionals and agencies (UNR, DRI, NOAA, etc.) to proactively manage the rangelands resources and adjust, as necessary, the current wild horse and burro management policies. Ensure that sufficient ongoing public and political education is provided.

**Objective 1.2:** Evaluate conflicts with HMA designations in SGMAs and modify LUPs to avoid negative impacts on sage-grouse.

***Management Action 1.2.1:*** Even if current AML is not being exceeded, yet habitat within the SGMA continues to become degraded, at least partially due to wild horses or burros, established AMLs within the HMA or WHBT should be reduced and resource objectives monitored annually to help determine future management decisions. Unless already meeting the lowest established AML level, during periods of drought, AMLs should be reduced to a level that is consistent with maintaining sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1). *(same as Management Action 1.1.2)*

***Management Action 1.2.2:*** Ensure that Herd Management Area Plans and WHBT plans are developed and/or amended within the Core, Priority, and General management areas, identified in the State's management areas map, taking into consideration the sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1).

***Management Action 1.2.3:*** Conduct herd management activities, as originally authorized, to avoid conflicts between the potential implementation of regulations within the Wild Free- Roaming Horses and Burros Act and the Endangered Species Act

**Goal 2:** As authorized in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971: Achieve and maintain wild horses and burros at or below established AMLs within the SGMA and mange for zero horse populations in non-designated areas within the SGMA to reduce impacts to sage-grouse habitat.

**Objective 2.1:** Meet established AMLs in all HMAs and WHBTs in Core, Priority, and General Management Areas within five years.

***Management Action 2.1.1:*** Focus expenditures of appropriated funds on management of wild horses and burros on public lands over care in captivity. *(same as Management Action1.1.1)*

***Management Action 2.1.2:*** Even if current AML is not being exceeded, yet habitat within the SGMA continues to become degraded, at least partially due to wild horses or burros, established AMLs within the HMA or WHBT should be reduced and resource objectives monitored annually to help determine future management decisions. Unless already meeting the lowest established AML level, during periods of drought, AMLs should be reduced to a level that is consistent with maintaining sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1). *(same as Management Action 1.1.2)*

***Management Action 2.1.3:*** Methods that were used to initially establish AMLs should be reevaluated to determine if they are still sufficient to achieve sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1). (same as Management Action 1.1.3)

***Management Action 2.1.4:*** Given their capability to increase their numbers by 18%-25% annually, resulting in the doubling in population every 4-5 years (Wolfe et al. 1989; Garrott et al. 1991), wild horse gathers should be conducted to attain the lowest levels of AML. This in combination with continued and expanded use and development of effective forms of population growth suppression techniques will enable AML to be maintained for longer periods and reduce the frequency of gathers and associated cost and effort.

***Management Action 2.1.5:*** If current AML is being exceeded, consider emergency short-term measures to reduce or avoid degradation of sage-grouse habitat from HMAs or WHBT that are in excess of established AML levels within the SGMA.

Plan for and implement an immediate reduction in herd size to a level that would enable the area to recover to meet the habitat objectives in Table 4.1 and to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use

relationship in that area. Consider lowering the AML levels to prevent future damage. *(same as Management Action 1.1.7)*

***Management Action 2.1.6:*** Prioritize gathers for removal and/or population growth suppression techniques in HMAs, HAs, and WHBTs first within the State's Core Management Areas and then within the Priority and General Management Areas. Additional prioritization should be given for HMAs and WHBTs that are near AML or where a reduction would serve the most beneficial purpose. Proactively and adaptively manage herd sizes taking into consideration climate variability and other natural phenomena, similar to the restrictions placed on livestock managers.

**Goal 3:** Support and conduct science based research and monitoring to more efficiently and effectively maintain AMLs in HMAs and WHBTs.

**Objective 3.1:** Implement more effective methods to conduct surveys and monitor wild horse and burro activities, populations, and responses to different herd management techniques.

***Management Action 3.1.1:*** Work with professionals from other federal and state agencies, researchers at universities, and others to continue to develop, expand, and test more effective population growth suppression techniques, including contraception options.

***Management Action 3.1.2:*** Implement a telemetry monitoring program for wild horses. Research regarding the direct interactions between, and in indirect effects of wild horses and sage-grouse is identified as a need and could further assist the agencies in the development of habitat selection maps (Beever and Aldridge et al. 2011) as well as offer a general understanding of the intensity, timing, and duration of use by wild horses within the SGMA.

***Management Action 3.1.3:*** Investigate the use of automated or time-lapse cameras or other monitoring methods to differentiate horse and livestock use impacts at key areas such as late brood-rearing habitats, use appropriate methods where combined use does not meet resource objectives. Subsequently, make management changes based upon monitoring data and resource objectives.

**7.5 Livestock Grazing**

Farming and ranching on private lands in unison with authorized livestock grazing on public lands has been a long standing arrangement for many private landowners in the State of Nevada. Historically, many homesteaders began to farm and ranch much of Nevada's riparian and mesic landscapes due to the availability of surface water or springs. Once developed, many of these mesic areas were expanded by the artificial spreading of water or irrigation. These larger, irrigation induced, privately and publicly owned meadows served to support many species of wildlife in addition to livestock. The meadows are not sufficient to support livestock year round. Today, by allowing for the authorized use of proper and targeted livestock grazing on public lands, private landowners and federal land managers can serve to protect or even benefit each other if managed properly (by reductions in fuels, targeted grazing of specific habitats and cheatgrass, etc.). The State of Nevada recognizes and supports this long standing beneficial relationship.

Livestock grazing (primarily sheep and cattle) has occurred on the Nevada landscape for over 170 years at varying levels. Many variables have contributed to the growth and reduction of the size and number of homesteads, as well as the number of livestock using the range, over the past century. While livestock grazing continues to be a highly contested use on public lands in the West, the State supports the proper management of livestock grazing on allotted public lands in Nevada. Davies et al. (2011, p. 2575) concluded based on literature review that "Though appropriately managed grazing is critical to protecting the sagebrush ecosystem, livestock grazing per se is not a stressor threatening the sustainability of the ecosystem. Thus, cessation of livestock grazing will not conserve the sagebrush ecosystem."

Dependent on many factors, livestock grazing can have a negative effect, a positive effect, or a neutral effect on sage-grouse habitat (Davies et al. 2009; Knopf 1996; Oakleaf 1971; Sjejcar et al. 2014; Whitehurst and Marlow 2013). If implemented

appropriately, the recommended actions listed in this section will assist landowners and land managers in managing appropriately to avoid or minimize negative impacts to sage-grouse habitat due to livestock grazing. The actions should also help to maintain the existing resistance and resilience of sagebrush communities and to protect the future persistence and sustainability of the diversity of other sage-grouse habitat types within the sagebrush ecosystem for those who depend on it.

The State supports grazing practices that incorporate a high level of flexibility through adaptive management to achieve the overall management and resource objectives agreed upon by the permittee and the land manager. The State will provide technical support to landowners through its combined resources and through partnerships with other governmental agencies and private industry. The State will continue to support the further understanding and development of rangeland management, resource conservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection that can be applied and supported, at least in part, by permittees and other land managers.

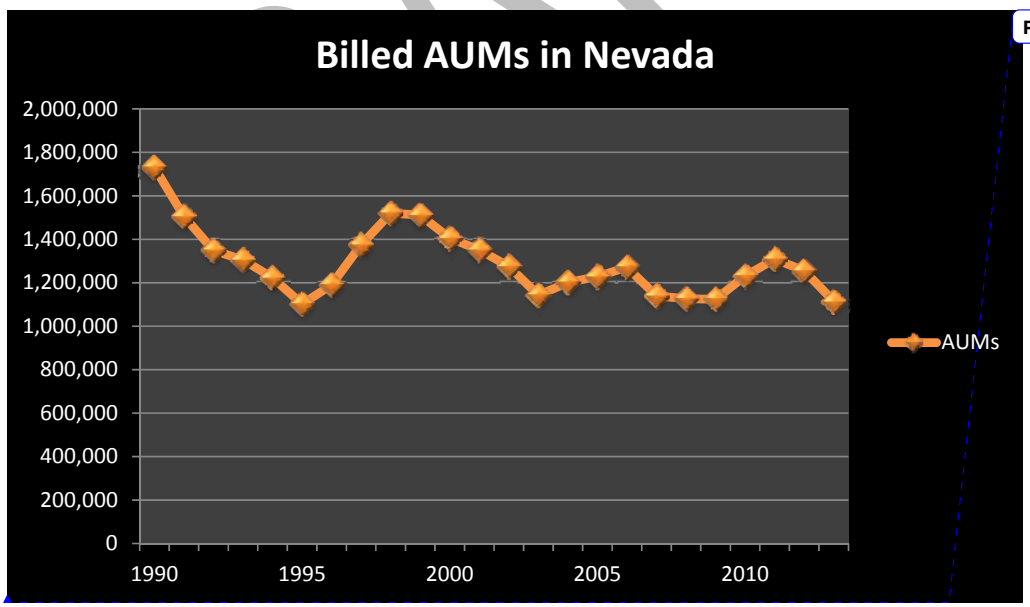
The State encourages private landowners to develop and implement conservation plans that serve to maintain or strengthen financial viability that also work to conserve or protect the renewable natural resources of Nevada, including sage-grouse and other wildlife species habitat.

The State will continue to support current, and development of new, public outreach and educational programs that assist with the proper understanding and implementation of the actions listed below to achieve the goals and objectives within this plan.

The State will also work with federal land managers and livestock owners to develop acceptable procedures to conduct consistent rangeland or resource monitoring with greater frequency. This should allow for greater flexibility in administering adaptive management decisions to achieve targeted goals and objectives.

The State encourages federal agencies to ensure that any loss of grazing allotment rights that were not directly attributable to the permittees actions or inactions are mitigated to attain a no-net-loss of AUMs.

As of July 2014, there are 2,073,664 active permitted animal unit months (AUMs) on BLM lands in Nevada. Of those, 540,371 of them are suspended, and 14, 374 are temporarily suspended. The graph below indicates the number of billed AUMs whether permitted or trespass. Billed AUMs are comprised of permitted livestock including cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. The graph does not display the total active and suspended AUMs or authorized non-use. For 2013, the active permitted AUMs were 2,133,562 with 572,618 suspended AUMs and the billed AUMs for 2013 were 1,115,251(BLM Rangeland Administration System).

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**Conservation Goal, Objective, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Ensure that existing grazing permits maintain or enhance sage-grouse habitat. Utilize livestock grazing when appropriate as a management tool to improve sage-grouse habitat quantity, quality, or to reduce wildfire threats. Based on a comprehensive understanding of seasonal sage-grouse habitat requirements, and in conjunction with the need for flexibility in livestock operations, make cooperative, timely, seasonal range management decisions to meet vegetation management objectives, including fuels reduction.

**Objective 1.1:** In sage-grouse habitat, manage for vegetation composition and structure that achieves sage-grouse seasonal habitat objectives (see Table 4.1), enhancing resilience and resistance based upon the ability of the ecological site to respond to management. This objective recognizes spatial and temporal variations across several stages.

***Management Action 1.1.1:*** Within sage-grouse habitat, incorporate sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1) and management considerations into all BLM and Forest Service grazing allotments through allotment management plans (AMPs), multiple use decisions, or permit renewals and/or Forest Service Annual Operating Instructions.

Implement appropriate prescribed grazing conservation actions at scales sufficient to influence a positive population response in sage-grouse habitat, such as NRCS conservation Practice Standard 528 for prescribed grazing (NRCS 2011).

***Management Action 1.1.2:*** In sage-grouse habitat, work cooperatively on integrated ranch planning within sage-grouse habitat so operations with deeded land, and BLM and/or Forest Service allotments, can be planned as single units,

providing flexibility and adaptive management across all ownerships and not altering stocking rates on operations for progressive management decisions.

***Management Action 1.1.3:*** Continue land health assessments on BLM public lands or other monitoring methods on Forest Service-administered lands in sage-grouse habitat to evaluate current conditions as compared to sage-grouse habitat objectives described in Table 4.1. Incorporate the results of BLM and Forest Service monitoring and land health assessments into future management applications to ensure progress toward meeting sage-grouse habitat objectives. Incorporate terms and conditions into grazing permits and adjust these as needed through monitoring and adaptive management to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives.

***Management Action 1.1.4:*** Implement management actions (grazing decisions, Annual Operating Instructions [Forest Service only], AMP/Conservation Plan development, or other agreements) to modify grazing management to meet seasonal sage-grouse habitat objectives as defined in Table 4.1 where current livestock grazing is identified as the causal factor of not meeting those objectives. Consider singly, or in combination, changes in:

1. Season, timing (duration) and/or rotation of use;
2. Distribution of livestock use;
3. Intensity of use;
4. Type of livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, horses, llamas, alpacas and goats; Briske et al. 2011); and
5. Numbers/ AUMs of livestock and other ungulates (includes temporary nonrenewable (TNR) use, and nonuse).

Before imposing grazing restrictions or seeking changes in livestock stocking rates or seasons of permitted use, federal agencies in coordination with grazing permittees must identify and implement all

economically and technically feasible livestock distribution, forage production enhancement, weed control programs, prescribed grazing systems, off-site water development by the water rights holder, shrub and pinyon/juniper control, livestock salting/supplementing plans, and establishment of riparian pastures and herding. (Eureka County Master Plan 2010)

***Management Action 1.1.5:*** Grazing management strategies for riparian areas and wet meadows should, at a minimum, maintain or achieve riparian Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) and promote brood rearing/summer habitat objectives, as described in Table 4.1, within sage-grouse habitat. Within sage-grouse habitat, manage wet meadows to maintain a component of available perennial forbs with diverse species richness to facilitate brood rearing and stabilizing riparian species (Burton et al. 2011) near where water flows to achieve or maintain PFC. Use Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) or locally relevant information about soils, hydrology, soil moisture, and site potential to set realistic objectives and evaluate assessments and monitoring data (Swanson et al. 2006). Also conserve or enhance wet meadow complexes to maintain or increase amount of edge and cover near that edge to minimize elevated mortality during the late brood rearing period (Hagen et al. 2007; Kolada et al. 2009a; Atamian et al. 2010) as observed throughout the stream/watershed and not limited to only easily accessible sites. Some defined areas of concentrated livestock use may be necessary to protect and enhance the overall riparian area.

***Management Action 1.1.6:*** Authorize new water development for diversion from spring or seep sources only when sage-grouse habitat would not be net negatively affected by the development. This includes developing new water

sources for livestock as part of an AMP/conservation plan to improve sage-grouse habitat.

***Management Action 1.1.7:*** Analyze springs, seeps and associated pipelines to find mutually beneficial enhancement opportunities for livestock and wildlife that restores functionality to riparian and mesic areas within sage-grouse habitat, and allow them to be developed.

***Management Action 1.1.8:*** In sage-grouse habitat, encourage and allow vegetation treatments that conserve, enhance, or adaptively restore resilience and resistance over time. This includes adaptive management as part of an AMP/Conservation Plan to improve sage-grouse habitat.

***Management Action 1.1.9:*** Evaluate the role of existing seedings that are currently composed of primarily introduced perennial grasses that are in and adjacent to sage-grouse habitat to determine if additional efforts should be made to restore sagebrush or to improve habitat quality for sage-grouse. If these seedings are part of an AMP/Conservation Plan or if they provide value in conserving, enhancing, or protecting the rest of the sage-grouse habitat, then no restoration may be necessary. Assess the compatibility of these seedings for sage-grouse habitat or as a component of a grazing system during the land health assessments (Davies et al. 2011), or other analyses such as the Humboldt-Toiyabe Resource Implementation Protocol for Rapid Assessment Matrices (USDAFS - HTNF 2007).

***Management Action 1.1.10:*** In sage-grouse habitat, ensure that the design of any new structural range improvements and plan the location of supplements (salt or protein blocks) to enhance sage-grouse habitat or minimize impacts in

order to meet sage-grouse objectives (see Table 4.1). Structural range improvements, in this context, include but are not limited to: cattle guards, fences, exclosures, corrals or other livestock handling structures; pipelines, troughs, storage tanks (including moveable tanks used in livestock water hauling), windmills, ponds/reservoirs, solar panels and spring developments. Potential for invasive species establishment or their increase following construction must be considered in the project plan and then monitored, treated, and rehabilitated post-construction.

***Management Action 1.1.11:*** Salting and supplemental feeding locations, temporary and/or mobile watering and new handling facilities (corrals, chutes, etc.) should be located at least 1/2-mile from riparian zones, springs, meadows, or 1 mile from active leks in sage-grouse habitat, unless the pasture is too small or another location offers equal or better habitat benefits. The distance should be based on local conditions.

***Management Action 1.1.12:*** To reduce sage-grouse strikes and mortality, remove, modify or mark fences in high risk areas within sage-grouse habitat based on proximity to lek, lek size, and topography (Christiansen 2009; Stevens 2011). Consideration of the utility of the fence should also be taken into consideration to ensure that its removal does not promote degradation of the overall management for habitat or other objectives (Swanson et al. 2006).

***Management Action 1.1.13:*** In sage-grouse habitat, monitor, treat and, if necessary, rehabilitate sites with invasive species associated with existing range improvements (Gelbard and Belnap 2003; Bergquist et al. 2007). State listed noxious weeds (NRS 555) should be given the highest priority. In general, monitor, map, treat (using integrated pest management and associated tools),

and rehabilitate sites that have invasive and noxious weed species, especially those associated with disturbance activities.

***Management Action 1.1.14:*** All permit relinquishments should be voluntary. All options to allow responsible management of livestock grazing on an allotment should be considered before any voluntary withdrawal of a grazing permit is considered, in conformance with the multiple use sections of the Taylor Grazing Act.

***Management Action 1.1.15:*** Prior to implementation, establish project monitoring sites where vegetation treatment is planned and monitor at least annually during the recovery period. To ensure effective recovery, monitoring should continue for a number of years immediately following the livestock exclusion period, depending on local site conditions.

***Management Action 1.1.16:*** When conditions, i.e., climatic variations (such as drought) and wildfire, requiring unique or exceptional management, work to protect sage-grouse habitat on a case by case basis and implement adaptive management to allow for vegetation recovery that meets resistance, resilience, and sage-grouse life cycle needs in sage-grouse habitat as needed on an individual allotment basis.

***Management Action 1.1.17:*** During the annual grazing application, work with permittees to avoid consistent concentrated turn-out locations for livestock within approximately 3 miles of known lek areas during the March 1 to May 15 period. During the March 1 to May 15 period, avoid domestic sheep use, bedding areas, and herder camps within at least 1.24 miles (2 kilometers) of known lek locations. Utilize land features and roads on maps provided to the

permittee to help demarcate livestock use avoidance areas. Require terms and conditions language for affected livestock grazing permits regarding livestock turnout locations during the lekking period. During the lekking period, use best management practices to avoid livestock aggregation around the lekking grounds.

***Management Action 1.1.18:*** Strive to improve and maintain regular communication at the allotment level between land management agency and the permittee to encourage proper management techniques. Land management agencies should coordinate with relevant state, local, and tribal government agencies and permittees to conduct regular trend monitoring at the allotment level. Encourage cooperative permittee monitoring, such as described in Perryman et al 2006, Swanson et al. 2006.

***Management Action 1.1.19:*** Promote and implement proper livestock grazing practices that promote the health of the perennial herbaceous vegetation component. Perennial grasses, especially, are strong competitors with cheatgrass (Booth et al. 2003; Chambers et al. 2007; Davies et al. 2008; Blank and Morgan 2012). Field research has demonstrated that moderate levels of livestock grazing can increase the resiliency of sagebrush communities, reduce the risk and severity of wildfire, and decrease the risk of exotic weed invasion (Davies et al. 2009 and Davies et al. 2010).

***Management Action 1.1.20:*** To reduce the risk of fire and enhance restoration in large contiguous blocks of cheatgrass-dominated sagebrush or sage-grouse habitats that are next to highly flammable cheatgrass dominated lands, create local NEPA documented plans to use tools (e.g. dormant season TNR AUM authorizations and stewardship contracted grazing), to reduce fuels in areas

dominated by invasive plants (Schmelzer et al. 2014). Use adaptive management to allow the use of TNR during other seasons, if science emerges demonstrating effectiveness of such practices. Planning should be conducted on an allotment specific basis, and may be contained in AMPs, multiple use decisions, or permit renewals.

***Management Action 1.1.21:*** To aid in planning adaptive management for the purpose of maintaining health of important forage plants (perennials needed for resilience and resistance), cooperatively strategize how various areas in sage-grouse habitat allotments can be managed differently each year to achieve positive grazing response index scores (Perryman et al 2006; Reed et al. 1999; Wyman et al. 2006; and USDA USFS 1996) and meet resource objectives.

## 7.6 Anthropogenic Disturbances

Anthropogenic disturbances, as defined in Section 3.0 of this State Plan, are a threat to sage-grouse and their habitat in Nevada; however these activities are a vital part of Nevada's economy. The State of Nevada seeks a balanced approach that allows for the preservation of Nevada's economy, while conserving and protecting sage-grouse populations and the sagebrush ecosystem upon which they need to survive. Nevada's strategy is to provide consultation for project planning to first avoid and minimize impacts to sage-grouse (see Section 3.0) and then to offset residual impacts through compensatory mitigation via the Conservation Credit System (see Section 8.0).

Anthropogenic disturbances can negatively impact sage-grouse both directly and indirectly, and through various mechanisms. Anthropogenic disturbances can directly impact sage-grouse by causing direct loss of habitat, avoidance behavior to infrastructure (Doherty et al. 2008) and to otherwise suitable habitat (Lyon and Anderson 2003, Holloran 2005, Kaiser 2006, Doherty et al 2008), direct mortality through collision with infrastructure (Beck et al 2006, Stevens et al 2012) and mosquitos carrying the West Nile virus (Walker and Naugle 2011) associated with artificial ponds created by development (Zou et al 2006), and negative impacts to survival and reproduction (Lyon and Anderson 2003, Holloran 2005, Kaiser 2006, Aldridge and Boyce 2007, Holloran et al 2007). Indirect impacts on sage-grouse demographics can be caused by noise produced from operations (Braun et al 2002, Holloran 2005, Kaiser 2006, Blickley et al 2012), vehicle traffic on associated roads (Lyon and Anderson 2003), and increased predation by raptors perching on associated power lines (Ellis 1984). Moreover, anthropogenic disturbances can lead to an increase in the presence of cheatgrass and other invasive plant species (Bradley and Mustard 2006, Manier et al 2014). In addition, habitat fragmentation resulting from cumulative effects of multiple anthropogenic disturbances across the landscape has been shown to have long term

negative impacts on sage-grouse populations (Johnson et al 2011, Knick and Hanser 2011, Knick et al 2013).

*Mining*

Mining is a vital part of the state of Nevada's economy both currently and historically. The initial discovery of the Comstock Lode silver ore deposit in Virginia City in the 1850s was central to the settling and development of Nevada, as well as a major reason for Nevada's admission into the United States in 1864. The Nevada Department of Taxation currently estimates the net assessed mineral value in the State to be approximately $5.1 billion (State of Nevada 2014) and the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology (NBMG) estimates the total production value at $10.76 billion (NBMG 2014)[2]. The annual tax revenue collected in fiscal year 2013 was approximately $236 million (State of Nevada 2014). It is estimated that Nevada's mining economic output contributes a 6% share of Nevada's statewide GDP (Nevada Mining Association 2011).

The primary type of mineral exploration and development in the state of Nevada is locatable minerals, including gold, silver, and copper. Locatable mineral development and exploration is governed under the General Mining Law of 1872 and is a non-discretionary activity on federal lands. Additional federal, state, and local laws also govern locatable minerals. Salable and non-energy leasable mineral exploration and development also occurs, though to a lesser extent. Salable mineral materials, which are common varieties of construction materials and aggregates, such as sand, stone, and gravel are governed under the Materials Acts of 1947. Government and non-profit organizations may obtain these resources free of charge for community purposes on BLM and USFS administered lands. The Nevada Department of Transportation and local governments are the primary users of gravel and sand resources on federal lands in Nevada. Non-energy leasable minerals, such as potassium and sodium, which are

[2] The State of Nevada 2014 estimate is for FY 12-13 (June 2012 – July 2013) and the NBMG estimate is for calendar year 2012. Both estimates also include geothermal energy and petroleum production.

governed under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 are also present, however there are currently no leases in sage-grouse habitat in Nevada (BLM 2013).

The extent of mining activities across the state of Nevada overlaps with the range of sage-grouse habitat. There are approximately 2 million acres of locatable mineral claims in sage-grouse habitat in Nevada (BLM 2013). The total "footprint" of mining in Nevada is estimated at 169,029 and 181,340 acres by BLM and NDEP respectively (~~Biaggi personal communication 2014~~Johnson personal communication 2014, Holmgren personal communication 2014). Mining and its associated facilities and infrastructure may result in habitat fragmentation, direct habitat loss, and indirect impacts decreasing the suitability of otherwise suitable habitat (USFWS 2013). The specific impacts of mining on sage-grouse and their habitat have not been studied (Manier 2013)~~; however the consistency in findings from research evaluating the impacts of different types of anthropogenic disturbances, principally oil and gas development, on sage-grouse (Naugle et al 2011), may offer insights to the impacts of other anthropogenic disturbances, such as mining~~.

*Non-Renewable Energy Production*

There is currently little oil and gas development in Nevada. Oil production in Nevada has been on a steady decline and is currently limited to approximately 336,000 barrels of oil production annually (Nevada Division of Minerals 2014a). Within sage-grouse habitat it is limited to two major basins, including the Railroad Valley and Pine Valley, with Railroad Valley being the predominant oil-producing valley in Nevada (BLM 2013). However, with recent federal approval of oil and gas exploration in, Nevada (BLM 2014), coupled with the emergence of new technologies, there may be potential for increased oil and gas production in the State pending results of the exploration.

In a comprehensive literature review of the impacts of energy development, principally oil and gas, on sage-grouse conducted by Naugle et al (2011), all studies reported negative effects, while no positive impacts to sage-grouse populations or habitat were

reported. Negative responses of sage-grouse were consistent regardless of whether lek dynamics or demographic rates were studied (Naugle et al 2011). The specific direct and indirect impacts are described above.

*Renewable Energy Production*

The development, transmission, and distribution of renewable and non-renewable energy is a high priority for the state of Nevada. Shifting national and state energy policies, as well as Nevada's favorable conditions for different types of renewable energy resources, renewable energy development is likely to increase in the State. The SEP supports Nevada's Renewable Portfolio Standard goal of 25% of Nevada's energy coming from renewable sources by 2025. In addition, the Nevada Public Utilities Commission this year ruled in accordance with Nevada S.B. 123 requiring the retirement of no less than 300 MW of coal-fired electrical generating capacity on or before December 31, 2014, and not less than 250 MW of coal-fired electrical generating capacity on or before December 31, 2017 (Public Utilities Commission of Nevada 2014).

Renewable energy resources in Nevada include geothermal, wind, solar, and biomass. Nevada has vast geothermal resources and is leading the way in geothermal energy development in the United States. As of the end of 2013, of the 3442 MW of installed generating capacity in the U.S. (Matek 2014), Nevada contributes 586 MW (Nevada Division of Minerals 2014b), representing approximately 17% of total installed capacity in the U.S. Nevada is outpacing the rest of the country in developing geothermal projects. Nevada accounted for approximately 41% of the total number of projects under development in the U.S. since 2011 (Matek 2014). Nevada currently has 22 operating geothermal plants at 14 different locations (Nevada Division of Minerals 2014b). There are significant geothermal resources in northern Nevada that coincide with the sage-grouse habitat range. Recent geothermal projects that coincide with sage-grouse habitat include the Tuscarora, McGinness Hills, and Jersey Valley Geothermal Power Plants.

Wind energy is one of the fastest growing renewable energy sectors in the U.S.; however the potential viability for development of this resource in Nevada is currently limited. Analysis conducted as part of BLM's Wind Energy Development Programmatic EIS showed most of Nevada's wind power classification rated as poor to fair, with only small pockets classified as good to outstanding (BLM 2005). Some of those pockets however, overlap with sage-grouse habitat. Currently there is one wind generation facility in Nevada, the Spring Valley Wind Project; an approximately 150 MW facility located approximately 30 miles east of Ely, NV.

The BLM, as part of a Programmatic ~~Environmental~~ EIS for Solar Energy Development, developed Solar Energy Zones (SEZ), defined as areas well suited for utility scale production of solar energy. Five SEZs were identified for Nevada; all located in Clark, southern Nye, and Lincoln counties, outside the range of sage-grouse (BLM 2012). There are currently no solar energy rights of ways within sage-grouse habitat in Nevada (BLM 2013).

There is currently no significant commercial conifer biomass energy economy in Nevada (BLM 2013); however considering that pinyon-juniper expansion is one of the major threats facing sage-grouse in Nevada, the SEP encourages exploring and incentivizing biomass energy development in the State.

Renewable energy development can negatively impact sage-grouse both directly and indirectly, and through various mechanisms. Impacts to sage-grouse from geothermal energy development have not been assessed in the scientific literature because the development has been too recent to identify immediate and lag effects (Knick et al 2011). There are currently no commercial solar projects operating in sage-grouse habitats at this time, so the impacts cannot be assessed. There has been one study on the effects on sage-grouse from wind energy developments recently completed in south-central Wyoming, which demonstrated that the relative probabilities of sage-grouse nest and brood success decreased with proximity to wind turbines (LeBeau

2012). Wind energy generation also requires tall structures, which can provide artificial nesting and perching substrate for sage-grouse predators (Knight and Kawashima 1993). Renewable energy development requires many of the same features for construction and operation as non-renewable energy, so it is anticipated that the potential impacts from direct habitat loss, habitat fragmentation through roads and power lines, noise, and increased human presence would most likely be similar to those for non-renewable energy production (USFWS 2010).

*Infrastructure*

Infrastructure whether related to energy production, mining, or any other purpose, can adversely impact sage-grouse. Infrastructure can result in habitat loss and fragmentation, sage-grouse avoidance of otherwise suitable habitat, provide a source for the spread of invasive species, and provide artificial subsidies for predators (USFWS 2013). Infrastructure most common in Nevada includes transmission lines, distribution lines and roads. Other types of infrastructure may also include, but is not limited to, pipelines, communication towers, and fences.

Transmission and distribution lines (hereafter collectively referred to as power lines) are necessary for transmitting energy from power production facilities and distributing that power to homes and businesses. Power lines may directly impact sage-grouse through habitat loss and fragmentation (Knick et al 2013), as well as direct mortality due to collisions (Beck et al 2006). Indirect habitat loss due to avoidance of vertical structures, presumably due to increases in predator populations is also a concern (Manier 2013). Power lines have been shown to decrease male lek attendance (Ellis 1985) and probability of lek persistence (Walker et al 2007), as well as causing avoidance behavior of brood-rearing habitat (LeBeau 2012). Power lines have been shown to increase predator distributions and hunting efficiency resulting in increased predation on sage-grouse (Connelly et al 2004). Preliminary results from a ten-year study on the impacts of the Falcon-Gonder transmission line on sage-grouse population dynamics in Eureka

County, Nevada show a significant negative effect of the transmission line on nest success and female survival, weak negative effect on male survival, and no support for impacts on nest site selection and female nesting propensity (Gibson et al 2013). Nest success and female survival, along with chick survival, are the demographic rates that have been shown to be important for population growth (Taylor et al 2012).

Roads are widespread through the sage-grouse range and can impact sage-grouse through a variety of mechanisms. A study along I-80 in Wyoming and Utah between 1970 and 2003 found no leks within 1.25 miles of the interstate, and fewer birds on leks within 4.7 miles of the interstate, than further distances (Connelly et al 2004). Roads can negatively impact sage-grouse through direct mortality due to vehicle collision, decreased male lek attendance due to increased traffic (Holloran 2005), avoidance behavior (Lyon and Anderson 2003, LeBeau 2012), and reduced nest initiation rates (Lyon and Anderson 2003). Roads can also facilitate the spread of invasive species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003).

**Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Manage anthropogenic disturbance development in a manner that provides for the long-term conservation of sage-grouse and their habitat, while balancing the need for continued development of the resources.

***Objective 1.1:*** Achieve no net unmitigated loss of sage-grouse habitat due to new anthropogenic disturbances and any associated facilities and infrastructure within the Sage-Grouse Management Area (SGMA) in order to maintain stable or increasing sage-grouse populations.

***Management Action 1.1.1:*** All new proposed anthropogenic disturbances within the SGMA will trigger timely SETT Consultation for application of the "avoid, minimize, mitigate" process (see Section 3.0). This will serve as a

centralized impact assessment process that provides consistent evaluation, reconciliation and guidance for project development.

***Management Action 1.1.2:*** Avoid new anthropogenic disturbance activities and its associated facilities and infrastructure within the SGMA. Locate activities, facilities, and infrastructure in non-habitat wherever possible. Avoidance of a disturbance within sage-grouse habitat is the preferred option. If avoidance is not possible, the project proponent must demonstrate why it is not possible in order for the SETT to consider minimization and mitigation alternatives. The process to demonstrate that avoidance is not possible (the "avoid process") is determined by the four management categories. (See Table 3-1 for more details on the avoid process.) If development cannot be sited in non-habitat, it should occur in the least suitable habitat.

***Management Action 1.1.3:*** If adverse impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat cannot be avoided, project proponents will be required to minimize impacts by employing Site Specific Consultation-Based Design Features (Design Features; see Appendix A) appropriate for the project. This may include seasonal operational restrictions, noise restrictions, clustering disturbances, and placing infrastructure in previously disturbed locations.

***Management Action 1.1.4:*** Technically evaluate and where reliability is not adversely impacted, seek to site new linear features in existing corridors (Figure 11) or, at a minimum, co-locate with existing linear features in Core, Priority, and General Management Areas.

***Management Action 1.1.5:*** Reduce and eliminate artificial hunting perches and nesting substrate for aerial predators. This can be achieved by installing anti-

nesting and anti-perching devices on new power lines (see Section 7.3) or burying power lines. Bury distribution power lines of up to 35kV where ground disturbance can be minimized, and where technically and economically feasible. Where technology and economic factors allow, bury higher kV power lines (see Appendix A). Sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0) will be incorporated when reclaiming the site.

***Management Action 1.1.6:*** Encourage continued research in the development of more effective perching and nesting deterrent options (see Section 7.3).

***Management Action 1.1.7:*** Aggressively engage in reclamation/weed control efforts during pre- and post-project construction.

***Management Action 1.1.8:*** If impacts from anthropogenic disturbances cannot be avoided and after minimization options have been exhausted, residual adverse impacts are required to be offset through compensatory mitigation. Mitigation obligations will be determined through the Conservation Credit System (see Section 8.0).

***Objective 1.2:*** Explore options to minimize impacts from existing and abandoned anthropogenic disturbances and associated infrastructure.

***Management Action 1.2.1:*** While SETT Consultation and the "avoid, minimize, mitigate" process does not apply retroactively to existing anthropogenic disturbances, existing operators are encouraged to incorporate the Design Features outlined in Appendix A and contact the SETT for timely input on techniques and practices to avoid and minimize existing impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat.

***Management Action 1.2.2:*** Inventory abandoned mine sites within sage-grouse habitat and, where practical, reclaim sites to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0). Coordinate with the Abandoned Mine Lands Program on this effort.

***Management Action 1.2.3:*** Work with the energy industry to explore opportunities to install anti-nesting and anti-perching devices on existing power lines and tall structures and to bury existing power lines where practical and economically feasible.

***Management Action 1.2.4:*** Inventory power lines and utility structures that are no longer in use and look for opportunities to decommission the lines and reclaim the sites to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Section 4.0).

**7.7 Recreation & Off-Highway Vehicle Activities**

Nevada offers some of the most robust recreational and off-highway vehicle experiences in the nation due, in large part, to its high percentage of accessible federally managed public lands. Recreation, in all of its forms, creates a significant benefit to local and statewide economies. Extensive networks of roads and trails offer recreationists excellent access to most of Nevada's expansive basin and range high desert ecosystems. This extensivity of roads and trails may also create impacts on sagebrush habitats and sage-grouse that may be difficult to measure.

While these activities are one of the many acceptable multiple-uses on our federal public lands, it also requires frequently reviewed and updated policies that allow for greater adaptive management. This may assist in ongoing efforts to protect and preserve sensitive land forms, plants, and animals from levels or types of disturbance that create unnatural or unduly negative impacts. Potential impacts on sage-grouse and their habitat associated with recreational activities include but are not limited to: increases in noise levels, distribution of invasive plants, generation of fugitive dust, and effects on predator prey relationships (Manier 2013).

In Nevada, the recent creation of the Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles provides a mechanism and a funding source to educate users on how to responsibly use off-highway vehicles while minimizing adverse effects of public land resources including important or restricted-access to sage-grouse habitats. It may also provide a funding source to allow the State to join with its federal agencies to better plan, develop, and manage a coordinated and designated system of off-road vehicle trails in Nevada. The off-highway vehicle registration system allows state law enforcement personnel to access vehicle registration information and identify vehicle titleholders in instances where state or federal laws pertaining to off-road access or use are violated.

**Conservation Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions**

**Goal 1:** Conserve sage-grouse and their habitat while allowing for continued recreational access to public lands.

**Objective 1.1:** In sage-grouse habitat, avoid or minimize recreation and OHV negative direct and indirect impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat and monitor sites for potential impacts.

***Management Action 1.1.1:*** Establish appropriate ambient noise levels for undisturbed sage-grouse leks. This should generally be done between the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. as these are the hours most critical for communications of sage-grouse and auditory detection of predators (Patricelli et al. 2013).

***Management Action 1.1.2:*** Take measures to minimize or reduce activities and to avoid an ambient noise level increase >10 dB at the edge of leks during the lekking season generally, March 1 through May 15 from one hour before sunrise until 9:00 AM.

***Management Action 1.1.3:*** Assist in efforts to enhance collaborative monitoring through volunteer organizations, recreational groups, etc., to collect data that would assist in the protection, enhancement, or rehabilitation of sage-grouse habitat.

***Management Action 1.1.4:*** Support studies that further the understanding of the relationship between recreational uses and their potential impacts on sage-grouse.

**Management Action 1.1.5:** Utilize sage-grouse habitat mapping to inform state and federal recreation management plans

**Management Action 1.1.6:** Where feasible locate recreation trails strategically to create or augment fuel breaks in the margins of sage-grouse habitats and landscapes and not create roads or trails where they cause net negative direct and indirect impacts.

**Objective 1.2:** Support and implement efforts to reduce the potential for additional sage-grouse habitat fragmentation from unauthorized 'trail making'.

***Management Action 1.2.1:*** Support and promote efforts by state, local, and federal agencies and recreational groups to promote educational campaigns that encourage responsible OHV and recreation activities that avoid or minimize negative impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat, including the spread of invasive species.

***Management Action 1.2.2:*** Work with state, local, and federal agencies and recreational groups to inventory unauthorized trails in Core, Priority, and General Management Areas and where feasible restore trails to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4-1).

**Objective 1.3:** Promote the leveraging of funding from all sources when addressing sage-grouse habitat enhancement, rehabilitation, or protection projects.

***Management Action 1.3.1:*** Develop a database to share with interested agencies and groups to maximize efforts and leverage funding.

**Management *Action 1.3.2:*** Encourage and support the Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles to expend OHV registration funds to enhance, rehabilitate, or protect sage-grouse habitat.

## 8.0 CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM

The Nevada Conservation Credit System (CCS)[3] is a pro-active solution that provides net conservation benefits for sage-grouse, while balancing the need for continued human activities vital to the Nevada economy and way of life. The CCS creates new incentives for private landowners and public land managers to preserve, enhance, restore, and reduce impacts to important habitat for the species.

The CCS is a market-based mechanism that quantifies conservation outcomes (credits) and impacts from anthropogenic disturbances (debits), defines standards for market transactions, and reports the overall progress from implementation of conservation actions throughout the sage-grouse range within Nevada. The CCS establishes the policy, operations, and tools necessary to facilitate effective and efficient conservation investments. The CCS is intended to provide regulatory certainty for industries by addressing compensatory mitigation needs whether or not the species is listed under the ESA.

*Goal and Scope*

The goal of the CCS is to achieve no net unmitigated loss of sage-grouse habitat due to anthropogenic disturbances with the Sage-grouse Management Area (SGMA; Figure 1), in order to stop the decline of sage-grouse populations. Proposed anthropogenic disturbances, as defined in Section 3.0 of this plan, must seek to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to sage-grouse habitat. After all possibilities to avoid and minimize impacts to sage-grouse habitat have been exhausted, residual adverse impacts are required to be offset by mitigation requirements as determined through the CCS.

Anthropogenic disturbances occurring on BLM and USFS lands within the SGMA require timely consultation with the SETT. Private landowners are not required to mitigate

[3] For more information please refer to *The Nevada Conservation Credit System Manual* on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program's Website: http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/CCS/ConservationCreditSystem/

anthropogenic disturbances on their land, but are welcome to voluntarily generate, sell, or purchase credits in the CCS. The CCS scope can be expanded in the future to support additional conservation needs or to include other states within the sage-grouse range.

*Roles and Responsibilities*

The *DCNR Division of State Lands*, holds ultimate authority over CCS design, operations, and management. The *SEC* oversees CCS operations and approves changes to the program. *The Administrator* manages the CCS's day-to-day operations, ongoing program improvements, facilitates transactions, and reports programmatic results. CCS operations are also informed by *Resource Managers* (e.g. BLM, NDOW, USFS, USFWS) and by a *Science Committee* to ensure it functions according to current laws, policies, and regulations and is consistent with the best available science.

*Credit Developers* are landowners, land managers, organizations, or agencies, that generate, register, or sell credits in the CCS. *Credit Buyers* are entities that purchase mitigation credits to offset impacts from anthropogenic disturbances or to meet other conservation objectives.

*What are Credits and Debits?*

*Credits* are the currency of the CCS. A credit represents a verified *"functional acre"* that meets the durability criteria defined by the CCS, such as committing to a Customized Management Plan that outlines actions to maintain habitat performance and to limit risks from future impact for the duration of the project. A functional acre is based on habitat quality ("function") relative to optimal conditions, and quantity (acres). This is determined through the Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT; see below).

Debits are similar to credits, but are the quantified and verified units of functional acres lost due to an anthropogenic disturbance.

*Generating and Purchasing Credits*

The steps for generating and purchasing credits are depicted below. Blue chevrons signify the steps undertaken to generate credits and green chevrons represent the purchase of credits.


*Calculating Credits and Debits*

*Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT)*[4]

The HQT is a method to estimate habitat quality and quantify debits and credits. The HQT uses a set of metrics, applied at multiple spatial scales, to evaluate vegetation and environmental conditions related to sage-grouse habitat quality and quantity. The HQT enables the CCS to create incentives to generate credits on the most beneficial locations for the sage-grouse, and to minimize impacts to existing high quality habitat.

The HQT is used to calculate scores for each type of seasonal habitat. Habitat condition is expressed in functional acres, relative to optimal conditions. The functional acre score is adjusted to account for indirect effects of the local area surrounding the site. Mitigation ratios are then applied.

*Mitigation Ratios*

Mitigation ratios incorporate biologically significant factors that cannot currently be incorporated into the HQT. They enable offset transactions to achieve a net benefit for the species by ensuring the functional acres of credit acquired is greater than the functional acres of debit. The mitigation ratios create incentives for avoidance of impacts and preservation, enhancement, and restoration of habitat in important areas. This includes avoiding and protecting seasonal habitats that are scarce for a particular population. Mitigation ratios are determined by the:

[4] For more information please refer to *The Habitat Quantification Tool Scientific Methods Document* on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program's Website: http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/CCS/ConservationCreditSystem/

- Habitat Importance Factor: The value is influenced by the location of a credit or debit site in Core, Priority, or General Management Areas (Figure 3)
- Seasonal Habitat Scarcity Factor: This is determined by the portion of seasonal habitat type (nesting, late-brood rearing, and winter) impacted.

Debits are adjusted by its proximity to potential credit sites (Proximity Factor) to determine the credit obligation that must be purchased to offset a debit project. This incentivizes mitigation in close proximity to debit sites.

*Regulatory Assurances*

*Verification*

Credit and debit projects require verification to ensure that calculations represent a true and accurate account of on-the-ground implementation and habitat function and assurances that projects are maintained over time. *Third-party Verifiers*, trained and certified by the Administrator, conduct independent checks using the HQT methods. *Credit Verification* is required before credit release and every fifth year. *Debit Verification* is required before the project begins, during project implementation, and when debits end or decrease. Periodic spot checks and audits are also required.

*Reserve Account*

The *Reserve Account* is a pool of credits, functioning like an insurance fund, that replace credits that are invalidated due to a force majeure event or competing land uses. A percentage of credits from each credit transaction are deposited into the reserve account. Factors that determine the Reserve Account contribution are: base contribution, probability of wildfire, and probability of competing land uses. In the case of unintentional credit reversal due to force majeure or competing land use events, the Administrator withdraws credits from the reserve account to cover the invalidated credits at no cost to the Credit Developer for a limited duration until the original credits are replaced.

*Additionality and Stacking of Multiple Payments*

Projects that generate credits must be additional to activities that would occur in the absence of the CCS. On private and public lands, a credit project is additional if the land manager is not already performing or planning to perform conservation actions using funding sources other than the CCS. *Stacking* allows a Credit Developer to receive multiple payments for conservation actions on the same area of land, but only receive credit for the additional conservation benefits.

*Durability*

The CCS uses *performance assurances* on private and public lands to ensure the durability of credits generated throughout the life of the credit project. Performance assurances are implemented through contract terms and financial instruments. The *durability of projects on public lands* is safeguarded using land protection mechanisms (e.g. right-of-ways), financial instruments (e.g. contract performance bonds) and the Reserve Account.

*Additional Policy Considerations*

The *Service Area*, the area in which credits can be exchanged, for the CCS is the SGMA.

*Baseline* is the starting point from which credits and debits are measured. Credits and debits represent the change from baseline that results from implementing a project. *Credit baseline* is a state-wide standard for each seasonal habitat type equivalent to the average habitat functionality. Project sites must be at the credit baseline, at a minimum to begin generating credits. *Debit baseline* is the pre-project habitat function value for each seasonal habitat type for a proposed debit project.

*Credit release* occurs when performance criteria milestones which increase habitat function are achieved on a credit site. Specific performance criteria are defined in each project's *Customized Management Plan*. Credit release can occur in single or multiple increments depending on credit project type; including: *preservation projects*, *enhancement projects*, and *restoration projects*.

The CCS requires that the *project life* of a credit project must be equal to or greater than the life of the debit project it is offsetting.

*Credit variability* may occur due to annual climatic or other natural conditions affecting habitat functionality. As a result, a *tolerance threshold* of 10% below habitat function is applied.

# 9.0 MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Monitoring and adaptive management are key components of successful resource management plans in order to derive the greatest environmental benefit given limited agency resources. Incorporation of these strategies in the planning process will help ensure management actions identified in this State Plan are implemented and effective at achieving the intended goals and objectives for the benefit of sage-grouse. Adaptive management allows for information learned through monitoring to be integrated into iterative decision making that can be adjusted as outcomes from management actions become better understood (Williams et al. 2009). Management that does not achieve intended goals and objectives can be modified through adaptive management and contribute to the emerging understanding of management action response, sage-grouse habitat requirements, sage-grouse behavior, and sagebrush ecosystem processes.

**Monitoring**

Two main categories of monitoring will occur for the State Plan: 1) inventory monitoring and 2) management action monitoring. These are described below. Within each of these categories, additional concepts will need to be considered: short and long-term monitoring, monitoring at multiple scales (e.g., site, landscape), and, for management action monitoring, monitoring for implementation and for effectiveness.

Inventory monitoring assesses the status/extent/condition of sage-grouse populations (e.g., sage-grouse population trends over time), sage-grouse habitat (e.g., gain/loss of sage-grouse habitat over time), and of the threats to sage-grouse (as identified in the State Plan, e.g., how many acres of PJ encroachment are occurring each year). Inventory monitoring provides a quantified understanding of changes in condition and extent of sage-grouse populations, habitat, and threats over time and space, can help prioritize efforts, and can help evaluate success in meeting short and long-term goals and objectives. Many of the state and federal agencies already provide a level of

inventory monitoring appropriate for the needs of the state plan and this will be incorporated into the state's monitoring plan- more detail is provided below.

This State Plan identified many management actions to address specific threats. Monitoring of management actions is necessary to ensure that individual actions are accomplishing what they are intended to do. The state will require that monitoring plans be developed for all management actions that occur under direction of the State Plan, including those intended to ameliorate threats outlined in Section 7.0. These plans will include monitoring for implementation and monitoring for effectiveness. Monitoring associated with the Conservation Credit System (see Section 8.0) is detailed in the Habitat Quantification Tool Scientific Methods Document5 {currently under development}.

Management Action monitoring for implementation includes: 1) a brief description of the project and the work completed, 2) pre- and post-project photographs, 3) lessons learned during implementation, 4) discussion of impacts to uses and other resources, 5) recommendations on the implementation of future projects, 6) maintenance performed, and 7) accounting of expenditures.

Management Action monitoring for e*ffectiveness* can play a key role in demonstrating the accountability, success, and value of management investments. Effectiveness monitoring is designed to determine if the project is effective at meeting its biological and ecological goals and objectives. Project-scale effectiveness monitoring measures environmental parameters to ascertain whether management actions were effective in creating the desired change(s) in habitat conditions *and* species response. There are at least three important reasons to conduct project-scale effectiveness monitoring on a management action or a change in management: 1) to determine the biotic and abiotic changes resulting on, and adjacent to, the treatment area; 2) to determine if treatment

[5] For more information please refer to The Habitat Quantification Tool Scientific Methods Document on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program's Website: http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/CCS/ConservationCreditSystem/

and management actions were effective in meeting the objective(s); and 3) to learn from the management actions and to incorporate new knowledge in future treatment design.

The following concepts should be addressed in all monitoring plans:

- Identify the site conditions and the reasons for implementing management action(s) at the site.
- Set monitoring objectives and indicators – these should quantitatively or qualitatively evaluate the project objectives that will be used to evaluate project implementation and effectiveness in meeting objectives. Effectiveness in meeting objectives will need to be evaluated for both habitat changes and when appropriate and feasible, sage-grouse response.
- Identify anticipated site attribute changes in response to the management action, target values, and time frame under which changes are anticipated.
- Select monitoring sites and determine appropriate, effective methods. Include control or reference sites in method design. Baseline data on these will allow before, after, with, and without comparisons.
- Monitoring will be conducted for a minimum of three years or until management objects are met. If, as part of the treatment, grazing was restricted for a time period, post-treatment, monitoring should be conducted for three year following resumption of grazing practices. In addition, monitoring will be conducted at 10 years post-treatment as a follow-up for long-term monitoring.
- Monitoring plans will be prepared jointly between the project proponent and land management agency, with final approval from the land management agency. In addition, relevant stakeholders, such as permittees, should be involved in the development of plans and monitoring site selection.

See resources listed at end of this section for development on monitoring plans.

**Adaptive Management**

Adaptive management as it relates to sage-grouse and their habitat is a structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reduce uncertainty over time through continued monitoring. Because adaptive management is based on a learning system, it improves long term management outcomes. The challenge in using the adaptive management approach lies in finding the correct balance between gaining knowledge to improve management in the future and achieving the best short-term outcomes based on current knowledge (Allan and Stankey 2009).

> "An adaptive management approach involves exploring alternatives ways to meet management objectives, predicting the outcomes of alternatives based on the current state of knowledge, implementing one or more of these alternatives, monitoring to learn about the impacts of management actions, and then using the results to update knowledge and adjust management actions" (Williams et al. 2009).

Adaptive management takes monitoring to the next level by establishing, prior to implementation, a framework from which an iterative implementation and learning process can be instituted. Adaptive management implements "learning by doing" and provides flexibility to act in the face of uncertainty.

The following are additional steps to monitoring that need to be addressed to successfully implement adaptive management (Adapted from Williams et al. 2009):

- Identify and record potential drivers of change in the system, threats to the system, and opportunities for beneficial actions. These should be incorporated in the model of response for each management action.
- Development of "models" or hypotheses of the expected response and rationale.

- Development of how management actions should be adjusted following results from monitoring (this should include a set of potential alternatives to management based on the outcome of specific monitoring, allowing for flexibility while based on best available science~~triggers that identify what monitoring~~ results ~~will trigger what management actions~~).
- Implementation of iterative adjustments to management actions following implementation of actions and results of monitoring, following the process outlined in previous bullet.
- Project and management plans have to incorporate the ability to change methods when monitoring of the projects or management actions provides indication or when new science from research or other monitoring project emerges.

Consideration of when adaptive management is appropriate:

- Decision making must be able to be made in an iterative process
- Monitoring data must be available to decision makers
- It is not appropriate when risks associated with learning based-decision making are too high (i.e., if risk of management action is unknown and worst case scenario has irreversible consequences) in comparison to the risks of not doing so (i.e., the consequences of doing nothing).

See resources listed at end of this section for development on adaptive management plans.

**Incorporation of Monitoring and Adaptive Management into the State Plan**

A multi-scale monitoring approach is necessary as sage-grouse are a landscape species and conservation is scale dependent to the extent that management actions are implemented within or across seasonal habitats to benefit populations. The state needs to track the extent of threats to sage-grouse (e.g., fire, pinyon-juniper encroachment,

etc.), through inventory monitoring, as well as the efforts to manage the threats (e.g., number of acres of pinyon-juniper treated), through management action monitoring, to be able to effectively manage for the species and understand progress in goals and objectives outlined in this plan. Many of the components of inventory monitoring are already being monitored by state and federal agencies. The SETT will work to compile annual monitoring reports that provide a synopsis of these monitoring efforts and metrics relevant to the state plans goals and objectives. The state will engage with stakeholders responsible for these components to facilitate when possible and ensure monitoring occurs. For components that are not currently under purview of agencies, the SETT will work to engage relevant stakeholders to develop a monitoring program. The SETT will develop a comprehensive database to store all monitoring information which will be accessible to the public.

To meet the need for the management action monitoring requirement, all management actions overseen by the SEP will develop monitoring plans following guidance provided in this section. If participating in projects developed by BLM/USFS, NDOW, NDA, NDF, or other agencies, projects should include similar aspects to those outlined here, if not all. As well, all management actions should be reviewed and those appropriate for the adaptive management process should additionally develop an adaptive management plan in coordination with the monitoring plan.

Table 9.1 presents the components (sage-grouse threats, habitat, and populations) that will be monitored to be able to better understand the level of threat to sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems and what can be done to respond to the threat for sage-grouse. Elements for inventory monitoring and management action monitoring are outlined as well as the relevant agencies from which monitoring information will be gathered. Monitoring information will be collected across the extent of SGMA and provided at the site, landscape, PMU and state levels and by core, priority, and general management areas. In addition, known changes in extent between years will be documented and total extent of treatments will be summarized.

Additional monitoring components may be identified in the future for inclusion in the annual monitoring report (above and beyond those monitoring components listed in Table 9.1). As additional threats to sage-grouse are identified, components should be included in the inventory monitoring and management action monitoring to better assess and understand the severity of threat and the progress in ameliorating the threat.

In addition to the annual monitoring report and database, the state of Nevada will develop a methods document for monitoring plans and adaptive management plans that provide recommended, standardized protocols and methods for objective based monitoring that are consistent with other land jurisdictions and agencies, including BLM, USFS, NDOW, and others. ~~the Habitat Assessment Framework (Stiver et al. 2010). These methods outlined will be consistent with those developed for the HQT and for the EIS.~~

**Table 9.1 Inventory and Management Action Monitoring for the State Plan**

| Monitoring Component | Agency/Entity | Inventory Monitoring Elements | Management Action Monitoring Elements[6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sage-grouse Parameters** | | | |
| Sage-grouse habitat | NDOW, BLM, USFS, SETT CCS | • Land Health Assessments (BLM) (site, landscape, and state scale)<br>• Resource Implementation Protocol for Rapid Assessment Matrices (USFS) [[Waiting to hear from USFS if this is the appropriate name]]<br>• Sagebrush landscape cover (BLM EIS)[7] (landscape scale)<br>• CCS- functional aces lost | • Treatment conducted and effectiveness of treatments (these would be treatments not included in subsequent monitoring components, e.g., meadow restoration) |

[6] Scale of Management Action Monitoring is dependent on management action details specified in Section 7.0

[7] As part of the Greater Sage-grouse Northern California and Nevada Sub-regional EIS/LUPA, the BLM/USFS have developed a Monitoring Framework (Appendix E of that document) that outlines monitoring for habitat loss, habitat degradation, and population trend (in coordination with NDOW) at the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order scale (Stiver et al. 2010).

| Monitoring Component | Agency/Entity | Inventory Monitoring Elements | Management Action Monitoring Elements[6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | due to debit projects, functional acres gained due to credit projects (concept of no net unmitigated loss) | |
| Sage-grouse populations | NDOW, BLM, USGS | • Lek, lek cluster, PMU counts, populations and trends[1] (all scales)<br>• Telemetry data collection (site to landscape scale-project dependent) | • At this point, the state plan does not outline management actions directly influencing sage-grouse numbers. Management actions outlined directly affect habitat and indirectly affect populations. |
| **Threat** | | | |
| Fire | BLM, USFS, NDF, NDOW[8] | • Number of fire starts per year<br>• Number and size of fires in each vegetation community, and resistance and resilience classes | • Number of fires "successfully" suppressed (<1,000 acres)<br>• Number of catastrophic fires<br>• Fuels management treatments (conducted and effectiveness of treatments)<br>• Rehabilitation efforts for each fire (implementation and effectiveness of treatments)<br>• Document coordination efforts that aid in efficient and effective fire pre-suppress and suppression management |
| Cheatgrass | SETT will coordinate with researchers to determine extent BLM, USFS, NDOW, | • Extent (spatial distribution, acres, and density of invasion) | • Treatments conducted and effectiveness of treatments (includes restoration efforts or efforts to improve resilience/resistance)<br>• |

[8] NDOW is engaged with BLM on post –fire treatment monitoring and provides monitoring in conjunction with these agencies post ES&R efforts.

| Monitoring Component | Agency/Entity | Inventory Monitoring Elements | Management Action Monitoring Elements[6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Nevada Cheatgrass Action Team | | |
| Noxious weeds[9]<br>Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*)<br>Hoary cress (*Cardaria draba*)<br>Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*)<br>Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)<br>Other weeds<br>Red Brome (*Bromus rubens*)<br>Rattlesnake chess (*Bromus briziformis*)<br>Halogeton (*Halogeton gomeratus*)<br>Purple mustard (*Chorispora tenella*) | NDA , NDOW, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, and SETT | • Extent (spatial distribution, acres, and density of invasion)<br>• | • Treatments conducted and effectiveness of treatments |
| Pinyon juniper encroachment | BLM, USFS, NDF, NDOW, SETT, all stakeholders (including researchers at University of Nevada, Reno, and USGS) | • Extent (spatial distribution, acres, and density of invasion) | • Treatments conducted and effectiveness of treatments |
| Predation | NDOW, | • Baseline data collected | • Treatments conducted |

[9] Weed species in Nevada identified as having, generally, greatest impact to sage-grouse habitats (S. Espinosa, personal communication).

| Monitoring Component | Agency/Entity | Inventory Monitoring Elements | Management Action Monitoring Elements[6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Wildlife Services, NDA, and SETT, | prior to treatments- data will likely be site specific, not SGMA wide (road kill inventories, raven counts, habitat parameters, etc.) | and effectiveness of treatments<br>• Documentation of coordination efforts with city counties, landfills waste managers, livestock owners, research on perching and nest deterrent technology |
| WHB populations | BLM, USFS | • HMA/WHBT populations<br>• Extent of resources damaged by WHB<br>• Understand their timing of use on wetland resources<br>• Trend monitoring regarding maintenance of a thriving natural ecological balance for adjusting AML (BLM 2010) | • Gathers conducted<br>• Treatments conducted and effectiveness of treatments |
| Livestock grazing | BLM, USFS, permitees and stakeholders | • Allotment standards and guidelines<br>• Dates of use and/or intensity of use by allotment<br>• Monitoring of attainment of management objectives (Swanson et al. 2006) | • Documentation of changes in management prescriptions to improve management, when appropriate |
| Anthropogenic disturbances | SETT, BLM, USFS, other federal agencies, all stakeholders | • CCS- functional aces lost due to debit projects, functional acres gained due to credit projects (concept of no net unmitigated loss)<br>• Surface acres impacted<br>• Indirect acres impacted<br>• Identification of existing infrastructure that could be retrofitted, as appropriate (inclusion on the list does not require retrofitting, simply | • Management actions to mitigation for anthropogenic disturbances will be accounted for under the appropriate threat or under habitat and in reporting will be noted as credit projects.<br>• Documentation of implementation of Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features |

| Monitoring Component | Agency/Entity | Inventory Monitoring Elements | Management Action Monitoring Elements[6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | identifying the opportunity) | |
| Recreation and OHVs | SETT, BLM, USFS, Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles and other stake holders | • Permitted activities<br>• Extent of authorized and unauthorized recreational trails and facilities | • Treatments conducted to restore areas impacted by recreational activities and effectiveness of treatments<br>• Documentation of coordination efforts with recreational groups |
| Weather Variability | NOAA, DRI, State Climatologist, NRCS Water and Climate Center, USGS BLM, USFS, and other stakeholders | • U.S. Drought Monitor<br>• Hydrologic Report<br>• Climate data records (current and historic) | • Tracking changes in management actions due to weather variability |
| Land Ownership | All agencies | • Tracking of land ownership changes | • Tracking of how changes in management actions due to land ownership affects habitat |

***Existing monitoring and adaptive management plans and methods***

There are several key plans and methods that have been developed for use in Nevada and across the range of the sage-grouse. These should be referenced in the development of resource objectives, management action monitoring plans, and adaptive management plans. The following are recommended for consideration in the State Plan:

<u>Monitoring</u>

Swanson, S, Ben, B, Rex, C, Bill, D, Gary, B, Gene, F, James, L, Gary, M, Valerie, M, Barry, P, Paul, T, Diane, W and Duane, W.2006. Nevada rangeland monitoring handbook. Second Edition. Educational Bulletin 06-03. University of Nevada

Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service. USA. 84 pp. Available at: https://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ag/2006/eb0603.pdf

Stiver, S.J., E.T. Rinkes, and D.E. Naugle. 2010. Sage-grouse Habitat Assessment Framework. U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Unpublished Report. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Idaho State Office, Boise, Idaho. Available at: http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/docs/rs/SG%20HABITAT%20ASESSMENT%202010.pdf

Bureau of Land Management. 2010 Wild Horses and Burros Management Handbook. H-4700-1. Available at: http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/blm_handbook.Par.11148.File.dat/H-4700-1.pdf

*BLM AIM Strategy*

Toevs, G.R., J.W. Karl, J.J. Taylor, C.S. Spurrier, M. Karl, M.R. Bobo, and J.E. Herrick. 2011. Consistent Indicators and Methods and a Scalable Sample Design to Meet Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Information Needs Across Scales. Rangelands: 14-20.

Toevs, G.R., J.J. Taylor, C.S. Spurrier, W.C. MacKinnon, and M.R. Bobo. 2011. Bureau of Land Management Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Strategy: For Integrated Renewable Resources Management. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, National Operations Center, Denver, CO. Available at: http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/ib_attachments/2012.Par.53766.File.dat/IB2012-080_att1.pdf

*BLM AIM Monitoring Methods*

Herrick, J.E., J.W. Van Zee, K.M. Havstad, L.M. Burkett, and W.G. Whitford. 2009. Monitoring Manual for Grassland, Shrubland and Savanna Ecosystems. Volume I: Quick Start. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Jornada Experimental Range, Las Cruces, NM. Available at: http://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/uploads/281/Monitoring%20Manual%20for%20Grassland,%20Shrubland%20and%20Savanna%20Ecosystems%20Vol.%20I_Quick%20Start.pdf

Herrick, J.E., J.W. Van Zee, K.M. Havstad, L.M. Burkett, and W.G. Whitford. 2009. Monitoring Manual for Grassland, Shrubland and Savanna Ecosystems. Volume II: Design, Supplementary Methods and Interpretation. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Jornada Experimental Range, Las Cruces, NM. Available at: http://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/uploads/281/Monitoring%20Manual%20for%20Grassland,%20Shrubland%20and%20Savanna%20Ecosystems%20Vol.%20.II.pdf

Adaptive Management

Williams, B. K., R. C. Szaro, and C. D. Shapiro. 2009. Adaptive Management: The U.S. Department of the Interior Technical Guide. Adaptive Management Working Group, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. Available at: http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/AdaptiveManagement/TechGuide.pdf

*Cooperative monitoring*

The state of Nevada recognizes the value of monitoring as well as the time and effort required to do so. Given limiting staffing and resources of agencies, the SETT will encourage and facilitate cooperative monitoring by interested stakeholders. The BLM has established a cooperative monitoring agreement for grazing allotment permittees to help conduct rangeland health assessments on their permitted allotments (See Appendix F). In compilation of the first annual monitoring report and through

discussions with stakeholders, the SETT will work to develop similar cooperative monitoring agreements for additional resources with additional agencies and will facilitate development of such to meet the needs for training and quality control.

See resources below for monitoring guides for ranchers and other stakeholders.

Oregon Cattlemen's Association (2014). Oregon Resources Monitoring Guide: The Rancher's Guide to Improved Grazing.

Peterson, Eric. 2010. Implementing a Cooperative Permittee Monitoring Program. Sublette County Extension. University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. B-1169. 28 pp. Available at: http://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B1169.pdf _____

Swanson, S, Ben, B, Rex, C, Bill, D, Gary, B, Gene, F, James, L, Gary, M, Valerie, M, Barry, P, Paul, T, Diane, W and Duane, W.2006. Nevada rangeland monitoring handbook. Second Edition. Educational Bulletin 06-03. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service. USA. 84 pp. Available at: https://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ag/2006/eb0603.pdf

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## APPENDICES

# Appendix A:

# Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features

## Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features

Site Specific Consultation Based Design Features (here after Design Features) are used to minimize impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse and its habitat due to disturbances on a project by project and site by site basis. Design Features in the S~~s~~tate of Nevada's plan apply to all newly proposed projects and modifications to existing projects. Existing projects within SGMA~~s~~ are not currently subject to Design Features; however all Design Features listed below, according to program area, are required to be considered as part of the SETT Consultation process. The S~~s~~tate of Nevada recognizes that all Design Features may not be practical, feasible, or appropriate in all instances considering site conditions and project specifications, nor is this list completely exhaustive. Therefore, the SETT in coordination with the project proponent, will consider all of the listed Design Features on a site-specific basis. If certain Design Features are determined to not be practical, feasible, or appropriate for the specific project site, the SETT will document the reasons the Design Features were not selected. The SETT may also consider additional Design Features that may minimize impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse and its habitat that are not specifically listed here and document the reasons for selecting the additional Design Features.

*Roads*

These Design Features apply to all new roads, whether a component of a mining/ energy project or for any other purpose. {{NOTE TO SEC: All of the Design Features for Roads have already been approved by the SEC under the "Mineral Development" section. This just creates an individual "Roads" section.}}

• Do not construct new roads where roads already in existence, could be used or upgraded to meet the needs of the project or operation.

• Design roads to an appropriate standard, no higher than necessary, to accommodate their intended purpose and level of use.

- Locate roads outside of key sage-grouse seasonal habitat, such as leks and late brood rearing habitat areas.
- Coordinate road construction and use among ROW or SUA holders, when the option is available.
- Avoid constructing roads within riparian areas and ephemeral drainages (note that such construction may require permitting under section 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act).
- Construct road crossings at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.
- Work with local governments to enforce speed limits and design roads to be driven at speeds appropriate to minimize vehicle/wildlife collisions.
- Establish trip restrictions (Lyon and Anderson 2003) or minimization through use of remote access technology, such as telemetry and remote well control if applicable (e.g., Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition).
- Do not issue ROWs or SUAs to counties on newly constructed mining/ energy development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.
- Restrict vehicle traffic to authorized users on newly constructed routes by employing traffic control devices such as signage, gates, fencing etc.
- Dust abatement on roads and pads will be based on road use, road condition, season, and other pertinent considerations.
- Close and rehabilitate duplicate roads by restoring original landform and establishing desired vegetation, in cooperation with landholders and where appropriate authority exists to do so.

• Do not construct new roads when there are existing roads that could be used or upgraded to meet the needs of the project or operations.

***Mineral Resources***

*Fluid Minerals*

~~*Roads*~~

~~• Do not construct new roads where roads already in existence, could be used or upgraded to meet the needs of the project or operation.~~

~~• Design roads to an appropriate standard, no higher than necessary, to accommodate their intended purpose and level of use.~~

~~• Locate roads outside of key GRSG seasonal habitat, such as leks and late brood rearing habitat areas.~~

~~• Coordinate road construction and use among ROW or SUA holders, when the option is available.~~

~~• Avoid constructing roads within riparian areas and ephemeral drainages (note that such construction may require permitting under section 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act).~~

~~• Construct road crossings at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.~~

~~• Work with local governments to enforce speed limits and design roads to be driven at speeds appropriate to minimize vehicle/wildlife collisions.~~

~~• Establish trip restrictions (Lyon and Anderson 2003) or minimization through use of remote access technology, such as telemetry and remote well control (e.g., Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition).~~

~~• Do not issue ROWs or SUAs to counties on newly constructed energy development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.~~

~~• Restrict vehicle traffic to authorized users on newly constructed routes by employing traffic control devices such as signage, gates, fencing etc.~~

~~• Dust abatement on roads and pads will be based on road use, road condition, season, and other pertinent considerations.~~

~~• Close and rehabilitate duplicate roads by restoring original landform and establishing desired vegetation, in cooperation with landholders and where appropriate authority exists to do so.~~

*Operations*

• Cluster disturbances associated with operations and facilities as close as possible, unless site specific conditions indicate that disturbances to sagebrush habitat would be reduced if operations and facilities locations would best fit a unique special arrangement.

• Minimize site disturbance though site analysis and facility planning.

• Use directional and horizontal drilling to reduce surface disturbance.

• Place infrastructure in already disturbed locations where the habitat has not been restored.

• Apply a phased development approach with concurrent reclamation through a coordination process among relevant parties.

• Place liquid gathering facilities outside of ~~priority areas~~Core Management Areas. Have no tanks at well locations within Core Management Areas~~priority habitat areas~~ to minimize truck traffic, and perching and nesting sites for ravens and raptors.

• Pipelines should be under or immediately adjacent to the road.

• Reduce motor vehicle travel during field operations through development and implementation of remote monitoring and control systems plans.

To reduce predator perching, limit the construction of vertical facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.

• Site and/or minimize linear ROWs or SUAs to reduce disturbance to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats.

•Co-locate new utility developments (power lines, pipelines, etc.) and transportation routes with existing utility or transportation corridors where adequate spacing separation can be achieved in order to preserve grid reliability and ongoing maintenance capability.

• Bury distribution power lines of up to 35kV where ground disturbance can be minimized. Where technology and economic factors allow, bury higher kV power lines.

• Power lines, flow lines, and small pipelines should be co-located under or immediately adjacent to existing roads.

• Permanent structures, which create movement (e.g., pump jack) should be designed or sited to minimize impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse.

• Preclude ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse access to pits and tanks through use of practical techniques (e.g. covers, netting, birdballs, location, etc.).

• Equip tanks and other above-ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting and/ or perching of raptors, corvids, and other predators.

• Control the spread and effects of non-native, invasive plant species Nevada Department of Agriculture listed noxious weeds (NAC 555.010, classes A through C, inclusive) and undesirable non-native plant species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003, Bergquist et al. 2007)~~(Evangelista et al. 2011)~~ (e.g., by washing vehicles and equipment, minimize unnecessary surface disturbance). All projects within SGMA~~s~~ should have a noxious weed management plan in place prior to construction and operations.

• Use only closed-loop systems for drilling operations and no reserve pits.

• Reduce the potential for creating excessive or unintended mosquito habitat and associated risk of West Nile Virus impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse. This can be implemented through minimizing pit and pond construction and, where necessary, size of pits and ponds (Doherty 2007).

• Remove or re-inject produced water to reduce habitat for mosquitoes that vector West Nile virus. If surface disposal of produced water continues and West Nile virus has been identified as a concern in the project area, use the following steps for reservoir design to limit favorable mosquito habitat (Dohery 2007):

– Overbuild size of ponds for muddy and non-vegetated shorelines.

– Build steep shorelines to decrease vegetation and increase wave actions. Ponds with steep shorelines will be equipped with NDOW approved wildlife escape ramps.

– Avoid flooding terrestrial vegetation in flat terrain or low lying areas.

– Construct dams or impoundments that restrict down slope seepage or overflow.

– Line the channel where discharge water flows into the pond with crushed rock.

– Construct spillway with steep sides and line it with crushed rock.

– Treat waters with larvicides to reduce mosquito production where water occurs on the surface if necessary.

• Limit noise to less than 10 decibels above ambient measures at sunrise at the perimeter of a lek during active lek season (Patricelli et al. 2010, Blickley et al. 2012).

• Require noise shields when drilling during the lek, nesting, brood-rearing, or wintering season.

• Fit new transmission towers with anti-perch devices (Lammers and Collopy 2007).

• Design and construct fences consistent with NRCS fence standards and specifications Code 382 and, where appropriate, use fence markers (Sage Grouse Initiative 2013).

• Locate new compressor stations outside priority habitats. Otherwise design them to reduce noise that may be directed towards priority habitat.

• Implement site keeping practices to preclude the accumulation of debris, solid waste, putrescible wastes, and other potential anthropogenic subsidies for predators of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse (Bui et al 2010).

• Locate man camps outside of priority habitats.

*Reclamation*

• Include objectives for ensuring habitat rehabilitation to meet ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites (Pyke 2011). Address post reclamation management in reclamation plans such that goals and objectives are to protect and improve ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat needs.

•Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.

• Maximize the area of interim and concurrent reclamation on long-term access roads and well pads, including reshaping, topsoiling and revegetating cut-and-fill slopes. In coordination with appropriate agencies, consider development of fuel breaks in reclamation design.

•Restore disturbed areas at final reclamation to the near pre-disturbance landforms and the desired plant community.

• Irrigate interim reclamation if necessary for establishing seedlings more quickly and if water rights are available.

• Utilize mulching techniques to expedite reclamation and to protect soils.

• Ensure that all authorized ground disturbing projects have vegetation reclamation standards suitable for the site type prior to construction and ensure that reclamation to appropriate ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse standards are budgeted for in the reclamation bond.

*Locatable Minerals*

For consistency, ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse ~~Site Specific Consultation Based~~ Design Features for locatable minerals shall be considered in association with state and federal permitting requirements including bonding, if applicable.

~~*Roads*~~

~~• Design roads to an appropriate standard no higher than necessary to accommodate their intended purpose and level of use.~~

~~• Locate roads outside of key GRSG seasonal habitat, such as leks and late brood rearing habitat areas.~~

~~• Coordinate road construction and use among ROW or SUA holders when the option is available.~~

~~• Avoid constructing roads within riparian areas and ephemeral drainages~~

~~• Construct road crossing at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.~~

~~• Work with local governments to enforce speed limits and design roads to be driven at speeds appropriate to minimize vehicle/wildlife collisions.~~

~~• Do not issue ROWs or SUAs to counties on newly constructed mining development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.~~

~~• Restrict vehicle traffic to authorized users on newly constructed routes by employing traffic control devices such as signage, gates, fencing etc.~~

~~• Dust abatement on roads will be based on road use, road condition, season, and other pertinent considerations~~

~~• Close and rehabilitate duplicate roads, by restoring original landform and establishing desired vegetation, in cooperation with landholders and where appropriate authority exists to do so.• Do not construct new roads when there are existing roads that could be used or upgraded to meet the needs of the project or operations.~~

~~• Avoid constructing roads within riparian areas and ephemeral drainages~~

*Operations*

• Cluster disturbances associated with operations and facilities as close as possible unless site specific conditions indicate that disturbances to sagebrush habitat would be reduced if operations and facilities locations would best fit a unique special arrangement.

• Minimize site disturbance though site analysis and facility planning.

• Place infrastructure in already disturbed locations where the habitat has not been restored.

• Apply a phased development approach with concurrent reclamation through a coordination process among relevant parties.

• Reduce motor vehicle travel during field operations through development and implementation of remote monitoring and control systems plans.

• To reduce predator perching, limit the construction of vertical facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.

• Site and/or minimize linear ROWs or SUAs to reduce disturbance to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats.

• Co-locate new utility developments (power lines, pipelines, etc.) and transportation routes with existing utility or transportation corridors where adequate separation can be achieved in order to preserve grid reliability and ongoing maintenance.

• Bury distributive power lines of up to 35 kV where ground disturbance can be minimized. Where technology and economic factors allow, bury higher kV power lines.

• Preclude ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse access to pits and tanks through use of practical techniques (e.g. covers, netting, birdballs, location, etc.).

• Equip tanks and other above ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting and/or perching of raptors, corvids, and other predators.

• Control the spread and effects of Nevada Department of Agriculture listed noxious weeds (NAC 555.010, classes A through C, inclusive) and undesirable non-native plant species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003, Bergquist et al. 2007). All projects within SGMA should have a noxious weed management plan in place prior to construction and operations.

• Reduce the potential for creating excessive or unintended mosquito habitat and associated risk of West Nile Virus impacts to sage-grouse. This can be implemented through minimizing pit and pond construction and, where necessary, size of pits and ponds ~~Where West Nile virus has been identified as a concern, restrict pond and impoundment construction to reduce or eliminate threats from West Nile virus~~ (Doherty 2007).

• Remove or re-inject produced water to reduce habitat for mosquitoes that vector West Nile virus. If surface disposal of produced water continues and West Nile virus has been identified as a concern in the project area, use the steps described under "Fluid Minerals" for reservoir design to limit favorable mosquito habitat (Dohery 2007).

• Limit noise to less than 10 decibels above ambient measures at sunrise at the perimeter of a lek during active lek season (Patricelli et al. 2010, Blickley et al. 2012).

• Require noise shields when drilling during the lek, nesting, brood-rearing, or wintering season.

• Fit new transmission towers with anti-perch devices (Lammers and Collopy 2007).

• Design and construct fences consistent with NRCS fence standards and specifications Code 382 and, where appropriate, use fence markers (Sage Grouse Initiative 2013)~~around sumps~~.

• Implement site keeping practices to preclude the accumulation of debris, solid waste, putrescible wastes, and other potential anthropogenic subsidies for predators of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse (Bui et al 2010).

• Locate man camps outside of priority ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats.

*Reclamation*

• Include objectives for ensuring habitat rehabilitation to meet ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites (Pyke 2011). Address post reclamation management in reclamation plans such that goals and objective are to protect and improve ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat needs.

•Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.

~~• Reclamation In coordination with appropriate agencies, consider development of fuel breaks in reclamation design.~~

• Maximize the area of interim and concurrent reclamation on infrastructure related disturbances through reshaping/regrading, topsoiling and revegetating cut and fill slopes. In coordination with appropriate agencies, consider development of fuel breaks in reclamation design.

• Ensure that all authorized ground disturbing projects have vegetation reclamation standards suitable for the site type prior to construction and ensure that reclamation to appropriate ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse standards are budgeted for in the reclamation bond.

~~• Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.~~

• Restore disturbed areas at final reclamation to near pre-disturbance landform and the desired plant community.

• Irrigate interim reclamation as necessary during dry periods when valid water rights exist.

• Utilize mulching techniques to expedite reclamation.

*Salable and Non-Energy Minerals*

*Operations*

*• Cluster disturbances associated with operations and facilities as close as possible unless site specific conditions indicate that disturbances to sagebrush habitat would be reduced if operations and facilities locations would best fit a unique special arrangement.*

*• Minimize site disturbance though site analysis and facility planning.*

*• Place infrastructure in already disturbed locations where the habitat has not been restored.*

*• Apply a phased development approach with concurrent reclamation through a coordination process among relevant parties.*

*• Reduce motor vehicle travel during field operations through development and implementation of remote monitoring and control systems plans.*

*• To reduce predator perching, limit the construction of vertical facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.*

*• Site and/or minimize linear ROWs or SUAs to reduce disturbance to sage-grouse habitats.*

*• Co-locate new utility developments (power lines, pipelines, etc.) and transportation routes with existing utility or transportation corridors where adequate separation can be achieved in order to preserve grid reliability and ongoing maintenance.*

*• Bury distributive power lines of up to 35 kV where ground disturbance can be minimized. Where technology and economic factors allow, bury higher kV power lines.*

*• Preclude sage-grouse access to pits and tanks through use of practical techniques (e.g. covers, netting, birdballs, location, etc.).*

*• Equip tanks and other above ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting and/or perching of raptors, corvids, and other predators.*

*• Control the spread and effects of Nevada Department of Agriculture listed noxious weeds (NAC 555.010, classes A through C, inclusive) and undesirable non-native plant species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003, Bergquist et al. 2007).. All projects within SGMA should have a noxious weed management plan in place prior to construction and operations.*

*• Reduce the potential for creating excessive or unintended mosquito habitat and associated risk of West Nile Virus impacts to sage-grouse. This can be implemented through minimizing pit and pond construction and, where necessary, size of pits and ponds Where West Nile virus has been identified as a concern, restrict pond and impoundment construction to reduce or eliminate threats from West Nile virus (Doherty 2007).*

*• Remove or re-inject produced water to reduce habitat for mosquitoes that vector West Nile virus. If surface disposal of produced water continues and West Nile virus has been identified as a concern in the project area, use the steps described under "Fluid Minerals" for reservoir design to limit favorable mosquito habitat (Dohery 2007).*

*• Limit noise to less than 10 decibels above ambient measures at sunrise at the perimeter of a lek during active lek season (Patricelli et al. 2010, Blickley et al. 2012).*

*• Require noise shields when drilling during the lek, nesting, brood-rearing, or wintering season.*

*• Fit new transmission towers with anti-perch devices (Lammers and Collopy 2007).*

*• Design and construct fences consistent with NRCS fence standards and specifications Code 382 and, where appropriate, use fence markers (Sage Grouse Initiative 2013)around sumps.*

*• Implement site keeping practices to preclude the accumulation of debris, solid waste, putrescible wastes, and other potential anthropogenic subsidies for predators of sage-grouse (Bui et al 2010).*

*• Locate man camps outside of priority sage-grouse habitats.*

*Reclamation*

*• Include objectives for ensuring habitat rehabilitation to meet sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites (Pyke 2011). Address post reclamation management in reclamation plans such that goals and objective are to protect and improve sage-grouse habitat needs.*

*•Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.*

*• Reclamation In coordination with appropriate agencies, consider development of fuel breaks in reclamation design.*

*• Maximize the area of interim and concurrent reclamation on infrastructure related disturbances through reshaping/regrading, topsoiling and revegetating cut and fill slopes. In coordination with appropriate agencies, consider development of fuel breaks in reclamation design.*

*• Ensure that all authorized ground disturbing projects have vegetation reclamation standards suitable for the site type prior to construction and ensure that reclamation to appropriate sage-grouse standards are budgeted for in the reclamation bond.*

*• Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.*

*• Restore disturbed areas at final reclamation to near pre-disturbance landform and the desired plant community.*

• *Irrigate interim reclamation as necessary during dry periods when valid water rights exist.*

• *Utilize mulching techniques to expedite reclamation.*

*Fuels and Fire Management and Post-Fire Rehabilitation*

• Fire and fuels operations should focus on protecting and enhancing occupied ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats. This includes taking into account the feasibility and cost of future rehabilitation efforts during Wildland Fire Decision Support Tree planning and general fire operations in all occupied ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats

*Fuels Management*

• Design fuels treatment objective to protect existing sagebrush ecosystems, modify fire behavior, restore ecological function, and create landscape patterns which most benefit ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

• Incorporate resilience and resistance and other best available science concepts into fuels treatment planning activities

• Provide training to fuels treatment personnel on ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse biology, habitat requirements, and identification of areas used locally.

•Fuels treatment project design in sagebrush and pinyon-juniper encroached sagebrush habitats must be based on the best available science. At a minimum, project proponents will consider best available science including: use of site appropriate state and transition models; ecological site characteristics; and, the evaluation of resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasive annual grasses.

• Ensure the proposed prescription burning plans meet the need of the resource via a comprehensive review by proponents, fire managers, wildlife biologists and resource managers, at a minimum.

• Use prescriptive fire use ~~only in areas~~on project sites where state and transition models, ecological site descriptions and existing high site resilience/resistance are used as principle components of the prescription planning process. The desired outcome of all prescription fire use in appropriate sagebrush habitat is to~~can~~ minimize undesirable effects on vegetation or soils (e.g., minimize mortality of desirable perennial plant species and reduce risk of annual grass invasion).

• Ensure proposed sagebrush treatments are planned with full interdisciplinary input pursuant to NEPA and coordination with NDOW and SETT, and that treatment acreage is conservative in the context of surrounding ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse seasonal habitats and landscape.

• Limit the use of intentional fires in sagebrush habitats, including prescribed burning or breeding and winter habitats.

• Ensure that treatments are configured in a manner that promotes use by ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse.

• Incorporate roads and natural fuel breaks into fuel break design

• Utilize supervised livestock grazing as a tool to reduce fuels and control non-native species.

• Power-wash all vehicles and equipment involved in fuels management activities prior to entering the area to minimize the introduction of undesirable and/or invasive plant species.

• Design vegetation treatments in areas of high fire frequency, which facilitate firefighter safety, reduce the potential acres burned, and reduce the fire risk to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat. Additionally, develop maps for ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat, which spatially display existing fuels treatments that can be used to assist suppression activities.

• For implementing specific ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat rehabilitation projects in annual grasslands, first give priority to sites which are adjacent to or surrounded by PPMA or that reestablish continuity between priority habitats. Annual grasslands are a second priority for rehabilitation when the sites are not adjacent to PPMA, but within two miles of PPMA. The third priority for annual grassland habitat restoration projects are sites beyond two miles of PPMA. The intent is to focus restoration outward from existing, intact habitat. Within these criteria, projects should be prioritized based on probability of success based on current condition, ecological site and state-and-transition modeling if available.

• As funding and logistics permit, rehabilitate annual grasslands to a species composition characterized by perennial grasses, forbs, and shrubs with the goal of establishing a functional ecological site based on state-and-transition modeling and ecological site descriptions..

• Emphasize the use of native plant species, recognizing that non-native species may be necessary depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions

• Based on ecological site descriptions, remove encroaching pinyon and juniper trees from areas within at least 3 kilometers (1.86 miles) of occupied ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse leks (Connelly et al. 2000) and from other limiting habitats at least 850 meters (e.g., nesting, wintering and brood rearing) to reduce the availability of perch sites for avian predators, as resources permit (Connelly et al 2000, Casazza et al. 2011).

• Protect wildland areas from wildfire originating on private lands, infrastructure corridors, and recreational areas.

• Reduce the risk of vehicle- or human-caused wildfires and the spread of invasive species by installing and maintaining fuel breaks and/or planting perennial vegetation (e.g., green-strips) paralleling road rights-of-way. Strategically place and maintain pre-treated strips/areas (e.g., mowing, herbicide application, targeted grazing, etc.) to aid in controlling wildfire, should wildfire occur near SGMA or important restoration areas (such as where investments in restoration have already been made).

• All fuels management projects should include short and long term monitoring to ensure success and provide for adaptive management. Multiple revegetation entries may be required to ensure success.

*Fire Management*

• Compile state and local government/District/Forest level information into state-wide ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse tool boxes. Tool boxes will contain maps, listing of state and local resource advisors, contact information, local guidance, and other relevant information for each state and local government/District/Forest, which will be aggregated into a state-wide document.

• Provide localized maps to dispatch offices and extended attack incident commanders for use in prioritizing wildfire suppression resources and designing suppression tactics.

• Assign a state and/or local resource advisor with ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse expertise, or who has access to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse expertise, to all extended attack fires in or near ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat. Prior to the fire season, provide training to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse resource advisors on wildfire suppression organization, objectives, tactics, and procedures to develop a cadre of qualified individuals. Involve state wildlife agency expertise in fire operations through:

– instructing resource advisors during preseason trainings;

– qualification as resource advisors;

– coordination with resource advisors during fire incidents;

– contributing to incident planning with information such as habitat features or other key data useful in fire decision making.

• On critical fire weather days, pre-position additional local, state, and federal fire suppression resources to optimize a quick and efficient response in ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat areas.

• Encourage local resources (volunteer fire departments and country equipment) to respond to initial attack efforts and further encourage these agencies to obtain required ICS training to be able to run incidents for longer periods when needed during critical fire periods.

• During periods of multiple fires, ensure line officers, in consultation with state and local resource advisors are involved in setting priorities.

• To the extent possible, locate wildfire suppression facilities (i.e., base camps, spike camps, drop points, staging areas, heli-bases, etc.) in areas where physical disturbance to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat can be minimized. These include disturbed areas, grasslands, near roads/trails or in other areas where there is existing disturbance or minimal sagebrush cover.

• Power-wash all firefighting vehicles, to the extent possible, including engines, water tenders, personnel vehicles, and all-terrain vehicles (ATV) prior to deploying in or near ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat areas to minimize noxious weed spread. Minimize unnecessary cross-country vehicle travel during fire operations in ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

- Minimize burnout operations in key ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat areas by constructing direct fire line whenever safe and practical to do so.

- Utilize retardant, mechanized equipment, and other available resources to minimize burned acreage during initial attack.

- As safety allows, conduct mop-up where the black adjoins unburned islands, dog legs, or other habitat features to minimize sagebrush loss.

- Adequately document fire operation activities in ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat for potential follow-up coordination activities.

- Coordinate and utilize local fire suppression resources to the maximum extent possible.

- Eliminate "burning out" islands and fingers of unburned ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat, unless lives and property are at risk.

*Post-Fire Rehabilitation*

- Emphasis should be on fall revegetation to ensure greatest likelihood of success.

- All post-fire rehabilitation projects should include short- and long-term monitoring to ensure success and provide for adaptive management. Multiple revegetation entries may be required to ensure success. Emphasize the use of native plant species in post-fire rehabilitation, recognizing that non-native species may be necessary depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions. Selected species maintain site ecological function based on pre-burn conditions and anticipated threat of invasive and noxious weed establishment. Use ecological site descriptions and state-and-transition models if available.

- Reseed all burned areas requiring rehabilitation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological

processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.

- Power-wash all vehicles and equipment prior to entering ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat rehabilitation areas to minimize noxious weed spread. Minimize unnecessary cross-country vehicle travel during rehabilitation operations in ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

- Consider Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices to ensure greater initial control of invasive and noxious plant species.

- ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse seasonal habitat requirements must be considered when selecting revegetation materials in all burned potential and current ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

- Prioritize shrub island plantings in large burn areas which may lack sufficient shrub seed sources, in order to ensure the reestablishment of the shrub component.

*Vegetation Management*

- Avoid sagebrush removal or manipulation in sage-grouse breeding or wintering habitats.

- Retain all remaining large intact sagebrush patches, particularly at low elevations.

- Limit habitat treatments in winter ranges to actions that maintain or expand current levels of sagebrush available in winter.

*Lands and Realty*

*Leases and Permits*

• Permits and leases must include stipulations to minimize impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse and ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat based upon the specific activity and ensure no net loss of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

*Right-of-Ways (ROWs)*

• Work with existing rights-of-way holders to encourage installation of perch guards on all poles where existing utility poles are located within 5 km (3.2 miles) of known leks (Coates et al. 2013).

• Use existing utility corridors and consolidate rights-of-way to reduce habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Install new power lines within existing utility corridors.

• Where ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse conservation opportunities exist, BLM field offices and Forests should work in cooperation with rights-of-way holders to conduct maintenance and operation activities, authorized under an approved ROW grant, to avoid and minimize effect on ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

• When renewing or amending ROWs, assess the impacts of ongoing use of the ROW to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat and incorporate stipulations, which minimize such impacts to the extent allowed by law.

• Conduct pre-application meetings with the BLM or Forest Service and SETT for all new ROW proposals consistent with the ROW regulations (43 CFR 2804.10) and consistent with current renewable energy ROW policy guidance (WO-IM-2011-061, issued February, 2011). Assess the impact of the proposed ROW on ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse and its habitat, and implement the following: Ensure that reasonable alternatives for siting the ROW outside of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat or within a BLM designated utility corridor are considered and analyzed in the NEPA document; and identify technically feasible best management practices, conditions, (e.g., siting, burying power lines) that may be implemented in order to eliminate or minimize impacts.

• Maximize the area of interim reclamation on long-term access roads and well pads including reshaping, topsoiling and revegetating cut and fill slopes.

• Authorize ROWs for wind energy development projects by applying appropriate Design Features as specified in the BLM Wind Energy Development EIS (BLM ~~Wind Energy Development EIS, June~~ 2005), land use restrictions, stipulations, and mitigation measures.

• Bury distribution power lines of up to 35kV where ground disturbance can be minimized. Where technology and economic factors allow, bury higher kV power lines.

• Where existing leases or rights-of-way (ROWs) have had some level of development (road, fence, well, etc.) and are no longer in use, reclaim the site by removing these features, without interfering with valid pre-existing rights, and restoring the habitat.

• Within designated ROW corridors encumbered by existing ROW authorizations: new ROWs should be co-located to the extent practical and feasible with the entire footprint of the proposed project adjacent to or within the existing disturbance associated with the authorized ROWs taking into account operational requirements and safety.

• Subject to valid, existing rights, where new ROWs associated with valid existing rights are required, co-locate new ROWs within existing ROWs or where it best minimizes sage-grouse impacts. Use existing roads, or realignments as described above, to access valid existing rights that are not yet developed. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then build any new road constructed to the minimum standard necessary.

• Upon project completion, roads used for commercial access on public lands would be reclaimed, unless, based on site-specific analysis, the route provides specific benefits for public access and does not contribute to resource conflicts.

• Construct new power lines outside of sage-grouse habitat wherever possible. If power lines cannot be sited outside of sage-grouse habitat, site power lines in the least suitable habitat possible or bury power lines,

• Remove power lines that traverse important sage-grouse habitats when facilities being serviced are no longer in use or when projects are completed.

• Install anti-perching and anti-nesting measures on new tall structures, such as power lines, commensurate with the design of the structures.

*Travel and Transportation*

• Work with local government to enforce speed limits and design roads to be driven at speeds appropriate to minimize vehicle/wildlife collisions.

• Conduct rehabilitation of roads, primitive roads, and trails not designated in travel management plans where such plans exist and have been approved for implementation. This also includes primitive route/roads that were not designated in wilderness study areas and within lands managed for wilderness characteristics that have been selected for protection, with due consideration given to any historical significance of existing trails.

• When reseeding roads, primitive roads, and trails, use appropriate seed mixes and consider the use of transplanted sagebrush in order to meet sage-grouse habitat restoration objectives (Table 4-1). Where invasive annual grasses are present, herbicides may be used to enhance the effectiveness of any seeding and to also establish islands of desirable species for dispersion.

• Use existing roads, or realignments to access valid existing rights that are not yet developed. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then any new

roads would be constructed to the minimum standard necessary to support the intended use.

• Work with local governments to minimize upgrading of existing routes that would change route category (road, primitive road, or trail) or capacity unless the upgrading would have minimal impact on sage-grouse habitat, is necessary for motorist safety, or eliminates the need to construct a new road, while providing for the intended use.

• Manage on-road travel and OHV use in key grouse areas to avoid disturbance during critical times such as winter and nesting periods.

• Consider road removal, realignment, or seasonal closures where appropriate to avoid degradation of habitat and /or to avoid disturbance during critical periods of the sage-grouse life cycle

*Recreation*

• Special recreation permits must have stipulations to minimize impacts to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse and ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat based upon the specific activity and ensures no net unmitigated loss of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat.

• Issue special recreation permits with appropriate distance and timing restrictions to minimize impacts to seasonal sage-grouse habitat.

• Develop trail mapping, and educational campaigns to reduce recreational impacts on ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse, including effects of cross country travel.

• Where feasible, locate recreation trails strategically to create or augment fuel breaks in the margins of sage-grouse habitats and landscapes and not create roads or trails where they cause net negative direct and indirect impacts.

• Take measures to minimize or reduce activities and to avoid an ambient noise level increase >10 dB at the edge of leks during the lekking season generally, March 1 through May 15 from one hour before sunrise until 9:00 AM.

*Energy Development and Infrastructure*

• Adopt standards outlined in *Nevada Energy and Infrastructure Development Standards to Conserve Greater Sage-grouse Populations and Their Habitats,* April 2010, pgs. 25-29.

*Wild Horses and Burros*

~~• Prioritize gathers in sage-grouse habitat, unless removals are necessary in other areas to prevent catastrophic environmental issues.~~

~~• As soon as the population is estimated to exceed high AML, gather to low AML and implement fertility control.~~

~~• Within sage grouse habitat, develop or amend herd management area (HMAs) plans to incorporate sage grouse habitat objectives and management considerations for all HMAs. For all HMAs within sage grouse habitat, prioritize the evaluation of all appropriate management levels based on indicators that address structure/condition/composition of vegetation and measurements specific to achieving sage grouse habitat objectives.~~

• When conducting NEPA analysis for wild horse and burro management activities, water developments or other rangeland improvements for wild horses in sage-grouse habitat, address the direct and indirect effects to sage-grouse populations and habitat. Implement any water developments or rangeland improvements using the criteria for wild horses and burros year around use and consistent with necessary rights and right of

ways in sage-grouse habitats. Incorporate the NRCS water development standards and additional criteria listed below, including Codes 614, 574, 533, 642, and 516.

*Livestock Grazing and Range Management*

• Where applicable and as part of a ranch management plan, use the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Practice Standards and Specification listed below. In addition, use the recommendations additions to the standards developed by NRCS and NDOW as part of NRCS' Sage-grouse Initiative and further expanded by the state of Nevada in this document:

- Code 645: Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Code 528: Prescribed Grazing
  - Emphasize rest periods and/ or seasonal deferment when appropriate as part of the grazing management plan and restoration.
- Code 614: Water Facilities
  - Avoid placement where existing sagebrush cover will be reduced near a lek, in nesting habitat, or winter habitat whenever possible. NDOW recommends structures be at least 1 mile from a lek.
- Code 574: Spring Development
  - Springs may be developed as long as valid water claims or rights exist and development shows a net benefit to overall habitat management within a SGMA.
- Code 533: Pumping Plant
  - NDOW recommends the structure should not be placed within 3 miles of a lek to avoid disturbance to nesting sage-grouse.
- Code 642: Water Well
  - Well placement should encourage dispersion of livestock and provide for a neutral or no net negative impact to habitat within a SGMA.

Further water developments will decrease concentrated livestock and wildlife use and further protect sagebrush habitats.

- Code 516: Livestock Pipeline
  - Pipelines shall be replaced as needed to provide for better dispersion of livestock.
  - Pipelines shall be replaced along existing pipelines, roadways, or fences.
  - Replacement and maintenance of pipelines shall use the least invasive techniques and extensive work requiring heavy equipment shall be done in a manner consistent with season of use by the ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse (i.e. replacing improvements in ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse winter habitat during the summer and replacing improvements in breeding and nesting habitat during the fall)
  - Replacement of improvements shall be allowed in order to not jeopardize existing and valid claims and rights.
- Code 410: Grade Stabilization Structure
  - If possible, avoid the installation of these structures during the late summer brood rearing period. NDOW recommends structure placement in mid-September through late November.
- Code 382: Fence
  - If possible, fencing should not be constructed near a lek and should be avoided in winter habitats near ridges. To make a fence more visible, use white tipped metal fence posts, securing flagging or reflectors to the top fence wires, or slide sections of PVC pipe over the top wire (Stevenson and Reece 2012).

• Relocate or modify existing water developments (including locating troughs to further disperse livestock) that are having a net negative impact on ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitats. Any changes to existing water developments must be conducted in accordance with

State Water Law and in close consultation with the water right owner in order to avoid a "taking" of private property water rights.

• All troughs should be outfitted with the appropriate type and number of wildlife escape ramps.

• All field and district offices should apply BLM IM 2013-094 or similar methodology until superseded related to drought management planning.

• During the annual grazing application, work with permittees to avoid consistent concentrated turn-out locations for livestock within approximately 3 miles of known lek areas during the March 1 to May 15 period. During the March 1 to May 15 period, avoid domestic sheep use, bedding areas, and herder camps within at least 1.24 miles (2 kilometers) of known lek locations. Utilize land features and roads on maps provided to the permittee to help demarcate livestock use avoidance areas.

• Salting and supplemental feeding locations, temporary and/or mobile watering and new handling facilities (corrals, chutes, etc.) should be located at least 1/2-mile from riparian zones, springs, meadows, or 1 mile from active leks in sage-grouse habitat, unless the pasture is too small or another location offers equal or better habitat benefits. The distance should be based on local conditions.

*Surface Disturbing Activities – General*

• During the period specified, manage discretionary surface disturbing activities and uses to prevent disturbance to ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse during life cycle periods. Seasonal protection is identified for the following:

-Seasonal protection within three (3) miles of active ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse leks from March 1 through June 15 during lekking hours of 1-hour before sunrise until 10:00 am

-Seasonal protection of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse suitable wintering areas from November 1 through March 31;

-Seasonal protection of ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse suitable brood-rearing habitat from May 15 to August 15.

• Implement appropriate time-of-day and/or time-of year restrictions for future construction and/or maintenance activities in known ~~GRSG~~sage-grouse habitat

• Reseed all areas requiring reclamation with a seed mixture appropriate for the soils, climate, and landform of the area to ensure recovery of the ecological processes and habitat features of the potential natural vegetation, and to prevent the invasion of noxious weeds or other exotic invasive species. Long-term monitoring is required to determine success.

• Minimize the footprint of disturbances to avoid or minimize the potential for invasive plant infestations. When possible, do not remove native vegetation. Monitor, report, and treat all disturbance sites that become occupied by invasive plants, primarily cheatgrass, and all state listed noxious weeds. This should be done until the site is free of invasive and noxious weeds for a period of two growing or germination seasons. Reporting should be sent to the Nevada Department of Agriculture via the EDDMapS link on their website.

• Maximize the area of interim reclamation on long-term surface disturbing activities to including reshaping, topsoiling and revegetating areas no longer being disturbed within the overall project foot print.

***Miscellaneous***

• On BLM and Forest Service-administered Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), mechanized equipment may be used to protect or rehabilitate areas of high

resource concerns or values; however, the use of mechanized equipment will be evaluated against potential long-term resource damage.

- Work with federal, state, and local governments and project proponents to minimize anthropogenic subsidies for predators, including ravens.

# Appendix B:
# Development Process and Justification for Habitat Objectives for Greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada

## Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Habitat Objectives

## Questions and Answers

1. How were the Proposed Habitat Objectives for GRSG developed?

   The proposed habitat objectives are a synthesis of existing data across the state of Nevada and portions of the Bi-State in California. The U.S. Geological Survey was primarily responsible for much of the synthesis and in translating often complex habitat relationships and GRSG responses into the proposed habitat objectives which could be summarized and applied on the ground. A team consisting of representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and U.S. Forest Service reviewed the Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines and also reviewed a bibliography of Nevada-based research made available by the U.S. Geological Survey. The team then went through each Connelly et al. 2000 guideline and reviewed it with respect to localized data. The Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines remained as a default unless refined by new information.

2. Why are the Proposed Habitat Objectives for GRSG different from Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines?

   The Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines were a strong synthesis of research until that time. The guidelines themselves suggest that studies which define GRSG habitat on a more region-specific basis should be used where supported by research. These proposed habitat objectives respond to more localized data than the Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines, which relied heavily on data from the eastern half of the range of GRSG where a perennial grass component is more dominant, and where large-scale ecological changes such as invasive grasses and conifer encroachment are largely absent. The proposed habitat objectives reflect those differences.

3. What are the differences between the Proposed Habitat Objectives for GRSG and Connelly et al. 2000 guidelines?

While numerous differences exist, they are driven primarily by three elements: 1) the reduced role of perennial grasses for nest concealment as revealed by many nesting habitat studies throughout Nevada; 2) the increased habitat fragmentation and degradation as a result of invasive grasses and conifer encroachment; and 3) the elevated importance of late-summer brood-rearing habitats in the lower precipitation zones of Nevada. The proposed habitat objectives also reflect recent research into more complex aspects of habitat juxtaposition, such as the interspersion of meadow habitat with adjacent sagebrush cover, and the attempt to quantify other scale-dependent relationships such as the degree of conifer encroachment.

4. Are the Proposed Habitat Objectives for GRSG supported by science?

The proposed habitat objectives are supported by numerous studies throughout Nevada from the Bi-State area in southwestern Nevada and California through the Elko District into northeastern Nevada. Much of the synthesis of research which resulted in these proposed habitat objectives for GRSG was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

5. Are the Proposed Habitat Objectives for GRSG consistent with the BLM National Technical Team report (NTT)?

The NTT report suggests the use of local and state seasonal GRSG habitat objectives when they are available and references the habitat recommendations from Connelly et al. 2000 if they are not.

6. What is the rationale for eliminating the residual cover standard (7 in/18cm) from GRSG nesting habitat?

Localized data indicate that sagebrush canopy cover was the primary indicator of nesting success within Nevada. Research indicates that the primary deterrent to successful nesting was predation, specifically by common ravens, an aerial predator. Thus, the research demonstrated that overhead concealment was the primary

indicator of nesting success and that the lateral concealment component of perennial grasses drove nesting success only when sagebrush canopy was deficient.

7. What is the difference between tall trees and powerlines?

These differ in degree of impact. Generally, powerlines are larger and have much greater visibility. They contribute to fragmentation and provide potential predators with larger scale, more pervasive access to habitats.

**Appendix C:**

**Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada Resolution**

# INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF NEVADA, INC.

680 GREENBRAE DR., SUITE 265 • SPARKS, NV 89431
P.O. BOX 7440 • RENO, NV 89510
PHONE (775) 355-0600 • FAX (775) 355-0648


**RESOLUTION NO. 12-ITCN-06**



## RESOLUTION
## OF
## INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF NEVADA, INC.

## SAGE GROUSE MANAGEMENT AREA ON TRIBAL LANDS

**WHEREAS,** The Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc., is organized and operates in accordance with its Constitution and By-Laws, amended in November 1974; and

**WHEREAS,** the purposes of Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc. (ITCN), are stated in its Constitution, Preamble; and

**WHEREAS,** the Executive Board, a body comprised of the twenty-seven (27) representatives of the federally recognized member tribes in the State of Nevada and whose Charter is ratified by these same tribes; and

**WHEREAS,** the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada has a continuing interest in the health, education and well-being of their Indian people; and

**WHEREAS,** the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada respects the sovereign to sovereign relationship between the Tribes and the State of Nevada and the federal government; and

**WHEREAS,** a Memorandum of Agreement may be sought on behalf of each individual Tribe to further develop the efforts needed for the management, monitoring, and surveying for sage grouse.

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**WHEREAS,** the sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is a valued native avian species with declining populations that have been severely impacted by habitat degradation, by declining big sage populations, by invasive plants, by increased predation, by mining interest, by recreational use, and by livestock grazing; and

**WHEREAS,** the ITCN recognizes the need for tribes to protect and conserve, to the greatest extent possible, the existing wildlife habitat of sage grouse within and/or adjacent to the boundaries of all tribal lands within Nevada; and

**WHEREAS,** the cooperative efforts will involve survey and monitoring activities, conservation planning, and protecting key habitat areas to assist with all sage grouse life stages which include brooding, migration and lek habitat; and

**WHEREAS,** the sage grouse is recognized by Nevada tribes traditional song and dance, language, and stories/legends and there is presence of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) regarding sage grouse and their habitat be protected for tribes' value and conservation efforts; and

**WHEREAS,** the ITCN acknowledges the valiant effort to protect existing sage grouse populations through the development of a Sage Grouse Conservation Plan for the State of Nevada; and

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**WHEREAS,** the ITCN Executive Board endorses the attachment 1 of approved language that would be updated into the final State of Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Executive Board, on behalf of their membership, hereby** supports the statewide Sage Grouse Conservation Plan effort by including any applicable Nevada tribal lands within Sage Grouse Management Areas through a Memorandum of Agreement for direct involvement for the purposes of monitoring, surveying, developing recommended conservation measures, funding, and protecting the sage grouse and its sagebrush habitat.

## CERTIFICATION

**The foregoing resolution was adopted by poll vote of the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada's Executive Board, completed on the 25th day of July, 2012, by a**

**Vote of __12__ FOR, __0__AGAINST, and__0__ ABSTENTIONS.**

Daryl Crawford, ITCN Executive Director
for
Bryan Cassadore, Secretary
ITCN Executive Board

# Appendix D:

# Cooperation of State and Federal Agencies for Depredation Permits for Common Raven

## Cooperation of State and Federal Agencies for Depredation Permits for Common Raven

The USFWS can authorize depredation permits for the 'take' of common ravens, which are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Currently in the State of Nevada, there are permits that authorize the 'take' of approximately 5,000 ravens annually, which constitutes five percent of the estimated 100,000 resident ravens (2003 estimate, Wildlife Services) in Nevada. NDOW is authorized to take 2,500 ravens; USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (WS) is authorized to take 1,500, and other private sources around 1,000. NDOW's permit is specifically authorized for the protection of sage-grouse and other game species. WS' permit is authorized for the protection of livestock. Other permits are authorized for the protection of property, public health and welfare (power companies, landfills, etc.). The most recent population estimate for Nevada is 190,000 ravens (2013 estimate, WS). This may potentially lead to an increase in permit allocations in the future if they can be justified

WS is a federal agency that works cooperatively with the Nevada Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Industry. Its primary objective is to protect livestock and farming interests from damage caused by predators or other nuisance species. WS is authorized to perform their duties on federal land and may enter into agreements with state, tribal, county, or private landowners to conduct their business. Predator control is a major component of their duties.

Specific to ravens, WS certified applicators are the only ones authorized by the EPA to either apply or directly supervise those applying the avicide DRC-1339 to execute the federal depredation permit authorized by the USFWS for the taking of migratory birds.

Currently, WS and NDOW are working jointly to reduce raven densities with the aim to enhance sage-grouse recruitment rates, which can be affected by raven predation of sage-grouse eggs and chicks. NDOW designates priority areas for treatment and WS treats hard-boiled chicken eggs with DRC-1339 and places them within the priority

areas. Monitoring and data collection is done by both agencies as well as other partners to inform future implementation of the program and determine the efficacy of the protocols used.

# Appendix E:

# Process to Prioritize Integrated Predator Management Projects

**Process to Prioritize Integrated Predator Management Projects**

The following frame work will be used to prioritize where Objective 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 are implemented across the state.

Step 1: State level mapping for ravens and sage-grouse. This should be an ongoing process updated every few years.

a. Contract with USGS to conduct landscape level modeling to estimate location of high raven occupancy (following methods for Raven Selection Probability Function (RSPF) as described in Coates et al., In Review).
   If funding is not available to conduct modeling, regional biologists would submit areas of concern for evaluation.

Conduct modeling of sage-grouse nesting habitat ~~[[Methods still to be determined]]~~

b. Intersect areas of raven concern with areas of sage-grouse nesting habitat. Select 5-15 sites to be evaluated at the site level. Until map of nesting habitat for sage-grouse in Nevada is available, the Core Management Area should be used.

Step 2: Site level analysis. This step should be conducted annually.

a. Conduct raven surveys at 5-15 sites identified during Step 1 following a selected raven survey protocol to determine raven densities.
b. Evaluate sage-grouse demographic data, as available, to determine if nest success is a limiting factor. Areas identified for potential raven removal should be prioritized for sage-grouse demographic data collection as feasible.
c. Use information from the above two steps to identify 2-5 project sites for Integrated Predator Management around the State. Sites that have identified nest success as limiting to the populations due to raven predation should be prioritized for treatment. Sites that have greater than 0.46 ravens per $km^2$ should be prioritized for treatment (Coates et al., In Review). Exact number of

project locations should be determined by number of raven take permits available, funding for projects, and personnel to carry out work.

Once Prioritized Integrated Predator Management Project locations are identified, the following steps should be completed.

1. Develop Integrated Predator Management Program for each project location.
    a. Develop anthropogenic subsidies control plan for project location following recommendations in Objective 1.
    b. Develop habitat integrity improvement plan for project location recommendations in Objective 2.
    c. Develop predator control plan for project location following recommendations in Objective 3.
        i. Develop treatment regime for project area
            1. Determine/set parameters of predator control area (where damage is occurring)
            2. Determine/set parameters of predator control project timing (when resource is vulnerable)
            3. Establish species to be targeted and methods/techniques which are acceptable
            4. Determine what constitutes a "corrected" situation (when does project end, e.g. stop lethal control once raven density is below density thresholds or a lack of population response to actions is determined)
        ii. Establish predator monitoring regimes
            1. Pre-treatment monitoring of predator numbers (frequency, number & type).
            2. Treatment monitoring of predator numbers (frequency, number & type).

3. Post-treatment monitoring of predator numbers (frequency, number & type).

iii. Establish sage-grouse monitoring regimes

1. Monitor sage-grouse population trends/demographic rates to determine effectiveness of predator control practices.

1 **Appendix F:**

2 **Template Cooperative Monitoring Agreement**

**COOPERATIVE MONITORING AGREEMENT**

**1. Introduction**

The Joint Cooperative Monitoring Agreement is instituted under the authority of the Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Public Lands Council dated January 30, 2004.

The BLM and _____[*cooperator*] enter into this agreement with the intent to strengthen their partnership in monitoring of the _____ Allotment. Resource objectives will be a central feature of this agreement because they will become the target and guide regarding what and how to monitor, and for what reasons. Resource objectives will be measurable and attainable statements of the desired resource attributes.

The BLM and _____[*cooperator*] expect the monitoring plan to evolve over time. New data will provide input on how to better interpret and apply the monitoring results. This will enable the parties to optimize the application of cooperative techniques throughout the monitoring partnership. The parties will work together to determine how the monitoring results will be used to refine and redirect the strategies and tactics for both the monitoring and management plans.

**2. Existing Management Objectives**

The _____ Allotment was evaluated through a Rangeland Health Evaluation and Assessment document in _____[*year*]. Allotment-specific

objectives were brought forward through the Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) for each key management area for upland areas, riparian zones, wildlife habitat, and wild horse and burro management. These objectives were established to be in conformance with the current Land Use Plan (LUP) and the Standards for Rangeland Health. Objectives under the LUP, Rangeland Program Summary, and Allotment Evaluation are attached. Also attached are the _____ Resource Advisory Council Standards and Guidelines (RAC S&Gs).

**3. Existing Monitoring Data/Information and Additional Data Needs to Address Established Resource Objectives**

a. Established Monitoring Methodologies

| **Short-term** | **Long-term** |
|---|---|
| Actual Use Information | Trend (Frequency study) |
| Use Pattern Mapping | Production/Composition/Ecological Status |
| Key Species Utilization at long-term upland monitoring sites | Cover |
| Riparian Utilization | Weed Inventory |
| | Water Quality |
| | Climate data |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Wild Horse & Burro Census |
| | Riparian Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) Assessment |

b. Additional Studies Needed

| Short-term | Long-term |
|---|---|
| None | Upland Soil Site Stability |
| | Photo Trend Monitoring |
| | Riparian Multiple Indicator Monitoring (MIM) |

**4. Future Monitoring Attributes and Protocols**

a. Key Management Areas, Critical Area, or Designated Management Areas have been selected for the _____ Allotment utilizing BLM protocols. The site(s) will be reconfirmed jointly. If a site is not reconfirmed as an appropriate monitoring site, consideration must be given to the historical data associated with the site and a determination should be made whether or not to continue monitoring this site to retain trend information.

b. Monitoring by the BLM and the cooperator will be consistent with BLM protocol and technical references. Short and long-term monitoring studies will allow for measurement(s) towards specific objective(s).

c. Any updates to technical references/BLM protocol will be incorporated for use under this cooperative monitoring agreement in the future. If additional monitoring studies become available that will supplement studies already occurring for measuring an objective, this cooperative monitoring agreement will be updated.

**5. Frequency and Timing of Monitoring (cooperator/agency specific for each cooperative monitoring agreement and cooperator interest)**

a. Short-term monitoring will be collected on an annual or semi-annual basis, unless otherwise stipulated. Long-term monitoring will be measured at 3-10 year intervals unless otherwise stipulated or if observations indicate a more rapid than expected rate of change. Observers will be consistent in the plant phenology and/or time of year in which data are collected. If new sites are established, data collection will follow BLM protocol, BLM technical references, and this Cooperative Agreement.

b. The following monitoring studies will be conducted as appropriate in order to measure progress towards meeting the objectives and for determining if the RAC S&Gs are being met.

Short-term monitoring (Upland triggers and/or indicators):

| Study | Responsible Party | Collection Period |
|---|---|---|
| Actual Use | Cooperator | Annually |
| Trigger Monitoring | Cooperator | Annually |
| Key Area Utilization | BLM | Semi-annually |
| Landscape Appearance (Ranchers' Monitoring Guide) | Cooperator | Annually |
| Use Pattern Mapping | BLM | As grazing management changes, funding, and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | priorities dictate |
| Climate | BLM and Cooperator | Annually |

Long-term monitoring (Upland objectives):

| Study | Responsible Party | Collection Period |
|---|---|---|
| Frequency | BLM | Every 5-10 years |
| Photo Trend | Cooperator | Annually |
| Production/Composition | BLM | Every 5-10 years |
| Line Intercept | BLM | Every 5-10 years |
| Line-Point Intercept | BLM | Every 5-10 years |

Short-term monitoring (Riparian triggers and/or indicators):

| Study | Responsible Party | Collection Period |
|---|---|---|
| Utilization/Stubble Height | BLM | Every 3-5 years |
| Stream Bank Alteration | BLM | Every 3-5 years |

Long-term monitoring (Riparian objectives):

| Study | Responsible Party | Collection Period |
|---|---|---|
| PFC (assessment) | BLM | Every 5-10 years |
| Multiple Indicator Monitoring | BLM | Every 5-10 years |

c. Each party will contact the other party prior to collecting monitoring data on the _____ Allotment in order to further promote a cooperative and collaborative working environment.

d. If a cooperator is interested, they may request to collect additional monitoring studies from those assigned above after adequate training and verification by the BLM.

e. Parties are encouraged to conduct monitoring efforts together, where possible.

**6. Data Analysis**

a. The BLM and the Permittee will meet to discuss the monitoring data collected. Each party will be provided copies of the monitoring data collected each given year for the associated monitoring file.

b. The BLM and the Cooperator will meet periodically to discuss the monitoring data collected.

c. The BLM and the Cooperator will review data analysis jointly and discuss any future changes that may be needed in order to address resource concerns.

**7. Agreement Implementation**

a. Collection of monitoring data specified in this cooperative agreement will occur at appropriate times immediately upon signature of this agreement. Data share between the parties will occur by the end of each calendar year.

Cooperator _____ Date_____

BLM Authorized Officer_____ Date_____

## FIGURES

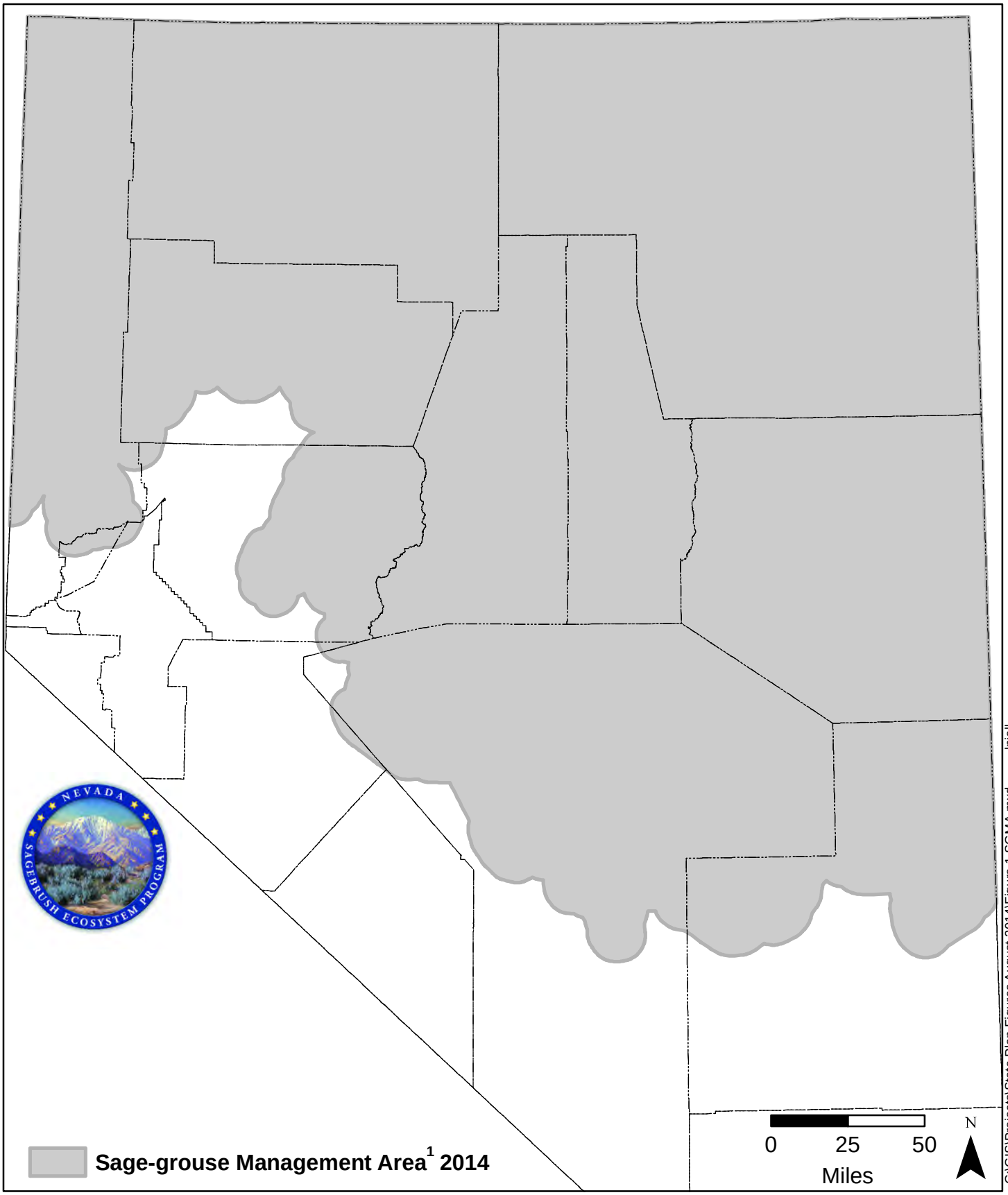


**Figure 1. Sage-grouse Management Area**

1. The express purpose of the SGMA is to trigger consultation with the SETT; specific area or project habitat determinations must be conducted in accordance with established scientific protocol. This should not be used for any other purpose.

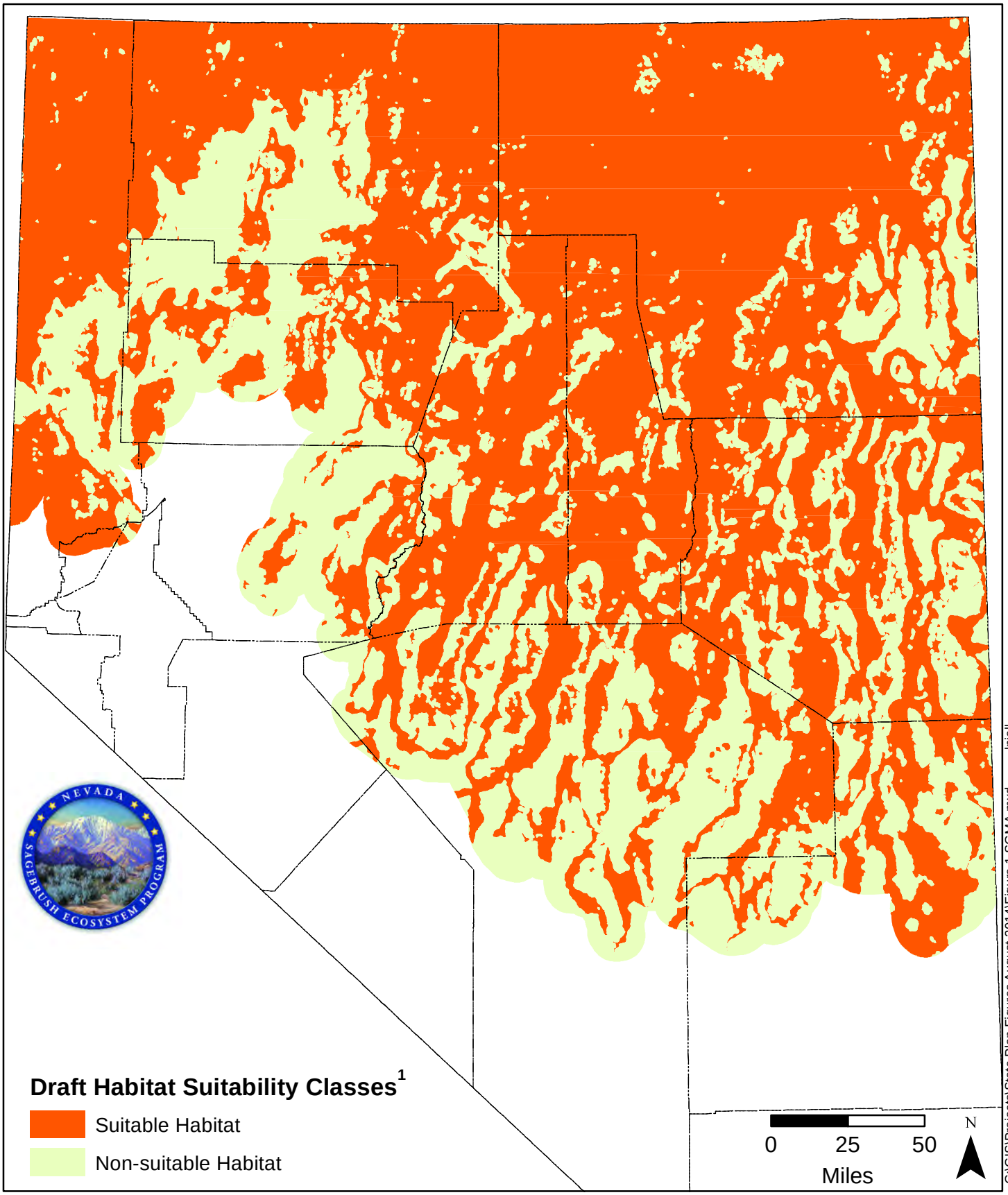


**Figure 2. Draft Habitat Suitability Classes**

1. These draft classes are available for review purposes only and should not be used for decisions, recommendations, prioritizations, etc. The final version of these classes are anticipated in January 2015.

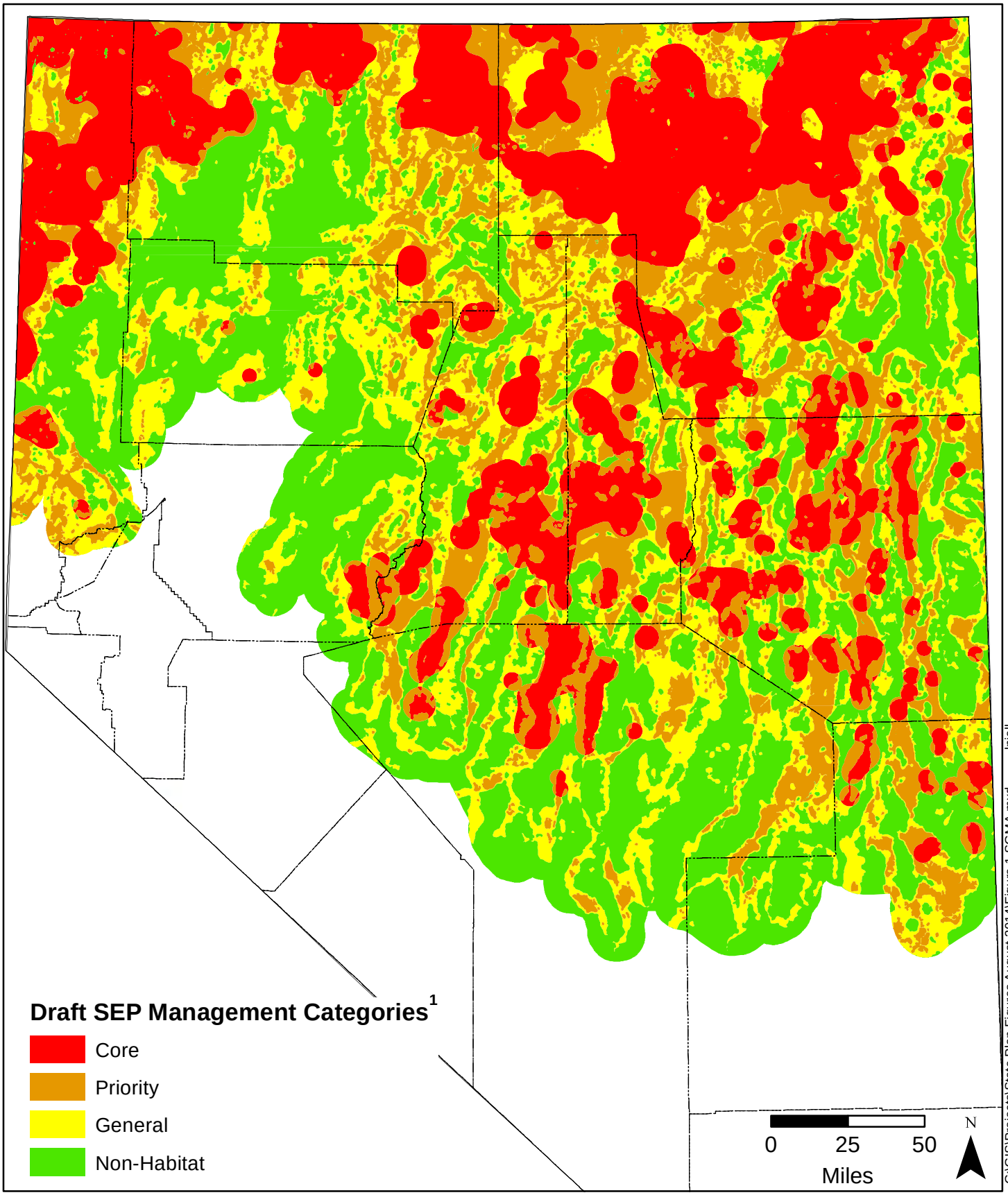


**Figure 3. Draft Management Categories**

1. These draft categories are available for review purposes only and should not be used for decisions, recommendations, prioritizations, etc. The final version of these categories are anticipated in January 2015.

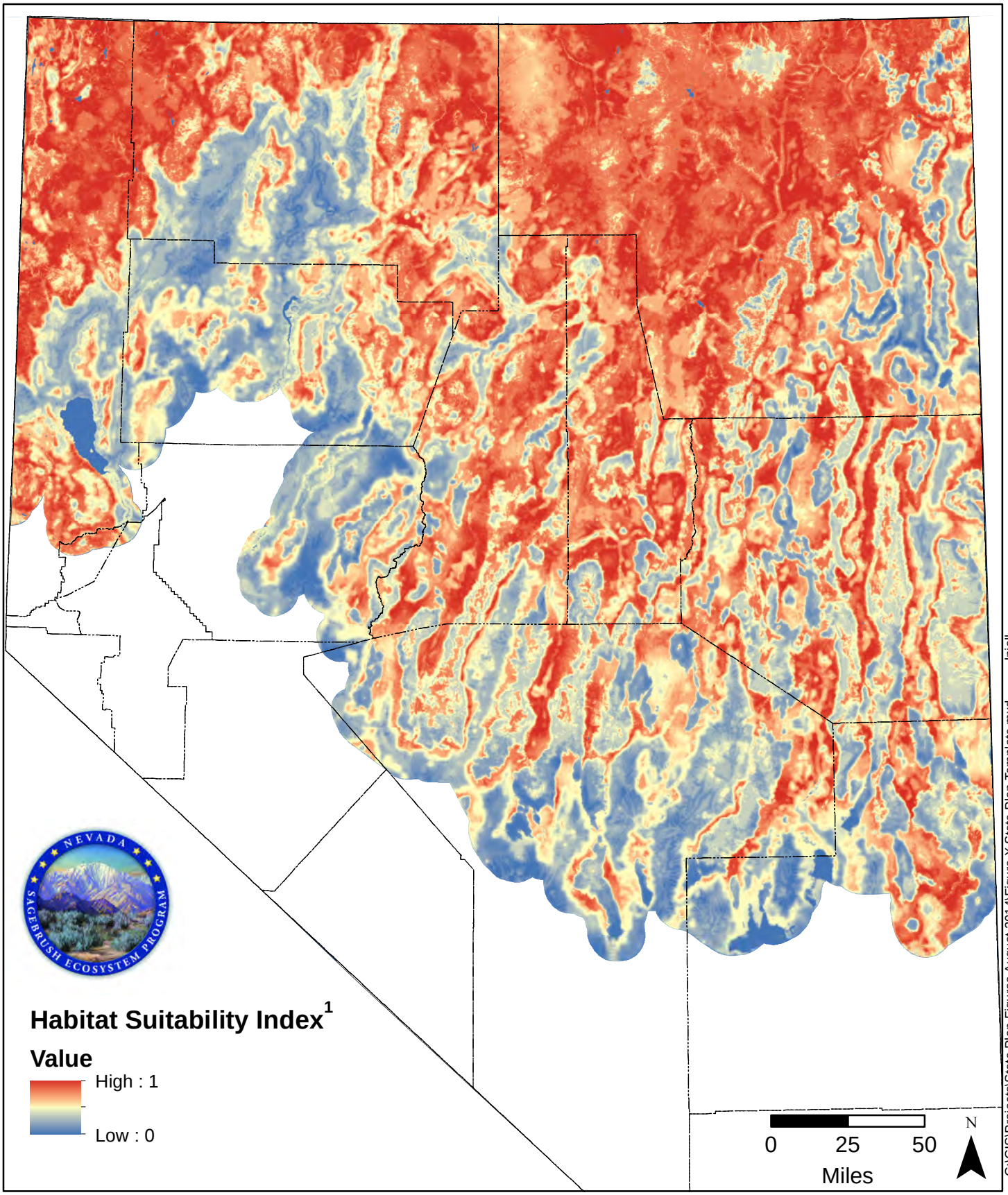


**Figure 4. Draft Habitat Suitability Index**

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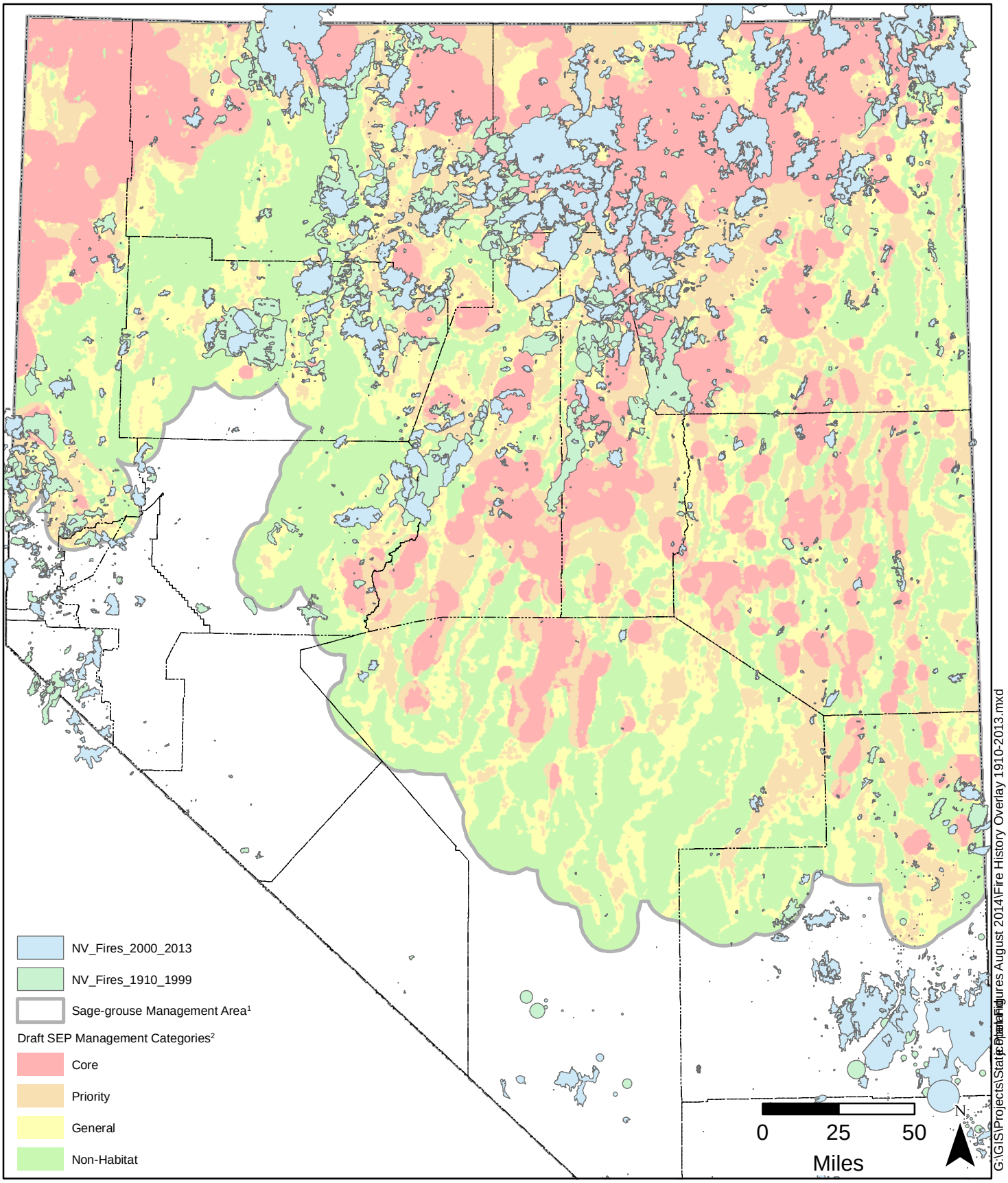


# Sage-grouse Management Area 2014

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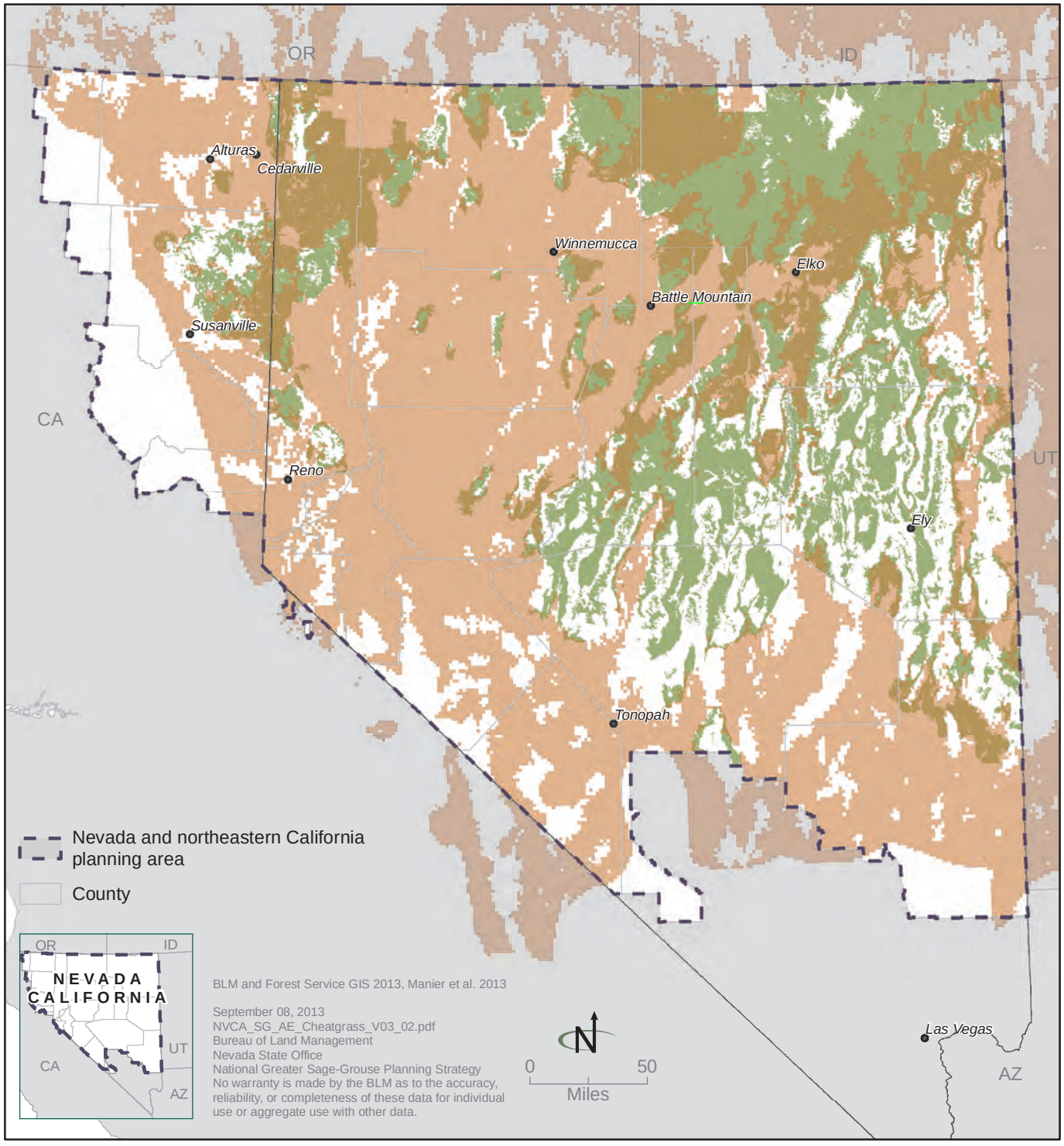
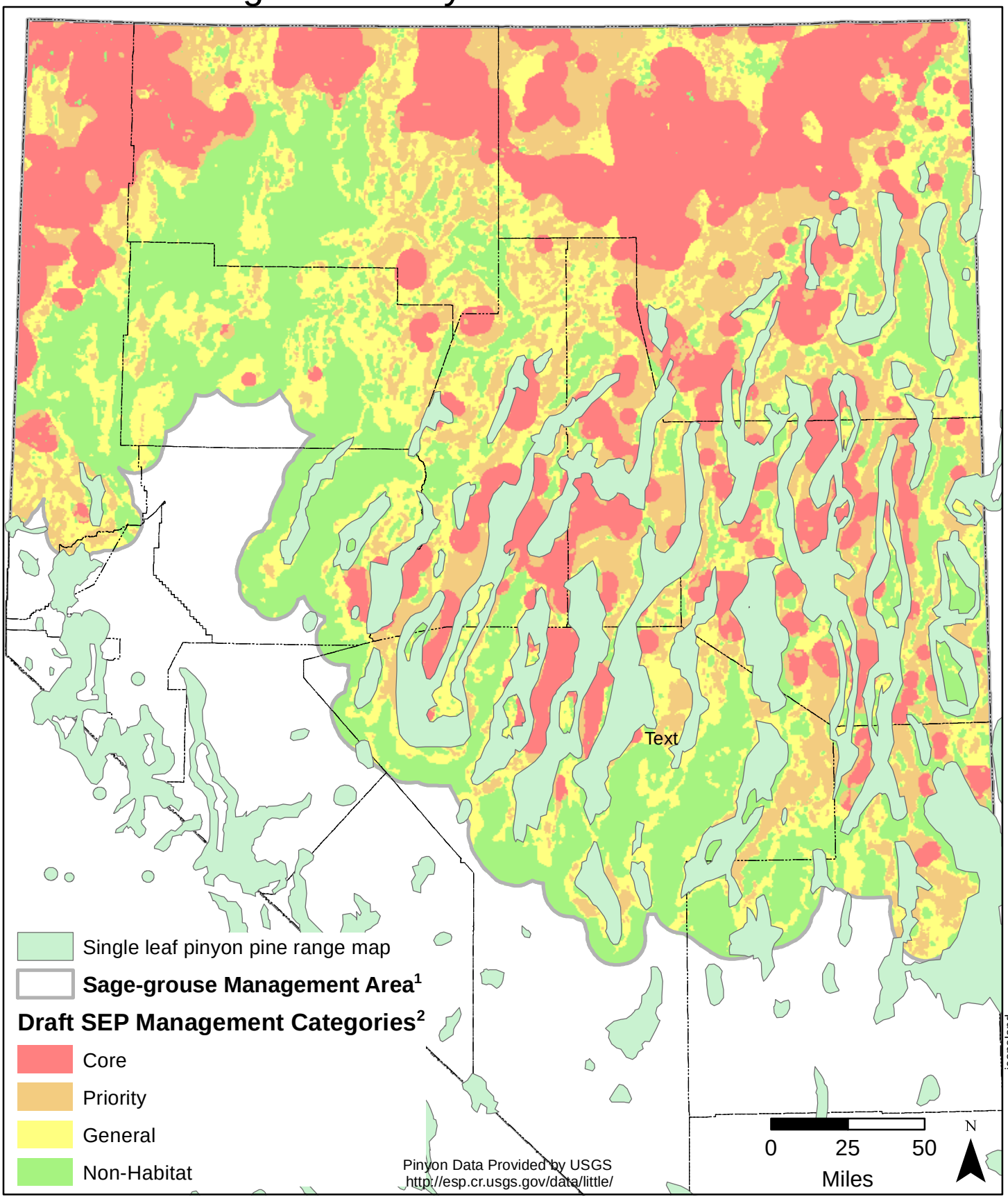
## Areas with a High Probability of Cheatgrass Occurrence

FIGURE 6. Extent of Cheatgrass in Nevada

THIS FIGURE IS A PLACE HOLDER AND WILL BE REPLACED WITH MAP ON THE STATE TEMPLATE FOR THE FINAL STATE PLAN. (FROM BLM DEIS 2014)



# Figure 8 - Pinyon extent in Nevada




## Sage-grouse Management Area 2014

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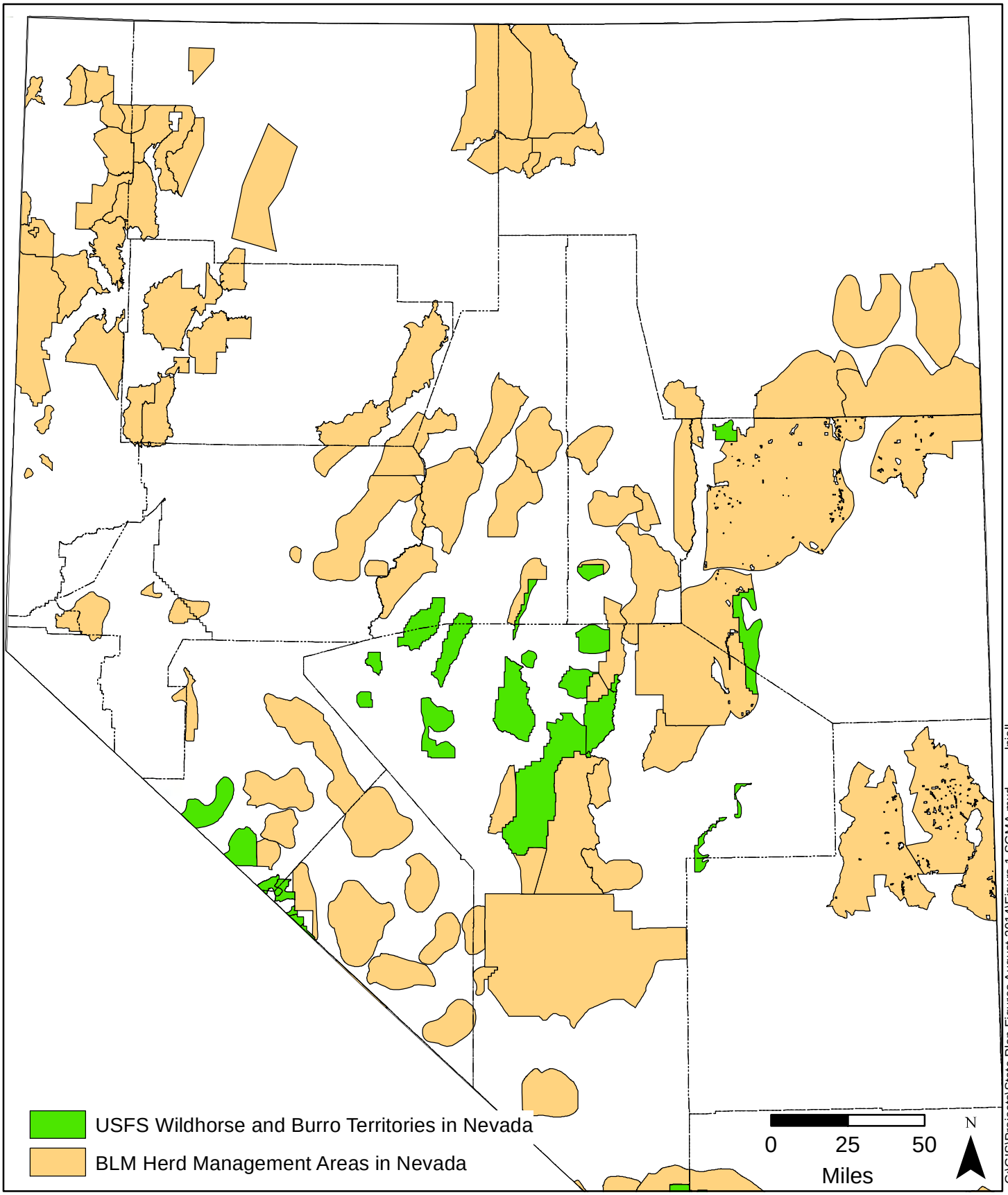


**Figure 8. BLM Horse Management Areas and USFS Wild Horse and Burro Territories in Nevada**

1. http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/gis/?cid=STELPRDB5327833 Accessed August 13, 2014
2. http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/htnf/landmanagement/gis Accessed February 18, 2014
3. http://www.blm.gov/ca/gis/index.html Accessed August 13, 2014
4. http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/more_programs/geographic_sciences/gis/geospatial_data.html Accessed February 18, 2014

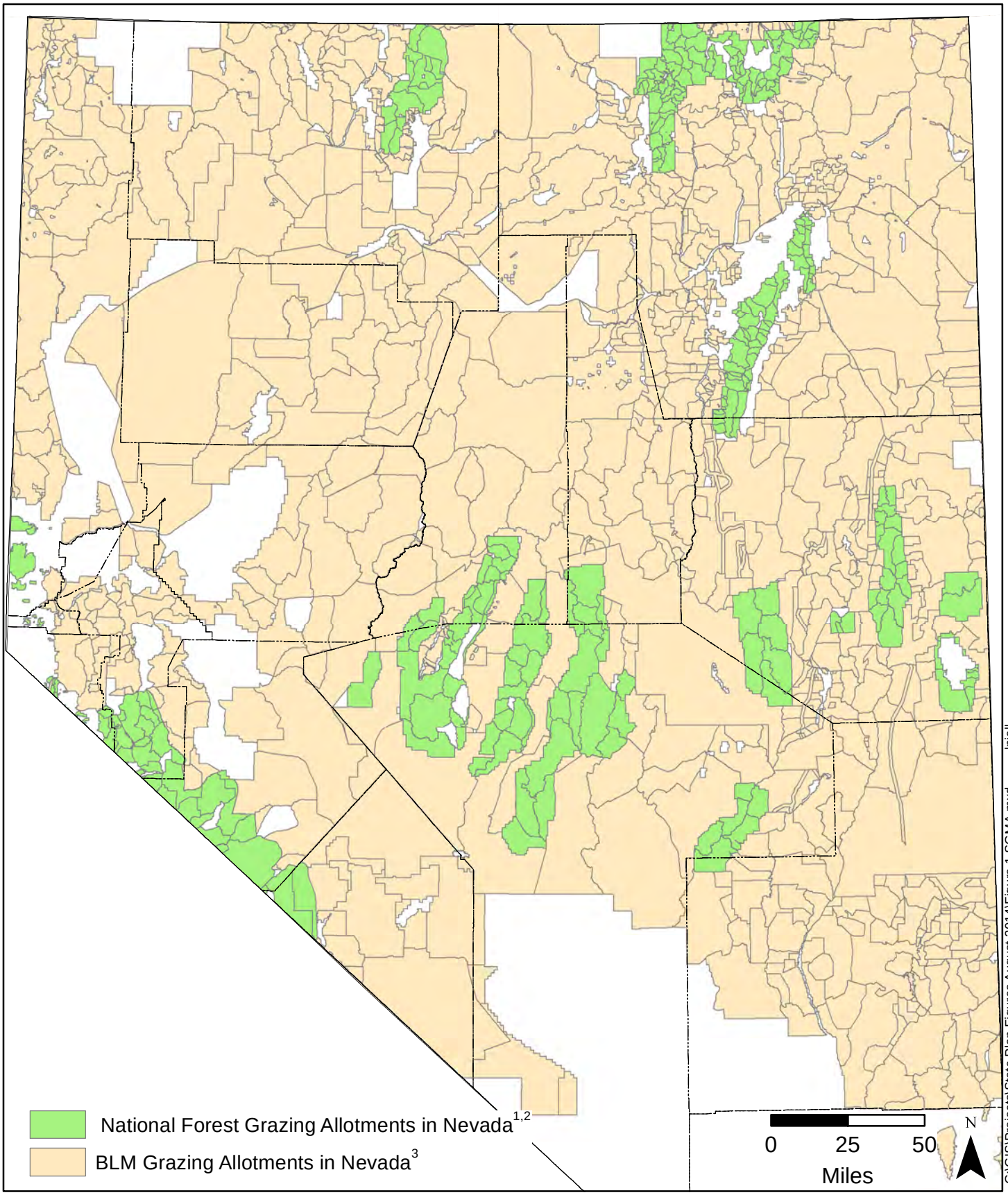


**Figure 9. USFS and BLM Grazing Allotments in Nevada**

1. http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/htnf/landmanagement/gis Accessed August 12, 2014
2. http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/gis/?cid=STELPRDB5327833 Accessed August 13, 2014
3. http://www.geocommunicator.gov/shapefilesall/GA/BLM_Grazing_allotments.zip Accessed August 12, 2014

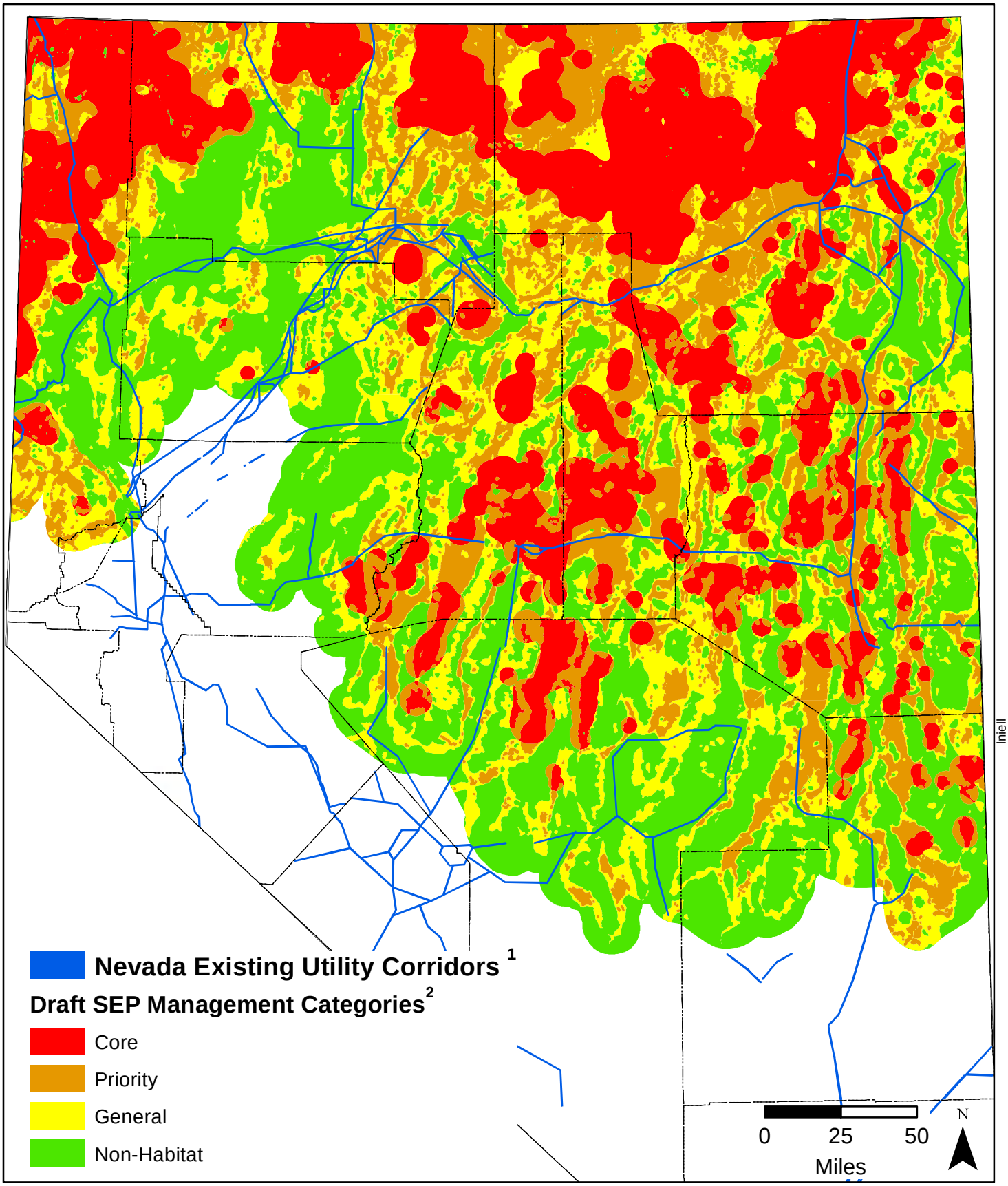


**Figure 10. Existing Utility Corridors in Nevada**

1. BLM Nevada State Office: Leisa Wesch lwesch@blm.gov
2. These draft categories are available for review purposes only and should not be used for decisions, recommendations, prioritizations, etc. The final version of these categories are anticipated in January 2015.


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