

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

201 S. Roop Street, Suite 101
Carson City, Nevada 89701
Telephone (775) 684-8600
Facsimile (775) 684-8604

www.sagebrusheco.nv.gov

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



Tim Rubald, Program Manager
John Copeland, Forestry/Wildland Fire
Melissa Faigeles, State Lands
Kelly McGowan, Agriculture
Lara Niell, Wildlife

STATE OF NEVADA
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
STAFF REPORT
MEETING DATE: April 8, 2014

DATE: April 2, 2014
TO: Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Members
FROM: Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
Telephone: 775-684-8600
THROUGH: Tim Rubald, Program Manager, SETT,
Telephone: 775-684-8600, Email: timrubald@sagebrusheco.nv.gov
SUBJECT: Discussion of items, including the 2014 State Plan, to be developed for
the USFWS data call request in September 2014.

SUMMARY

This item provides a status report on the progress of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program Detailed Strategic Timeline approved and updated by the SEC at the July 30, 2013 and September 12, 2013 SEC meetings. The primary focus of work to date has been the development and updating of items to be included in the BLM/FS Final LUPA and EIS. With that work accomplished, the SEP will shift focus to items necessary to complete by September 2014, when USFWS begins their 12-month findings process for the listing decision. The primary focus will be to finalize the State Plan and Strategic Action Plan.

PREVIOUS ACTION

March 27, 2013. The Council directed the SETT to meet with USFWS and NDOW staff to discuss the USFWS comments on the Nevada State Plan and report back to the Council.

April 22, 2013. Staff presented a general timeline and the Council directed staff to develop a more detailed timeline, which includes specific tasks to be accomplished, interim milestones, and key Council decision points.

July 30, 2013. The Council adopted the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program Strategic Detailed Timeline.

September 12, 2013. The Council reviewed revisions to the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program Strategic Detailed Timeline.

BACKGROUND

At the July 30, 2013, and then updated at the September 12, 2013 meeting, the SEC adopted the Sagebrush Ecosystem Strategic Detailed Timeline that was prepared by the SETT at the request of the SEC. The Timeline was developed to guide program priorities, staff workload, and corresponding SEC policy decisions through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) listing decision of the greater sage-grouse in September 2015. This included five major areas of focus:

- Conservation Credit System
- BLM/FS LUPA and EIS
- Revision of the State Plan and Development of the Strategic Action Plan
- USGS Habitat Suitability Mapping
- USFWS Data Call/Develop Projects Database

BLM/FS LUPA and EIS

To date, the main focus has been to update components of the State Alternative/State Plan for inclusion in the Final BLM EIS. There has been much work already accomplished to this end, including:

- Adoption of the revised Section 3.0 of the State Plan – Goals and Objectives, including more detail on the avoid, minimize, mitigate process;
- Adoption of Site-Specific Consultation Based Design Features that pertain to the “minimize” policy;
- Adoption of sage-grouse habitat objectives;
- Adoption of revisions to the Livestock Grazing section of the State Alternative;
- Adoption of revisions to the Wild Horse and Burro section of the State Alternative;
- Withdrawal of the De Minimis activities section of the State Plan;
- Adoption of the DRAFT USGS Habitat Suitability; Management Categories; and Sage-Grouse Management Area maps; and
- Adoption of the DRAFT Nevada Conservation Credit System Manual and Habitat Quantification Tool Scientific Methods Document.

State Plan and Strategic Action Plan

While the SETT will continue to work closely with the BLM and FS staffs, the SETT's main focus will shift to the revision of the final State Plan and Strategic Action Plan, to be completed by the September 2014 USFWS data call, for consideration during the USFWS' 12-month findings process for the listing decision. These are items that were less time sensitive for inclusion in the EIS. Over the coming five months, the SETT will be bringing revised sections of the State Plan in quick succession for SEC review and approval. It is anticipated that this work will be complete by the August 7, 2014 SEC meeting. The anticipated schedule for the SETT bringing items forward at SEC meetings is as follows¹:

- **May 8, 2014:** Predation; Mitigation; Wild Horse and Burro Management; and Livestock Grazing
- **June 12, 2014:** Fire and Invasives Species; Monitoring and Adaptive Management; Mineral Development; and Energy Production, Transmission, and Distribution

¹ Exact dates of meetings may change.

- **July 10, 2014:** Pinyon-Juniper Encroachment; Recreation and Off-Highway Vehicle Use; Maps; and Implementation Responsibilities
- **August 7, 2014:** Adoption of the Final State Plan in its entirety

In addition, the SETT will begin work on developing a Strategic Action Plan. This will be a separate document from, and in addition to, the State Plan. The State Plan provides broad goals, objectives, and management actions. The Strategic Action Plan will go into much greater detail and identify areas to target restoration and mitigation, including efforts as part of the Conservation Credit System. The Strategic Action Plan will identify key sage-grouse habitat for conservation, spatially identify threats to sage-grouse habitat, and provide specific guidance on how to ameliorate these threats based on local area conditions. The Strategic Action Plan will guide and help prioritize where restoration and mitigation efforts will be targeted in Nevada in order to achieve landscape-scale conservation of sage-grouse habitat. This will be developed in conjunction with the State Plan, but may or may not be brought to the SEC at the same meetings (simply due to work timelines) as the corresponding sections of the State Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be brought to the SEC for modification and approval.

In addition, the SETT will continue to work on the other main items: the Conservation Credit System, USGS Habitat Suitability Mapping, and USFWS Data Call/Projects Database.

Conservation Credit System

The SETT has recently met with Environmental Incentives, the contractor developing the Credit System, to discuss the next phases of work. The SETT will be working with Environmental Incentives through the end of July on:

- Conducting a Case Study Review and Mock Transaction, which will include intensive field and office analysis and review;
- Revising the HQT: including revising the Scientific Methods Document and developing the HQT Calculator, Calculator User Guide, and Data Collection Guide
- Revising the Credit System Manual, as well as developing draft forms and form guidance

The final version of the Credit System Manual and HQT Scientific Methods Document will be complete by September 2014 for the USFWS data call. Other supporting documents, such as forms, guidance documents, user guides, and Document of Rationale, as well as the Credit System website, will be continued to be developed through December 2014.

USGS Habitat Suitability Mapping

The USGS Habitat Suitability modeling and mapping process is still preceding on the same scheduled timeline as presented to the SEC at the September 12, 2013 meeting. The DRAFT Habitat Suitability Maps have been completed. The FINAL version is still anticipated in January 2015. The DRAFT maps, and the corresponding scientific methods and modeling process document, will be provided to the USFWS for consideration in their listing decision.

USFWS Data Call/ Projects Database

The SETT will begin to reinvigorate efforts to collect all the necessary data state-wide for USFWS to consider during their 12-month finding process. The SETT will analyze

the data collected and write a narrative to accompany the data submission. This will be complete by September 2014

The SETT also envisions developing a database website with a GIS-based platform to house the project information that will be made available to the public. This will be a secondary priority for the SETT as collecting data for USFWS data call is more pressing and time sensitive. This is still anticipated to be complete by June 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the SEC approve the report and/or provide additional direction to staff.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Council agree with the staff recommendation, possible motions would be:
“Motion to accept the report.”

or

“Motion to accept the report and provide additional direction to staff.”

Attachments:

1: 2012 State Plan Table of Contents

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