



STATE OF NEVADA  
**SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL**  
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### DRAFT MINUTES

**Date:** Monday, April 9, 2015  
**Time:** 8:30 AM  
**Place:** Nevada State Capitol – Guinn Conference Room

A full audio recording of this meeting is accessible through the following website -  
[http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Sagebrush\\_Ecosystem\\_Council\\_Meeting/](http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Sagebrush_Ecosystem_Council_Meeting/)

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**Council Members Present:** Jim Barbee (arrive 2:13 p.m., left 3:00 p.m.), Steven Boies, Bill Dunkelberger (arrived at 9:26 a.m.), Leo Drozdoff (arrived at 8:42 a.m. and at 12:37 p.m.), Gerry Emm (arrived at 10:35 a.m., left at 3:30 p.m.), JJ Goicoechea, Starla Lacy (arrived at 8:42 a.m.), Bevan Lister, Amy Lueders (left at 11:22 a.m.), Chris MacKenzie, Tina Nappe, Sherman Swanson (arrived at 9:59 a.m.), and Tony Wasley (arrived at 10:36 a.m., left at 11:22 a.m.)

**Council Members Absent:** Allen Biaggi, Mary Grimm

- 1. CALL TO ORDER** – Chair Goicoechea called the meeting to order at 8:37 am.
- 2. PUBLIC COMMENT** – Mr. Cliff Gardner, Rural Heritage Preservation Project, requested the Council reconsider the directives in NRS 232.162, specifically in regards to the use of the best science available.

Max Symonds, F.I.M. Corporation, provided a copy of comments to Council from Mr. Fred Fulstone, F.I.M. Corporation. Ms. Symonds also spoke about the areas of interest (AOIs) that were recently released.

Floyd Rathbun, F.I.M. Corporation, stated he is familiar with the statements concerning federal agencies coordinating with locally developed plans. He also noted several documents from NEPA are in the State Clearinghouse for coordination by the Governor. The Council should be involved in this process as well for the purpose of resolving any inconsistencies between the federal plans and the State Plan.

Debbie Struhsacker, Pershing Gold Corporation, noted she has spoken with Kacey KC (SETT) and Lara Niell Enders (SETT) about the Coates Map and the Pershing Gold Corporation Project Area in Pershing County. Pershing Gold Corporation has done some detailed surveys on the ground in support of a NEPA analysis for project development. The surveys on the ground clearly show there

is no Sage-grouse habitat, however, the Coates Map shows there are some low suitability and moderate suitability habitat in a portion of the project area. This is not supported by the on the ground data. Ms. Struhsacker offered this area as a demonstration project to explore why the Coates Map identifies Sage-grouse habitat that is not supported by on the ground determination.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

### **3. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Member Boies moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Vice-chair MacKenzie; motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

### **4. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. Approval of minutes from the meeting held February 19, 2015 – Member Nappe moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Member Boies; Member Lister abstained from the vote, as he had not had an opportunity to review the minutes due to the Council Packet being distributed late; motion passed. **\*ACTION**

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

### **5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Chair Goicoechea noted that it would be helpful if Council Packets were distributed to the Councilmembers with enough time for review of the information.

A. Jim Lawrence, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), noted in Council packets is a copy of the program report submitted to the Governor's Office in March. Member Nappe asked if the report had been distributed to the Nevada Legislature. Mr. Lawrence stated the statute is clear that the Council must submit the report to the Governor, however, if the Council would like to distribute to others, it is at the Council's discretion. Chair Goicoechea noted the report should be distributed to the Legislature.

Ms. Niell Enders noted also in the Council packet is a copy of a news release regarding Barrick Mining.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

### **6. INFORMATION ON SAGE-GROUSE MITIGATION BANK ENABLING AGREEMENT BETWEEN DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AND BARRICK GOLD OF NORTH AMERICA**

Amy Lueders, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), noted the electronic news release referred to by Ms. Niell Enders does contain a link to the Bank Enabling Agreement (BEA). One of key points in the news release is a specific acknowledgement of the State Conservation Credit System (CCS). The agreement between Barrick Gold (Barrick), the BLM and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (The Service) was initiated quite some time ago. Ms. Lueders noted it is complimentary to the CCS. It is science based similar to what has been done with the CCS. It is a good model in terms of providing certainty to companies like Barrick that want to make investments on their private lands for conservation now, and also providing a certainty that will be a benefit to them as they look at future

developments on public land. The BEA gives a good framework on how the CCS will work in terms of providing the same certainty to entities making investments in conservation now and their ability to use that to offset for offsite mitigation in the future.

Over the last couple of weeks the BLM has announced a number of volunteer conservation activities, including a conservation bank in Wyoming, a number of agreements in Oregon and the Barrick BEA. The hope is that it shows federal agencies are willing to look at creative new ways to provide for Sage-grouse conservation, while adding certainty for economic development. This agreement is the first of its kind in terms of the advanced crediting piece. Ms. Lueders is optimistic in terms of the benefits it provides to Sage-grouse and economic development, setting the stage for how to use the CCS to accomplish similar things on a broader scale, as this is a defined and specific geographic area.

Member Lacy asked if this agreement would roll into the State Plan or if it would be distinct and separate from the State Plan. Ms. Lueders stated this could either roll in to the CCS, recognizing the currency exchange process, meaning converting from this currency to the CCS currency, or for the conservation projects to feed into the CCS. This is acknowledged in the enabling agreement, however, the details are not defined, as this would be something to be determined at a later date. It could exist separate and apart from the CCS or it could be integrated into the CCS. There is still a lot to be done in terms of developing project plans of where conservation actions are going to occur and develop the priorities and the type of credits generated as they go through the system. Ms. Lueders noted that the BEA could be separate because of the specific geographic area.

Member Lacy asked for clarification on the currency exchange procedure. Ms. Lueders noted the BLM is currently working with the SETT on creating the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the State Plan and the MOU could be utilized to frame some of these concerns.

Patrick Malone, Barrick Gold, provided an overview of the process for the BEA. Barrick started discussions with the Department of Interior (DOI) approximately two years ago about the trajectory of the Sage-grouse and how to obtain some certainty for potential mining projects, particularly in the Cortez range area. Barrick owns ranches in the area and thought there may be an opportunity to do projects beneficial to Sage-grouse and use the credits obtained to offset potential impacts from projects roughly in the same area. Barrick continued to be in contact with the State, as the State Plan was being developed to ensure the approach being taken with the BEA would be somewhat compatible with what the State was planning. The negotiations were completed approximately a month ago. The BEA has been signed. Barrick will propose projects on their ranch properties, primarily on private property, but hopefully in the future on public property, particularly when there is more certainty on how the NEPA process will unfold. These projects will generate credits using a methodology that has been developed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Those credits will then be used to offset debits that will also be calculated using the same Nature Conservancy methodology on mining projects. This area, called "Gold Rush," is for a future mining operation in the same general vicinity of the existing Cortez mine. The BEA states as long as Barrick obtains a net conservation benefit for the Sage-grouse they will receive credits, which are defined generally as 1.1 credits for every debit that is generated. The BLM and The Service will give Barrick credit for their credits if the Sage-grouse is listed. It is separate and apart, although potentially complimentary, to the State Plan, but there is hope that at some point Barrick will be able to enter into a subsequent agreement that would allow them to take credits from their the BEA bank and fold them into the State Plan. The State Plan was in a state of uncertainty; therefore, Barrick determined it was in their best interest to move forward with something they could make decisions on now before investing money in the Gold Rush project area.

Chair Goicoechea asked for clarification on if debits would also be folded into the State Plan. Mr. Malone noted Barrick would need to negotiate a subsequent agreement with the State and with

other parties to the BEA that would set out the exchange rate to ensure the clear determination of what each debit (State Plan and the BEA) stands for if it is to be rolled into the State Plan.

Vice-chair MacKenzie asked Ms. Lueders if there were other BEAs currently being negotiated. Ms. Lueders noted that Newmont Mining (Newmont) is working on a broader conservation strategy, however, not specific to a Bank Enabling Agreement. There are others in different states, however, this is the only one in Nevada. Vice-chair MacKenzie asked Mr. Malone if Barrick had underlying concerns about the State Plan that caused them to pursue the BEA. Mr. Malone stated Barrick is not certain how the State's credits are going to be treated. Until there is a Record of Decision, there is no way of knowing. Also, the BEA concerns one specific type of use with a specific area and specific projects to offset impacts. It is narrowly tailored compared to what the State is attempting to accomplish. Vice-chair MacKenzie asked for an example where the State Plan would not handle Barrick's situation. In response, Mr. Malone noted Barrick and Nevada Mining have submitted a number of comments on the HQT Manual concerning credits and debits. There is still uncertainty about how items including how offset benefits will be calculated versus offsite impacts. Barrick wants to ensure they are given proper credits specifically concerning wet meadow areas. The BEA was a better fit for Barrick's particular needs.

Vice-chair MacKenzie asked why the BLM did not advise Barrick to work through the State Plan. Ms. Lueders noted if the Council reviews the news release they will see the BLM and The Service acknowledged the benefit seen in the CCS. Both believe it is a good system. Both are working on the MOU, or can work on another instrument, that allows them to see how to utilize the CCS. There are no concerns about the CCS. The federal agencies feel it is a good system and have acknowledged that. In this case, because of where Barrick is in terms of projections, in terms of development in the Gold Rush area, they see a benefit and the BLM sees a benefit for them getting started sooner rather than later in terms of conservation actions in advance of occurring impacts. This provides Barrick with enough certainty to get started on certain aspects, recognizing the BLM has not signed a Record of Decision and recognizing there is an escape clause in case information comes out with the Record of Decision that is inconsistent with the investments Barrick makes concerning the BEA. This is a timing issue for Barrick and The Service. Barrick is willing to accept the BEA because of the certainty it provides to make investments in conservation now. Mr. Malone noted there may be some convergence with the approach of the BEA and the State Plan. This provides Barrick with the certainty to start heavily investing on both sides of the equation both on conservation projects as well as advancing their mining plans as well.

Chair Goicoechea noted if entities such as Barrick and Newmont notice deficiencies in the State Plan, they should point them out so they can be improved. It is concerning that Newmont is working on a broader conservation plan with the BLM.

Member Boies noted the work being done with the BEA could help the State Plan and compliment it. Once the State Plan is established, hopefully, participants will be encouraged by federal agencies to participate in it. Ms. Lueders noted the CCS fits well into the DOI Secretary's direction on broader regional mitigation strategies in terms of taking a wider look at the landscape. There needs to be work on how to leverage the strength of the CCS, providing regional context. Ms. Lueders is hopeful the MOU can be utilized to provide that linkage and certainty with the CCS.

Member Nappe asked for clarification on if the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) will be involved in monitoring the Sage-grouse and if the BEA is specific to Sage-grouse or does it include other wildlife, which can also affect water usage. Ms. Lueders noted this agreement is specifically for Sage-grouse and its habitat. She also noted there are a number of issues other than Sage-grouse that are addressed in the NEPA process. There will be a lot of work done in the project plan development, including baseline and monitoring. Bonding and financial assurances will be built into it. There will also be an adaptive management piece.

Mr. Malone noted each time a project plan is put into action, there will be a mini-negotiation concerning items such as what the long-term monitoring is going to look like and what kind of financial assurance is needed. There will be opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the discussion of the projects, including their role. This includes NDOW.

Bryan Stockton, Nevada Attorney General's Office, reminded Council to review details only in regards to the specific item as written on the agenda.

Mr. Malone noted there are other projects that could be included in the State Plan as the BEA does not cover the entire State of Nevada.

Member Lister asked for clarification on how and where the data will be collected. Ms. Lueders noted the MOU will address if the BLM would like to use the SETT as a clearinghouse to collect and retain data. It is a broader question than simply this agreement. Mr. Malone noted the State is not a party to this agreement so there is nothing in the agreement that mentions the data and information should be provided to the State. It will be provided to the BLM and The Service. Barrick is happy to share it, however, there is not a formal reference requiring them to provide the data to the State.

Member Lister asked for clarification on why the TNC conservation plan is acceptable and viable and the State Plan is not. Ms. Lueders noted there have not been any faults with the CCS by the BLM, The Service, or the US Forest Service in terms of mitigation methods. Everyone has been involved in the workshops in regards to the science. There is comfort with the science that supports the CCS, just as there is comfort with the science that TNC is using for the modeling used for the BEA. There still needs to be discussions on both plans and clarification with some aspects, however, as is stated in the news release, there is support for both.

There was discussion concerning the possible transfer of credits concerning the BEA. Mr. Malone stated the credits are just for use by Barrick for Barrick projects. If there is a transfer out of Barrick either to the State system, or to some other party, that would have to be addressed under a subsequent agreement. There is a section about the conveyance of bank properties. It does state that Barrick can sell a ranch, however, they would have to negotiate with the federal agencies to make sure they are comfortable that those credits are still adequately protected. Member Nappe asked if this was similar to conservation easements on property. Mr. Malone noted that some of the properties may, at some point in the future, be under a conservation easement, but it would be addressed in a project plan. Ms. Lueders noted the BLM and The Service would be looking for long-term durability of those credits and this could take multiple forms. It would vary depending on what the conservation plan was.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

## **7. INFORMATION AND UPDATE ON THE BI-STATE ACTION PLAN FOR CONSERVATION OF THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE BI-STATE DISTINCTION POPULATION SEGMENT**

Steve Abele, Wildlife Biologist, The Service, provided two informational handouts on the Bi-State Action Plan and provided an overview of the process and the data. The Bi-State Action plan was developed in 2012. The Bi-State did not start from scratch. There was a Local Area Working Group (LAWG) in the area for over a decade. It is not a regulatory plan but focuses on conservation. They identified 79 restoration projects that will cost approximately \$38 million. Currently, there are commitments adding up to approximately \$45 million to implement the projects.

Member Lister asked what kind of mitigation system is included in the Bi-State. Mr. Abele noted it does include mitigation. The mitigation aspect will fall to regulatory mechanisms.

Mr. Bill Dunkelberger, US Forest Service, noted the NRCS Farm Bill has been a benefit to incentives for conservation easements. The US Forest Service has agreed to provide a 25 percent match that the private landowner normally would be responsible for paying on any treatment that would benefit Sage-grouse if their private land is part of a federal allotment. NRCS has accomplished over \$23 million in conservation easements.

Member Nappe noted the Bi-State conference was beneficial and helpful. Mr. Dunkelberger noted approximately 170 people attended. They are planning to have another workshop that is not so technical in August at UNR.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

## **8. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON THE UPDATE OF THE SAGE-GROUSE MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES MAP**

A. Mr. Lawrence reiterated the Council's goal has always been that when the Record of Decision is finalized, the maps will reflect the best-available science and the most current information. The process has been moving forward but there have been some delays in the release of the BLM's EIS Record of Decision. This afforded the opportunity to update maps based on the most recent lek data provided by NDOW. Pete Coates, Research Wildlife Biologist, USGS, updated the map with NDOW's most recent information. Mr. Lawrence reviewed some of the changes concerning the Management Categories (Core, Priority, General and Non-Habitat). There will be another update in June after the BLM EIS is released. Dr. Coates is also working on the Pinyon-Juniper encroachment map layer. This will come out in late May or early June. He is also working on seasonal habitat information and urban or anthropogenic impacts. Chair Goicoechea asked for clarification on when the Council should expect the updates to be submitted for their review. Mr. Lawrence noted all layers are anticipated to be done by late May or early June. Chair Goicoechea asked for clarification on if the updates will be incorporated into the EIS as adaptive management. Mr. Lawrence noted the EIS contains language that adopts the Coates Maps for management purposes and states it is an adaptive management process. As updates occur to the map, it will be used for management decisions, and as part of the resource management plans and land use plans. Mr. Lawrence noted the State should not provide frequent, non-essential updates. Mr. Dunkelberger agreed with the statement from Mr. Lawrence on the EIS language, and noted that updates will be welcome to a certain point.

Ms. Niell Enders explained the concepts/terms and how the maps determine data and account for data.

There was discussion on lek counts. Tony Wasley, NDOW, noted there is a temporal window in order for data to be considered an official count. The desire is to visit three to four times in 7 to 10 day intervals, because they are so numerous, and because of access issues (snow or remoteness), it is a subset. There is a subset of that subset that is considered official trend grounds. Those trend grounds have been counted for any length of time (e.g. decades) and used to indicate population trends based upon number of males in attendance. Member Lister asked for clarification on how a localized checking can affect statewide mapping data. Mr. Wasley stated there are random points representing a localized trend. The idea is they are randomized across the landscape and represent a larger scale pattern. The ups and the downs are not necessarily a local phenomenon. The idea is that as a habitat management map we are looking at the habitat conditions that exist in those areas, but the statewide trends are largely driven by large scale events (drought or fragmentation), or habitat improvements, in the majority of the areas. Having the landscape scale and randomized

points across a large geographic area, statistically speaking, should be an accurate representation of what is occurring on the landscape. There may be local gains that are missed as a result however there are also local loses that are missed as a result.

Member Lister asked for the SETT to compile a 3-ring binder with all the most recent maps pertaining to the State Plan for the Council. Ms. Niell Enders noted a map agenda item should be set for the June Council meeting.

Member Nappe made a motion to approve the March 2015 updated Management Category Map; seconded by Member Boies; motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

**B.** Ms. Niell Enders reviewed the process for updating maps moving forward, ensuring all agencies are on board. The SETT will use the same process they have been using to date until other methods are identified. If this happens, the new process would be presented to the Council, and would be reviewed by state and federal partners to ensure everyone is comfortable with switching the overall process. In regards to the lek database and categories, the updates will be every three to five years. In 2016, there will be a new vegetation categorization which will contain much more detail on the understory. The process was presented and accepted at the coordination meeting, which includes a number of partners.

Member Swanson made a motion to approve the proposed map update process for the State Plan and include the process as an appendix to the State Plan; seconded by Member Emm; Member Lister noted that it may not be appropriate to include the second part of the motion as part of this specific agenda item; Mr. Stockton stated this is dependent on the term "policy" (how broad it is), if it has been presented to the Council before, and whether the appendix could be included in the way the word is used. Member Swanson rescinded his original motion because of concern over the term "policy." Member Swanson then made a motion to approve the policy presented for updating state maps; seconded by Member Emm; Meghan Brown, Congressman Amodei's Office, mentioned mapping should be available online and easy to use. Ms. Niell Enders indicated the Management Category files are currently available on the SETT website. Ms. Brown noted that having GIS capability could be an obstacle and questioned if the State could provide a platform to make it easier for everyone to use. Mr. Lawrence noted this would be something the SETT will look into. Motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website

Lunch Break from 11:22 am to 12:49 pm.

## **9. PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF UPDATED STATE PLAN IN RESPONSE TO AN UPDATED TABLE 4.1**

Mr. Lawrence noted the adoption of the habitat objectives table in October 2014 contained a caveat the State Plan should contain habitat objectives and they should mirror what is in the BLM/US Forest Service EIS, including their land use and resource management plans. The intent was always to bring this back to the Council for review.

The SETT recommends doing a global search throughout the document replacing "Habitat Objectives" with "Desired Conditions."

There is a habitat objective on the Table 4.1 specifically regarding the objective of achieving seven inch stubble height in late brood-rearing habitat with the focus on riparian areas. The SETT convened

the Science Workgroup to discuss this issue. There was agreement around the table this chapter within the State Plan is not meant to be standard, enforced, or regulated. Table 4.1 is to be a guide on what would be the ideal habitat conditions wanted on the landscape.

Based upon the conversation, the SETT put together three options for perennial grass height, as presented in Council packets. Mr. Lawrence reviewed each option, including suggested footnote language additions/changes. Mr. Wasley noted the main point is in the science which states the taller the stubble height the better in terms of vital rates for Sage-grouse. It is difficult to recognize the science while recognizing not all sites are created equal.

Member Boies asked about discussing Nesting Security which is included on Table 4.1. Mr. Stockton noted it is a requirement the agenda clearly state what will be discussed during the meeting. There was discussion on the intent of the agenda item. Mr. Stockton noted the Council could review the three options proposed by the SETT in Table 4.1 along with anything affected by those changes.

There was discussion about the incorporation of seven inches height, with John Tull, NDOW, explaining there is a table in the Hagen et al Analysis that is clear about what grass heights are beneficial for brood-rearing habitat and the low end of the range is seven inches. This is where the incorporation of seven inches comes from in the EIS process. Member Boies noted the Council cannot propose something that is not attainable.

Member Nappe asked if the BLM/US Forest Service thought the section being discussed was significant. Mr. Dunkelberger noted it is important especially if specifying numbers as being the desired condition. He also proposed perhaps the wording should be "four inches or greater", with the accompanying Footnote Five, because having an actual number listed is beneficial. He also indicated the US Forest Service Plan states "greater than or equal to four inches". They also have a footnote similar to Footnote Five. He stated the number is a trigger for US Forest Service personnel to do more investigating if habitat has less than four inches. There was discussion about the wording of Footnote Five. Ms. Niell Enders noted the footnotes listed need to be reorganized and adjusted.

Member Swanson proposed some language changes and typo corrections to Section 4.0. There was discussion concerning Member Swanson's proposed changes. The SETT took notes on the proposed changes for updating in the State Plan.

Member Lister made a motion to adopt Option A; seconded by Member Emm. Mr. Rathbun noted his concern with wording that limits the discussion to research and does not include information from local ranchers. He also referred to studies done concerning the effects of grazing within the State of Nevada that indicate the meadows most heavily grazed were the areas chosen by Sage-grouse for foraging. Ms. Symonds commented on her concern the document up for approval would make any difference going forward. Mr. Gardner noted there needs to be a more holistic approach by scientists. There are statistics that this process is ignoring. There was discussion concerning what the motion would include, what it would not include, and how to address the precipitation issue brought up by Member Boies. The discussion is captured on the audio recording of this meeting. Mr. Drozdoff requested that as soon as this vote is completed, the SETT update Table 4.1 accordingly and get it back out as it will provide detail when talking with federal agencies. Member Lister restated the motion to adopt Option A on Table 4.1, including the accompanying footnote (Footnote Five), with the SETT correcting footnote mistakes. Ms. Niell Enders reviewed the corrections to the footnotes. Motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

Member Swanson proposed language changes to Footnote Five, which starts with, "Site does not have to meet PFC..." The Council agreed that Member Swanson's proposed wording should be added.



Member Lister noted the Council should adopt the first two pages of Section 4.0, including adding the word precipitation for now, and then come back and review the Section when there is an opportunity to have Member Swanson's proposed language changes in front of them to review and digest. There was some discussion.

Member Lister made a motion to adopt the first two pages of Section 4.0 with the sentence on the first page that includes Lines 25, 26, and 27 to be in bold type. There was discussion concerning the motion that is captured on the recording with additional changes. Member Swanson asked for clarification on if the Council would be willing to also adopt his proposed changes to the sentence Member Lister referenced. The Council was in agreement to accept his proposed changes to the sentence. Vice-chair MacKenzie seconded the motion; Member Swanson noted the place to add the reference to precipitation is on Page 2, Line 14 "...annual climate..." Member Boies seconded the precipitation amendment to Page 2, Line 14. Chair Goicoechea restated the motion with the accepted changes discussed during the conversation. Member Swanson clarified the motion was to tentatively adopt language to go along with Table 4.1 for now with the idea that it would be revisited at a subsequent meeting. Member Lister noted it was. Motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

Member Swanson moved to tentatively adopt the changes in Attachment Two until the Council can readdress the question of resource objectives; seconded by Member Lister; motion passed unanimously. **\*ACTION**

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

## **10. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON IMPROVEMENTS LIST TIMELINE**

Ms. Niell Enders noted at the December meetings the Council created a list of adaptive management issues. At the January and February meetings the SETT began referring to the adaptive management list as an improvements list, which is the summary of all the recommendations the SETT and Environmental Incentives (EI) identified that still need to be worked on within the CCS. The Improvements List is the SETT's work plan for the Council's review, which includes their priorities for moving forward. It also lists items that will be tabled for later.

Ms. Niell Enders reviewed the work plan and three different milestones. The first milestone is the 2015 piloting season. The second is the signing of the MOU, which will possibly occur in June 2015, between the BLM, the US Forest Service, DCNR, NDOW, and the Department of Agriculture. The third is getting the verification process established.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

## **11. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS DRAFTED ON FLIPCHARTS DURING THIS MEETING**

- A. With staff assistance, the Council reviewed items discussed, as well as items acted upon during this meeting, and items directed to the SETT.

### Approved Items

- Approved Agenda for April 9, 2015
- Approved Minutes from meeting held on February 19, 2015
- Approved the March 2015 updated Management Category Map
- Approved the policy presented for updating maps

- Approved Option A on Table 4.1, including the accompanying footnote (Footnote Five), with the SETT correcting footnote mistakes.
- Approved the first two pages of Section 4.0 with the sentence on the first page, Lines 25, 26, and 27 to be in bold type and tentatively adopting the language accompanying Table 4.1 for now with the understanding it will be revisited at a subsequent meeting.
- Tentatively approved changes in Attachment Two until the Council can readdress the question of resource objectives.

B. The Council determined specific items they would like to work on at their next scheduled Council meeting.

The Council decided the dates of their next meetings:

- Thursday, May 14, 2015, Guinn Conference Room
- Thursday, June 18, 2014, Tentatively Scheduled

The following items were requested to be placed on the upcoming agenda.

- Concept of SETT to host a central database for the State on conservation actions
- Establish measurables for the next two years
- Changes to Section 4.0, including Member Swanson's proposed changes and any variations needed as a result of the changes to the State Plan – Tracked Changes Document
- Table 4.1 – Clarification on Cover and Security
- Process for updating map and adding it as Appendix to the State Plan
- Review adding areas of the Bi-state to be eligible for the CCS
- Review a comparison between the BEA and the State Plan, specifically looking at ratios - May/June
- Updated map discussion – June
- New Versions of HQT and CCS Manual – July Meeting

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

## **12. FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:**

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service (The Service) – None.

B. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – None.

C. US Forest Service – Mr. Dunkelberger noted the Bi-state Sage-grouse work plan amendment issued a draft decision 60 days ago. The objection period is closed. They received approximately 10 objections. The US Forest Service did not use the seven inch stubble height standard in the Bi-state Plan. They used language similar to that adopted by the Council, including the footnote. The Regional Forester in Ogden will review the appeal. They are hoping to have a final plan out by the end of May. There are some technical corrections that need to be made. He also stated he will check on stubble height in the AOI. The US Forest Service had a meeting with tribal members who expressed concern on Pinyon Juniper removal. The US Forest Service will soon distribute a letter about the meeting. The US Forest Service is also hosting a workshop for laypersons to explain the Bi-state Action Plan. Member Swanson asked if there would be a Forest Plan revision. Mr. Dunkelberger noted the FEIS will contain a forest plan amendment.

- D. Other – Meghan Brown, Congressman Amodei's Office, noted the Congressman is working through the appropriations process. The DOI requested an additional \$60 million to deal with Sage-grouse and there is an attempt to define how the money will be used.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

### **13. STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:**

- A. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) – Mr. Drozdoff noted the DCNR made a budget presentation to the Nevada State Legislature approximately a month earlier. There was money for on the ground investments and to preserve the SETT moving forward and ensure there is enough money so the Council can continue to have meetings. The federal and state taskforce did meet and the issue of stubble height was discussed. It is not unique to Nevada. One of the major discussions for the taskforce was the Sage-grouse focus area of business. Subsequent discussions are planned. Nevada is working closely with other Great Basin States (Idaho, Oregon, and Utah). The BLM wants to have their RMP out by the end of May.
- B. Department of Wildlife (NDOW) – Ms. Niell Enders did the update for the Department of Wildlife. Sage-grouse lek surveys are in full swing and the NDOW is currently using ground and aerial surveys to document lek activity and male attendance. The surveys conducted so far are showing increased male attendance compared to the last two to three years. In the Nevada portion of the Bi-state, they are seeing stable numbers compared to last year within the Mount Grant PMU, however, they are seeing lower attendance within the Desert Creek PMU. The numbers on the Lower Desert Creek and on Sweet Water Flat have declined over the last three years. The NDOW will be funding research and monitoring projects over the next three years within the Desert Creek and Mount Grant PMUs. There is Federal Aid PR Funding matched with Upland Game Stamp dollars to fund the project at \$90,000 a year. The funding proposals are currently being developed.
- C. Department of Agriculture – Tina Mudd, Department of Agriculture, noted the Department of Agriculture just released grant funds for the cooperative weed management areas for on the ground noxious weed treatments focused on annual invasive grasses and Sage-grouse habitat. They are currently monitoring the projects that were funded last year. They are having to amend some project plans because of dry ground. They received the preliminary analysis on the Nevada grazing statistics, which basically tracks the economic impact of loss of AUMs on federal ground. In the previous 15 years the analysis was done, they lost 350,000 AUMs. In the most recent 15 years, they lost roughly 100,000 valued at approximately \$100 an AUM with direct and indirect impacts. The results show an approximately \$10 million a year impact on top of the cumulative loss of 350,000 AUMs the previous 15 years, which were at a lower value due to cattle prices, etc. The Department of Agriculture is looking at these numbers, however, there are some inaccuracies between the databases that are public information through the BLM matching up with the ground truth database from the 1980s. They are missing about 200 of the 1600 allotments that are not lining up. This is the preliminary data with the economics completed by the university. They need to understand what happened to them. It is evident there is quite an impact. It may be a cursory review of the data rather than a full blown economic analysis and AUM data mining. The reductions are based on permitted use by the BLM. They are also working on understanding how federal land decisions are impacting producers and rural communities.
- D. Conservation Districts (CD) Program – Tim Rubald, Conservation Districts, noted the CD Program continues to work on trying to develop a couple of additional LAWGS. One in Humboldt/Pershing County, and another in Northern Nye County. There was a slight problem with a competitive grant two years ago so the Program submitted SB 45 to correct the issue.

The Bill is currently on the Governor's desk. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts submitted SB 476, which could provide a local option in leveling a partial tax or fee. This is a local option that must be approved by the people within the conservation district area during a regular voting period, however, it could be an additional funding source down the road. NRCS has an annual event called Conservation Innovation. It is a \$20 million grant. The Paradise/Sonoma and the Owyhee Conservation Districts are involved in submitting an application. There are two steps in the process for the grant. The first step is a pre-application followed by a selection of "winners" from the application pool. The winners from the first round will then submit a full application. If the CDs are selected they are looking at doing work of approximately \$1 million on the north fork of the Little Humboldt.

- E. Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) – Mr. Lawrence noted the announcement for the Forestry position on the SETT is closed. Ideally, the selected candidate will be in attendance at next Council meeting. There have been discussions in the past about the FIAT process, the recent press releases noted Phase Two is now open and out to the public. It will be incorporated into the SETT's efforts. The SETT and EI are working on the CCS users' guides.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

- 14. PUBLIC COMMENT** – Mr. Rathbun noted coordination with NEPA should be brought before the Council again. In the face of federal decisions this Council needs to work on coordination. He also noted there are beneficial effects of grazing and his concern about Douglas and Lyon Counties being excluded from the CCS.

Member Lister noted he had a discussion with Cassandra Joseph, Nevada Attorney General's Office, concerning the Council. Ms. Joseph specified the 2014 Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan (State Plan) does not include the Bi-State population as it is a distinct population with its own plan and protection measures. The State Plan is not specific in the use of the CCS in the Bi-state population. Mr. Drozdoff noted the Council could make the Bi-state areas eligible for the CCS.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website.

- 15. ADJOURNMENT** – Member Nappe made a motion to adjourn; meeting adjourned by acclamation at 3:58 PM. **\*ACTION**