

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

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STATE OF NEVADA
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
MEETING DATE: September 13, 2016

DATE: September 7, 2016
TO: Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Members
FROM: Jennifer Celio, Program Manager Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
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SUBJECT: Continual Improvements Preview

SUMMARY

Each year, per the Conservation Credit System (CCS) manual, the SETT is required to track and report performance of the CCS, and produce a list of recommended improvements. This annual process ensures that CCS policies, procedures, and tools support efficient achievement of the CCS's goal to offset impacts to greater sage-grouse habitats from anthropogenic disturbances through restoration, enhancement, and protection resulting in a net benefit for greater sage-grouse. This has been a very active and successful year for the CCS with many milestones achieved including verifier training and certification, state solicitation project agreements, utilization of the CCS to quantify debits for projects on federally managed lands, and multiple inquiries to utilize the CCS for conservation projects outside of the state solicitation process. The recommendations for continual improvements for this year are largely based from lessons learned from all of the activity that has occurred in 2016.

Key to the successful implementation of the improvements is following the adopted process that synthesizes findings and utilizes new science and policy information available to the SETT to base improvement recommendations to improve the CCS and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program.

PREVIOUS ACTION

On December 10, 2015 the SEC reviewed and approved the following improvements:

- Management Importance Factor revision to prioritize high importance management areas
- Limiting Seasonal Habitat Mitigation Ratio Factor replacement with Meadow Habitat Power Factor
- Inclusion of Biological Significant Unit as an additional Proximity Ratio category
- Proximity Ratio revision to incentivize mitigation in close proximity
- Award credits for the indirect benefits generated on land outside of the credit developer's control from removal of existing anthropogenic features
- Resistance and Resilience scorecard revision
- Utilize the Ability to Control Wildfire scorecard

- Replace the Reserve Account contribution percentages for the Probability of Adverse Effects from Wildfire factors with a matrix that includes contribution percentages for both factors, and provide rebate for implementing wildfire risk recommendations
- Revise permissible windows for collection of field data

BACKGROUND

This section contains a preview of 2016 priority improvements identified by the SETT.

ID	Title	Need for Improvement	Goal
115	Site Scale Data Collection Improvements	Collecting field data in a replicable way is a challenge, and some field data parameters are more sensitive to annual climatic conditions and require more samples than others. Further, field data collection is time consuming and costly.	The goal is to use the large data sets now available from the initial credit and debit projects to determine if field data parameters can be improved to increase replicability and statistical confidence in results.
116	Credit Validations	Develop field friendly sampling adequacy calculator. Work with 2016 HQT data to review minimum samples for map units based on size and other characteristics. Draft an objective, clearly-defined process for evaluating credits	The goal is to develop site-specific, objective-based performance measures to ensure transparency and accountability while increasing confidence of Credit Developers that decisions on remediation and credit invalidation will be based on clearly-defined and objective measures of site performance.
131	Sample Timing	Field data parameters like grass height are sensitive to the timing of grazing relative to data collection.	The goal is to provide guidelines for when field data can be collected relative to grazing activities to ensure field data is appropriate for calculating habitat function for the site. This guideline will provide consideration for sampling in drought conditions
119	Minimization Incentives	It is critical to sage-grouse conservation to incentivize minimization actions and appropriately adjust the indirect effect of disturbances when minimization actions are implemented.	Determine methods and objectives to modify disturbance decay curves when minimization actions are implemented.
135	Variance Protocol	There are going to be exceptions to some of the methods and policies in the manual and HQT based on huge variability across the state and the ability of the CCS to incorporate appropriately all this complexity. Thus if all parties agree that a certain attribute is not appropriate for a project scenario,	Define clear steps to come to an accepted variance to existing CCS policy and application of the HQT, which will likely include the SEC approval to all variances

		then modification can be made to the policy or HQT method, given all parties can come to consensus on a revised approach.	
127	HQT Functionality Enhancement	Applying the HQT requires many GIS steps and using a sophisticated calculator, which create opportunities for inconsistently applying the HQT.	Create GIS models that automate application of the HQT and thus increase the accuracy and consistency of the HQT.
123	Fee Structure	Administrating the generation of credits and defining the mitigation for a debit project must be done thoughtfully and comprehensively to ensure the Credit System achieves its goals. This requires significant SETT resources.	The goal is to establish a fee structure that appropriately covers, either partially or wholly, CCS administrative costs.
132	Verifier Policies	Generate internal and external policies to define: certification and training requirements for verifiers, and verification process and schedule. Develop internal policy for selection, contracting, management and evaluation of certified verifiers	The goal is to differentiate and provide more specific requirements of verification processes, and more clearly define rules for hiring verifiers to provide participants and Verifiers certainty and ensure credibility of the CCS.
124	Public lands credit development	Develop process based on mitigation framework for administration of credit projects located on public lands. Establish demonstration sites with one or two permittee(s). Assist landowners with the establishment of credits through the CCS.	The goal is to define a process that is satisfies public land manager requirements for mitigation on public lands.

RECOMMENDATION

The SETT seeks SEP review and modification of listed improvements if required.