

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

Progress Report: June 2017



Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

State of Nevada

201 South Roop Street, Suite 101

Carson City, Nevada 89701-5247



The Sagebrush Ecosystem Council's mission is to maintain and restore a functional and resilient sagebrush ecosystem to benefit all species while allowing for various land uses. This will be accomplished by working through a diverse coalition of public and private stakeholders.

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**Nevada Sagebrush
Ecosystem Council**

BRIAN SANDOVAL

Governor

State of Nevada

J. J. GOICOECHEA

Chairman

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council



NRS 232.162 § 8—On or before June 30 and December 31 of each year, the Council shall submit a written report to the Governor.



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Governor



Kelly McGowan, Program Manager

Katie Andrie, Wildlife

Sara McBee, State Lands

Dan Huser, Forestry/Wildland Fire
Agriculture, Vacant

**Letter from the Chairman
Sagebrush Ecosystem Council**

Dear Governor Sandoval:

Over the past six months the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) has taken significant actions related to the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team's (SETT) recommendations to improve the current Conservation Credit System (CCS). Our annual process of reviewing and adopting adaptive management while implementing the CCS came to fruition during this six month period. The SEC approved 14 improvements. These recommendations for improvement were thoroughly vetted by staff from State agencies, Federal agencies, and faculty from the University of Nevada, Reno and ultimately were developed into recommendations by the SETT. The actions by the SEC to adopt these improvements will reduce user costs, increase efficiencies, and also resulted in improved and scientifically justifiable methods of applying the Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT). The HQT is the primary tool for assessing habitat values (credits and debits). With these improvements, we are confident that Nevada has one of the most scientifically sound habitat exchange programs in the nation. We also believe these improvements may provide greater confidence in its users and continue to protect Nevada's sagebrush ecosystem.

The SEC also approved seed grant funding to five private landowners to conduct conservation practices on their land that will enhance and protect Greater Sage-grouse habitats and will eventually lead to credit generation and the sale of credits to those needing to offset anthropogenic disturbances. This was the second round of funding that the SEC approved, following the first funding round in 2016. These projects encompass nearly 30,000 acres of private land and will generate over 15,000 credits. When these credits are sold, the state seed grant funding will be returned to the state for reinvestment in additional projects. A summary page of the State sponsored credit projects is included in this report, as well as some of the organizational highlights of the SEP.

We appreciate your continued support and leadership as we develop and refine the tools needed that will allow for the responsible multiple uses of Nevada's natural resources while ensuring that impacts are adequately offset through the use of the CCS.

Sincerely,

J.J. Goicoechea, Chairman
Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

Instrumental Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) Decisions

January 2017 – June 2017

- 2017, January
- Letters of Interest (LOI) proposing potential credit projects were submitted to the SEC for the 2017 Credit Project Solicitation. The LOIs and the projects proposed within were carefully reviewed by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT), who presented the information to the SEC at the January SEC meeting for their review and guidance on moving forward.
- The SETT submitted the second iteration of the 2017 Improvements and Recommendations Report draft and presented on the proposed changes at the January SEC meeting, where the SEC voted to adopt all but three recommendations. The SEC requested further information or elaboration on the other recommendations. .
- 2017, March
- Six projects proposed within LOIs from the 2017 Credit Project Solicitation were recommended by the SETT to be further developed and submitted as full proposals. The SEC approved the staff recommendations, and selected applicants were informed of the need to develop full proposals.
- The SETT again presented to the SEC on the remaining 2017 Improvements and Recommendations Report that the SEC instructed staff to further develop. Some of the remaining improvements were passed, and additional information was requested on a potential improvement.
- 2017, April
- The SEC reviewed full proposals from the 2017 Credit Project Solicitation effort, estimated pre-project credit yields, and approved five projects for State seed grant funding.
- The remaining 2017 Improvements and Recommendations were approved by the SEC and the report was finalized thereafter.
- 2017, June
- The SEC welcomed status update reports from representatives of the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) and the Local Area Working Groups (LAWG). They did not have specific actionable requests of the SEC, but encouraged the SEC to continue to allow them to present at future SEC meetings and asked for their continued support of their efforts. The SEC assured the groups that they would continue to welcome their participation at future SEC meetings.
- The SEC reviewed and unanimously approved the semi-annual progress report to the Governor.

Major SETT Activities January 2017 – June 2017

- 2017, January
- Program Manager, Kelly McGowan met with AboveNV to discuss opportunities to use drone technology to enhance field data collection methods and reduce the costs associated with conventional vegetative data collection techniques.
- The SETT held a meeting with the Technical Review Group (TRG) to utilize scientific expertise to direct potential program improvements. Specifically, the TRG recommended changes to the Habitat Suitability Index (HSI), distance decay curves, weights, and distances associated with powerlines.
- 2017, February
- The SETT met with Verifiers to discuss potential improvements for CCS data collection efforts and continued to develop and finalize the 2017 Improvements and Recommendation Report, making revisions and adding more improvements (changing the shape of our scoring curves and modifying the use of the HSI).
- The SETT coordinated an internal State agencies meeting to discuss our approach with Federal agencies on the process for credit development projects on public lands.
- The SETT met with Kinross Mines to discuss Financial Assurances in anticipation for the completion for their project.
- The SETT met with the TRG to discuss improvements to habitat sampling design, map unit delineation and transect generation that will be developed and implemented throughout the year.
- The SETT attended and presented (specifically NDOW representative Katie Andrle) on the Conservation Credit System at the Greater Sage-Grouse Symposium held by the Western Section of the Wildlife Society.
- SETT member Dan Huser (NDF representative) of the SETT also attended a three-day Great Basin Consortium Conference at UNR.
- 2017, March
- The SETT had meetings with the BLM and an initial meeting with the USFS focused on developing credits on public lands.
- SETT member Sara McBee (Representative NDSL) participated in an NDF grant review process and attended a meeting for the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) outreach and communication working group. SETT member Dan Huser gave a four-hour presentation on the CCS to NDF Staff.
- SETT member Katie Andrle (NDOW representative) participated in a three day interagency Habitat Division Coordination Workshop to assist NDOW's Habitat Division in developing a Strategic Habitat Framework and geospatial tool for project planning. Katie Andrle gave a presentation to a 6th grade science class at Sepulveda Elementary School on March 20th teaching students about sage-grouse biology and had students participate in habitat sampling techniques.

2017, April

The SETT held a one-day refresher and two-day full training for Verifiers to maintain or receive certification to conduct the GIS desktop analysis, field data collection, and Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) process for the CCS program. Over 40 individuals either renewed their verification or became newly certified over the three day training period.

The SETT developed the newest versions of the CCS Manual, CCS Scientific Methods document, and CCS User's Guide. These were posted, along with all appropriate forms and instructions for their use and submission, on the CCS ftp site, where they could be accessed by Verifier's working on this year's credit and debit projects.

The SETT finalized the Management Plan template, the Annual Management and Monitoring Report template, and Verifier Conflict of Interest form.

Dan Huser attended a week-long Sagebrush Restoration Course held by the BLM in Reno. Sara McBee attended the second meeting for the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) outreach and communication working group on April 28th.

Kelly McGowan participated in discussions with Barrick, BLM, TNC, USFWS, and NDOW on implementation of the TNC model for mitigation within the Barrick Bank Enabling Agreement.

2017, May

The SETT conducted field visits to the Crawford and RDD Ranches, which were selected from the 2017 Credit Project Solicitation. SETT discussed formal agreements and the habitat quantification efforts to take place in the near term.

The SETT finalized Johns Ranch credit project management plan, making 164 credits available for sale on May 9th.

The SETT met with BLM on May 11th to finalize our vision for public land credit projects and prepare for the upcoming meeting with BLM, USFS, USFWS, and NRCS.

The SETT met with Executive Director of the Nevada Rural Electric Association to discuss potential for powerline minimization measures within the CCS.

The SETT completed the automated tool to conduct the GIS Desktop Analysis portion of the HQT; the tools were uploaded to a website for use by CCS Verifiers on Credit and Debit projects.

Katie Andrie presented to the Lahontan Audubon Society (LAS) on May 23rd discussing sage-grouse biology, research, and an overview of the CCS.

Kelly McGowan attended a tour of Newmont's sagebrush ecosystem potential credit development and mitigation sites with other agency personnel in Elko County.

2017, June

SETT toured Eureka Land and Livestock's State funded credit project to offer guidance on habitat improvements and to discuss the process for selecting verifiers and review the funding agreement.

Kelly McGowan attended a tour of the Kinross Gold's Bald Mountain Mine expansion site. Kinross is also a participant in the CCS and intends to use their own private land holdings to offset their mine expansion.

SETT staff met with private land credit developers from the Cottonwood Ranch, Johns Ranch, Boies Ranch, Heguy Ranch, and Earthton to work with landowners to maximize credit production, sign agreements, and offer suggestions or recommendations and to become more familiar with the project sites.

SETT met with BLM and USFS to continue discussions and work through the details that might allow credit development on public land.

In addition to the HQT process being conducted on all 2017 State funded credit projects to determine their available credits, SETT received word that the first credit project not to receive a seed grant award through the State solicitation process was also implementing the HQT to determine their credit potential.

Conservation Credit System Progress

The first half of 2017 brought about significant changes to the SEP. Along with nearly all new staff becoming more settled into their respective positions on the SETT, extensive improvements were being developed and evaluated for implementation into the CCS. Fourteen improvements were developed by the SETT and considered by the SEC. These improvements ranged from "Minor" to "Major" in significance. The SEC carefully considered each improvement, offered guidance, and asked the SETT to reevaluate several improvements and bring it back to them for consideration. In the end, all 14 improvements were approved by the SEC.

Once the improvements that affected the HQT results were adopted, the SETT was well positioned to quickly process the four projects sponsored in 2016 and has been able to begin to process the 2017 sponsored projects. To date, we officially have 164 credits available in the bank with several other projects within weeks of having credits available. In total, we anticipate over 5,000 credits being available for sale or transfer by mid-July 2017.

The SETT is working closely with the 2017 State sponsored credit developers to schedule field data collection, desktop analysis, Agreement finalization (to recover State funds once credits are sold to allow for a revolving fund account for the program), and completion of Management Plans. We anticipate that these credits may become available in the fall of 2017, but more likely in the late winter of 2018. Between both funding rounds, we anticipate that over 15,000 credits will be available to offset significant anthropogenic disturbances.

The SETT conducted refresher training for our certified verifiers (required to maintain certification) who were first certified in March of 2016. We also conducted two-day training for professionals with the credentials to become certified verifiers in April 2017. We now have over 40 CCS certified verifiers available for potential clients to use.

The SETT continues to work towards the ability to implement the CCS on public lands to generate credits. Long term success of the CCS is likely dependent on the ability to develop credit projects on public lands. Implementing projects on public lands has unique challenges compared with projects on private lands, but all parties are committed to use the CCS on public lands. We are working towards developing ‘pilot’ projects with both the BLM and the USFS. Given the small percentage of private land ownership in Nevada, generating credits on public lands is critical to the long term success of a habitat exchange program in the state of Nevada.

The SETT is also involved in administering a Regional Conservation Partners Program through the NRCS-USDA in partnership with organizations in Colorado. This has the potential to infuse another \$1.6 million in sagebrush ecosystem conservation efforts to benefit Greater Sage-grouse. We anticipate up to \$400,000 to be invested in Nevada in calendar year 2017. We are hopeful that this will develop into a long term relationship and provide future funding beyond 2018.

Population Status of the Greater Sage-grouse

The December 2016 semi-annual report contained the most recent lek count surveys and population trends based upon surveys taken in the spring of 2016. The most recent surveys were conducted in the spring of 2017. Data collected from those surveys are expected to be available in summer/fall 2017. We will provide an update in the December 2017 semi-annual report.

The data collected from 2006–2016 indicates an overall stable statewide trend for the Greater Sage-grouse when applying a logarithmic trend to the lek count data. In 2016, 162 trend leks were monitored and the average male attendance was 28.2 males per lek. This value represented a 19.3% increase over the prior year and was 15.2% greater than the 20-year average of 24.5 males per lek. Recruitment over the last three years has exceeded 1.5 chicks per hen which has likely contributed to the increases in male attendance.

CCS Credit Project Status

ID	Name	Type	County	WAFWA MZ	Current Credits (for sale)	Availability	Status (PRE-FIELD, FIELD, POST FIELD, QA EI, QA SETT, FINAL)	Notes
2016 State Funded Conservation/Credit Projects								
2016-01	TumblingJR	Credit	Elko White Pine	3	4268	Not Available*	Finalizing	Nearing completion on management plan.
2016-02	Coleman	Credit	Washoe	5	336	Available	Finalizing	Nearing completion on management plan.
2016-03	Cottonwood	Credit	Elko	3	711	Available	Finalizing	Nearing completion on management plan.
2016-04	Johns Ranch	Credit	Elko	4	164	Available	Finalizing	Management Plan Completed.
2017 State Funded Conservation/Credit Projects (Credit totals are "Estimated")								
2017-01	Crawford Cattle	Credit	Humboldt Elko	3 and 4	4838	Est. Ready by March 2018	Pre-Field	Data Collection, Management Plans, Funding Agreements in initial process
2017-02	Earthton Coogan	Credit	Elko	3	395	Est. Ready by March 2018	Pre-Field	Data Collection, Management Plans, Funding Agreements in initial process
2017-03	Eureka Livestock	Credit	Eureka	4	1956	Est. Ready by March 2018	Pre-Field	Data Collection, Management Plans, Funding Agreements in initial process
2017-04	Heguy Ranch	Credit	Elko	3	1708	Est. Ready by March 2018	Pre-Field	Data Collection, Management Plans, Funding Agreements in initial process
2017-05	RDD Inc.	Credit	Humboldt	5	1011	Est. Ready by March 2018	Pre-Field	Data Collection, Management Plans, Funding Agreements in initial process
Total					15387			
* These credits are not available for sale. Currently authorized for use to offset an existing mine expansion.								
We expect that all 2016 state funded credit projects will have their existing credits available for sale starting in Summer 2017.								
We have become more proficient in going through the process this year and credits from the 2017 State funded credit projects will be available potentially as early as October/November 2017 (at least the credits currently available), but will more likely be available by March 2018.								
We envision that enhancements with all projects will make additional credits available over the next 5-10 years.								

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

J.J. Goicoechea, Chair
Local Government Representative

Chris MacKenzie, Vice-Chair
Board of Wildlife Representative

Allen Biaggi
Mining Representative

Steve Boies
Ranching Representative

Gerry Emm
Tribal Nations Representative

Starla Lacy
Energy Representative

Bevan Lister
Agriculture Representative

Tina Nappe
Conservation and Environmental Representative

Dr. Sherman Swanson
General Public

Ex-Officio Members

Jim Barbee
Director, Nevada Department of Agriculture

Ray Dotson
State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

Bill Dunkelberger
Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest Supervisor, U.S. Forest Service

Jim Lawrence
Deputy Director, Nevada Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

John Ruhs
State Director, Bureau of Land Management

Carolyn Swed
Interim State Supervisor, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tony Wasley
Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife

Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team

Kelly McGowan—Program Manager
Technical Team

Katie Andrie- Wildlife
Technical Team

Dan Huser—Forestry/Wildland Fire
Technical Team

Sara McBee—State Lands
Technical Team

Currently Vacant—Agriculture
Technical Team

List of Acronyms

The list of acronyms below contains many of the terms used by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team in describing its activities.

BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
BLM ADEIS	BLM Administrative Draft Environmental Impact Statement (provided to CAs)
BLM DEIS	BLM Draft Environmental Impact Statement
BLM EIS	BLM Environmental Impact Statement
BLM SRMP	BLM Sub-Regional Management Plan
CA	Cooperating Agency
CCS	Nevada Conservation Credit System
CDP	Conservation District Program
DCNR	Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
ESA	Endangered Species Act
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRSG	Greater Sage-grouse
GSGAC	Governor's Sage-grouse Advisory Committee
HSM	Habitat Suitability Modeling
HQT	Habitat Quantification Tool
LAWG	Local Area Working Groups
LUPA	Greater Sage-grouse Land Use Plan Amendment
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDA	Nevada Department of Agriculture
NDF	Nevada Division of Forestry
NDOT	Nevada Department of Transportation
NDOW	Nevada Department of Wildlife
NDSL	Nevada Division of State Lands
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SEC	Sagebrush Ecosystem Council
SEP	Sagebrush Ecosystem Program
SETT	Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
SGMA	Sage-grouse Management Areas
SWG	Science Work Group
TRG	Technical Review Group
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey



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