



STATE OF NEVADA
SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
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APPROVED MINUTES

Date: Thursday, August 3, 2017
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Place: Nevada Legislature – Room 4100
401 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701

A full audio recording of this meeting is accessible through the following website
http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Sagebrush_Ecosystem_Council_Meeting/

Council Members Present: J.J. Goicoechea, Chris MacKenzie, Allen Biaggi, who left at 10:43 a.m., and returned at 1:43 p.m., Steven Boies, Starla Lacy, Bevan Lister, Tina Nappe, Sherman Swanson, Bill Dunkelberger, Marci Todd for John Ruhs, Mary Grimm for Carolyn Swed, Meghan Brown for Jim Barbee, Ray Dotson, Bradley Crowell, who left at 12:43 p.m., Tony Wasley, who left at 10:30 a.m., and returned at 1:30 p.m., and Jim Lawrence

Council Members Absent: Gerry Emm, John Ruhs and Carolyn Swed

1. CALL TO ORDER – Chairman J.J. Goicoechea called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

A. *Approval of agenda for August 3, 2017* – Member Chris MacKenzie moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Member Sherman Swanson; motion passed unanimously. ***ACTION**

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

A. *Approval of minutes from the meeting held on June 8, 2017* - Member Steven Boies made a motion to approve the minutes; seconded by Member Bevan Lister; motion passed unanimously. ***ACTION**

5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE –

A. Council members may make comments at this time and the Program Manager will bring forward any pertinent correspondence directed to the Council.

Member Lister noted that he has had discussions with Farm Bureau members who questioned what the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) is doing to push forward Nevada's plans for sage-grouse management and implementation. The Farm Bureau members advised that they feel there is a potential vacuum or pull-back from federal partners, and Member Lister is bringing this concern to the attention of the SEC. Chair Goicoechea stated that updates will be brought forward today that may cover those concerns. Member Tina Nappe advised the SEC that her term on the SEC has expired and she has decided to not seek reappointment. Ms. Nappe stated that Mr. William Molini is in the process of completing paperwork for the Governor's

consideration for appointment to the SEC as the member representing conservation and the environment. The SEC members expressed their appreciation to Member Nappe for the invaluable input she has provided to the SEC over the years. Mr. Kelly McGowan provided the SEC with correspondence directed to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and copied to the SEC, from Mr. Jim Jeffress, expressing concern with potential lithium development in the Montana Mountains area. Mr. McGowan also advised the SEC that he has been invited to participate and provide a presentation on the Credit Conservation System (CCS) at the Partners for Conservation Easements Workshop in Reno, Nevada, on September 12, 2017.

6. UPDATE ON SECRETARY ZINKE'S SECRETARIAL ORDER 3353 AND THE STATE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS - Pam Robinson, Office of the Governor *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Ms. Pam Robinson, Office of the Governor, provided an update to the SEC with regard to Secretary Zinke's Secretarial Order 3353. Ms. Robinson advised that Secretary Zinke had issued a secretarial order entitled "Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation and Cooperation with Western States," on June 7, 2017, a copy of which can be found on the Program's website. As background, Ms. Robinson stated that the Western Governors' Association had created a Sage-grouse Task Force which includes Western Governors and federal partners as members. Governor Sandoval, along with governors of other western states, met with Secretary Zinke and asked that the Sage-grouse Task Force be included in any review or discussions with regard to the secretarial order. In June of 2017, the Sage-grouse Task Force held a formal meeting in Whitefish, Montana, during the Western Governors' Association to establish a protocol in moving forward. Secretary Zinke established an internal review team to produce a report focusing on addressing the principal threats to rangeland health and sage-grouse habitat, invasive grasses and wildland fire. The team will also consider ideas which may include captive breeding, setting population targets by state, and opportunities to improve state involvement. Further, the team will be asked to identify land use plan provisions which may need to be amended or rescinded. Ms. Robinson noted that the western states met several times with the review team to present each state's concerns. Ms. Robinson cautioned the SEC that although Nevada provided input for the report, ultimately, it will be prepared by the federal review team. Secretary Zinke is amenable to allowing the states an opportunity to comment on the report after its submittal, and a final decision will be made once state and stakeholder input has been received. Ms. Robinson said that the procedure for the states and stakeholders to provide input or comments has not been established at this time. Chair Goicoechea added that it will be critical for the SEC to have stakeholder involvement and asked that as soon as the procedure has been established that the SEC be notified so that meaningful comments can be provided to Governor Sandoval.

There were concerns and questions from the SEC; a full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION**

7. PRESENTATION ON THE CHALLENGES WITH IMPLEMENTING THE CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM (CCS) FOR SMALL DISTRIBUTION LINE PROJECTS - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* Hank James, Executive Director, Nevada Rural Electric Association

Mr. Hank James reviewed a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is located on the Program's website. The purpose of the presentation was to bring to the attention of the SEC the challenges faced by the Nevada Rural Electric Association (NREA) relative to the CCS. Mr. James provided the SEC with a history of the NREA, its governance, strategic planning and its members. Mr. James stressed that the NREA members are not-for-profit distributors of electric service and net revenues are allocated back to the owners/members as capital credits. NREA members have no excess profit components when setting rates, and excess costs result in an increase in rates that are charged to the members. Mr. James went on to provide the SEC with the environmental challenges faced by the NREA and noted that the raven control program is a serious issue. NREA has spent over \$400,000 this year on the removal of raven nests and the replacement of transformers on power lines, noting that those costs are passed on to the members. Mr. James further stated that there is confusion in some instances when a landowner, working on a credit project, installs perch deterrents on power lines located on both public and private land. Mr. James asked who would be entitled to the credits, the

landowner or the utility. Mr. James noted that the utility owns the right of way permits and the power lines. A specific concern the NREA has with the CCS is the 30-year commitment preventing power line changes. Mr. James stated that they have a commitment to provide power to owners/members. If a power line is installed and a credit project then crosses a section of that line, the NREA would be required to maintain that power line unchanged. However if the power line must be upgraded to increase capacity, the NREA must upgrade the power line, thereby generating debits. Mr. James also noted conflicting standards between the BLM and the CCS' policy. Mr. James concluded that NREA member utilities are very much involved in conservation and strive to be effective and responsible stewards of the land. Ms. Marci Todd, BLM requested a status update on the project in the Elko district. Member Boies noted that Thad Ballard, Wells Rural Electric Company (WERC) was available to respond. Mr. Ballard advised the SEC that several of their members are considering entering the CCS and stated that WERC is working with members to establish a balance of preserving the affordability of energy while facilitating an individual landowner's desire to increase the value of their conservation credit program. Member Boies noted that a possible answer to the dilemmas noted above is the monopole, or armless power lines, and how they are weighted within the CCS. Member Boies expressed concern that the 75% weight on the 3-phase line seems high, and critical habitat will be lost if landowners are unable to participate in the CCS due to the weighting. Member Boies also clarified, with confirmation from Mr. McGowan, that if a utility built a 3-phase power line into an area after a landowner was already participating in the CCS and had received the credits, it would not affect that credit producer. However, it would affect a utility or a future developer. Member Lister directed a question to Mr. James with regard to the confusion arising between the utility and the landowner and which party would receive credits for restoration projects. Member Lister noted that it was his understanding that the utility company owns the power lines and would be the credit producer. Member Boies mentioned that it is important for the SEC to discuss the ability of utilities to obtain credits and utilize them for mitigation purposes. Mr. Ballard stated that utilities are interested in accruing credits for future mitigation. Mr. James Lawrence, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) advised that there is nothing in the CCS which would prohibit an entity from generating credits and utilizing them for future use. Member Biaggi asked Mr. McGowan if the 30-year commitment for power line changes were imbedded in the requirements and if so is there a way to amend the CCS to better reflect opportunities for future changes. Mr. McGowan replied that currently if a credit project is developed and an outside factor degrades the value of the credit project, the initial value of the credit project is maintained. Mr. Lawrence offered clarification on the 30-year commitment, agreeing with Mr. McGowan's statement, however, noting that if an upgrade on the power line is made, the utility would have to mitigate, so that overall there would be a net conservation gain. Mr. Lawrence reminded the council that when the CCS was created, the SEC had to ensure that the credits were durable and the council made the decision on the 30-year timeframe. Mr. Lawrence said that since this was a council decision there would be opportunities to revisit those decisions as part of the adaptive management process. Mr. Lawrence also said that he understands the reluctance of NREA to engage in credit conservation projects due to the 30-year commitment. Mr. Ballard noted that the concern with durability is with the structures required to be put in place, particularly the perch deterrents and flight diverters, as those are an on-going maintenance issue. Mr. Bill Dunkelberger, United States Forest Service (USFS), commented that it may be possible that Farm Bill (The Agricultural Act of 2014) money may be available to assist in off-setting some of the costs to the utilities. Mr. Ray Dotson, United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) replied that Farm Bill funds are available to any eligible party, so that could be a possibility. Member Lister asked the NREA if they could provide the cost differential between a monopole and a cross arm pole. Mr. James advised they would provide that information to the SEC. Mr. Tony Wasley stated that as a representative for the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) he understands the challenges faced by the utility in the CCS's perceived inflexibility. He noted that the challenge with sage-grouse is that they continually demonstrate their inflexibility and the value in mitigation for sage-grouse is the durability and is the reason the policies dissuade dynamic mitigation. Mr. Wasley said that the importance of durability and consistency cannot be underscored for this particular species. Member Nappe stated that she has expressed concerns previously with the CCS and that over time she fears there will be many projects, but fewer sage-grouse.

A full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION.**

Chair Goicoechea called for a recess at 10:27 a.m., and reconvened at 10:37 a.m.

**8. SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM TECHNICAL TEAM (SETT) UPDATES/REPORTS TO THE SEC -
FOR POSSIBLE ACTION *SETT Staff***

- A. Discussion of Greater Sage-grouse habitat on existing state lands and potential preservation, restoration or enhancement of those areas.
- Mr. McGowan reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "State-Managed Lands and Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat," a copy of which is available on the Program's website. Mr. McGowan stated that at the last meeting, the SEC had requested that the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) review the potential for sage-grouse habitat which may exist on state managed lands. Mr. McGowan said that within state lands, there is approximately 11,500 acres of Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA), 9,696 in General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA) and 14,559 in Other Habitat Management Areas (OHMA) for a total of 35,755 acres. Mr. McGowan advised the SEC that the SETT had only reviewed state lands that were greater than 1,000 acres in size. Member Biaggi asked how many total acres the state manages in Nevada. Mr. Lawrence replied that the state manages approximately 225,000 acres, not including land owned by the University System, the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), or lands owned by the Legislature, noting that the largest amount of state-owned acreage is either state park systems or wildlife management areas. Mr. McGowan presented information on the state lands located within PHMA, GHMA and OHMA and noted that the Bruneau River, the Snowstorm and the Steptoe Wildlife Management areas contained the largest portion of PHMA, however comparatively the acreage is very small compared to the entire State of Nevada. Mr. McGowan discussed the possibility of coordinating with state agencies to discuss opportunities that may exist to protect or enhance habitats and explore potential opportunities to fund conservation efforts while ensuring those efforts are documented. Member Biaggi asked if there was sage-grouse habitat within the newly acquired state lands along the Walker River. Mr. McGowan replied that there is a significant amount of sage-grouse habitat located there and it is within the Bi-State sage-grouse population. Ms. Grimm inquired what types of preservation and protection projects would be foreseen as an added benefit to sage-grouse on state land. Mr. McGowan said that the greatest opportunity would be enhancements, such as piñon juniper (PJ) removal, or rehabilitation of a burn area. Member Lister noted that the sage-grouse habitat in Eagle Valley State Park has declined since the land became a state park and believes that opportunities are being missed on state land for conservation. Member Nappe requested that the state land located within the Bi-State conservation area be included in the inventory in order to have a more accurate picture. Mr. Lawrence replied that a list of the data can be compiled and reported back to the SEC.
- B. Update on the status of debit and credit projects underway in Nevada.
- Ms. Katie Andrie reviewed a PowerPoint presentation, entitled, "Update on Conservation Credit System Debit and Credit Projects," a copy of which is available on the Program's website. Ms. Andrie advised the SEC that two credit projects have been finalized with a total of 875 credits for sale, and anticipates that by fall of 2017, final credit estimates will be available for the remaining projects. Ms. Andrie provided the SEC with a map outlining debit and credit projects. Chair Goicoechea interjected that the debit projects indicated on the map were not to scale and Ms. Andrie advised the SEC that the reason the debit projects appear much larger, is that the indirect disturbance area has been included in the project footprint. Ms. Andrie noted that there are six debit projects that the SETT has been working with the project proponents on, some with field data collection initiated last year, and some projects in the investigative stage. Ms. Andrie noted that of the seven current debit projects, the SETT has been invited to participate as a cooperating agency in only the Gold Rock project. Member Boies asked Ms. Todd that if there is a new debit project in the process of being permitted, would the BLM require that the debit project participate in the CCS. Ms. Todd stated that the BLM encourages participation in the CCS, but cannot require it. Member Swanson asked Ms. Todd if mitigation was required and the CCS was encouraged, and the debit creator chose to go in a different direction, does the BLM have a

standard alternative approach. Ms. Todd said that mitigation is generally required, but does not know if there is a standard formula. Mr. Matthew Magaletti, BLM, provided further information, stating that the BLM is required, through its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DCNR and the SETT, to invite the SETT as a cooperating agency for debit projects on federal land. Mr. Magaletti stated that the BLM is attempting to ascertain if the SETT can act as a cooperating agency on projects that have already initiated environment impact statements (EIS). Mr. Magaletti also stated that the requirements for mitigation are challenging, as the BLM is required to work within the General Mining Act of 1872 and the BLM Surface Management Regulations for locatable minerals. Chair Goicoechea asked if mitigation ratios were being utilized outside of the CCS. Mr. Magaletti advised that some proponents still use ratio mitigations, which is described as proponent driven mitigation strategy. Mr. Lawrence brought up his concern that the listing decision on sage-grouse calls for revisiting that listing, and when United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) does revisit, there must be a track record to show that the CCS is working. Mr. Lawrence stated that if the Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) was used to quantify the debits on projects, they would have a consistent understanding of disturbances and if alternative mitigation is being used there must be a consistent metric for quantification and documentation of a no-net loss or conservation gain for the species. Mr. Lawrence asked how that could occur and how the data could be quantified. Member MacKenzie asked if a credit computation for alternative mitigation would be possible. Mr. Lawrence replied that is one way to accomplish quantification, but the metric must be documented. Chair Goicoechea directed a question to Ms. Mary Grimm, USFWS, asking her to weigh in on the difference between the BLM and the state mitigation. Ms. Grimm responded that the USFWS knows that after reviewing past performance and mitigation practices that traditional ratios do not always get at some of the indirect impacts to sage-grouse, whereas the CCS takes a more comprehensive view and is preferred by the USFWS. Ms. Grimm further stated that they recognize the limitations the BLM has in their current laws and regulations. Ms. Grimm said that USFWS has been advocating for at least one set of measurement tools, which the CCS provides, to determine if a net conservation gain is achieved. Member Swanson asked if pressure could be placed on a potential debit creator to work through the CCS by requiring state permits for a project, and those permits would require a debit creator to utilize the CCS. Mr. Lawrence replied that there are permits required for mining projects which must be obtained through the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP), but they do not have the statutory authority to require the debit creator to enter the CCS. Member Swanson noted that if the nation is going to turn towards states for more of an influence in the conservation of sage-grouse, it may be time for Nevada to consider state permitting pivoting on the work of the SEC. Mr. Bradley Crowell, DCNR stated that might be possible, but believes it may be premature until the system is up and running.

C. Update on the status of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) announcement and participation.

Mr. Dan Huser reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) in Nevada," a copy of which is located on the Program's website. Mr. Huser stated that the RCPP is a joint proposal between Nevada and Colorado with \$1.2 million being provided to Nevada for on-the-ground projects. The SETT sent out the application notice, the deadline was on July 17, 2017, and three applications were received. The SETT is assisting the NRCS with the screening process and leading a portion of the ranking process for high priority applicants. Ms. Huser said that the SETT will provide an estimation of credit potential for each project, along with a ranking score. The highest ranking projects will be selected and the full HQT protocols will be utilized to measure the pre- and post-project habitat function and uplift associated with the project. The goal of the SETT is the successful improvement of quality sage-grouse habitat, marketing of the CCS and strengthening partnership and coordination with the NRCS. Mr. Dotson remarked that this has been great process and partnership thus far.

D. Update on 2017 Nevada wildfires and their potential effects on Nevada CCS projects.

Mr. Huser reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Update on 2017 Wildfires in Nevada, Potential Effects on GRSG Habitat, and CCS Credit Projects," a copy of which is located on the Program's website. Mr. Huser provided the SEC with a brief update on the 2017 wildfires in Nevada with a focus on the potential effects on Greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat and CCS credit projects. Mr. Huser presented a map of the active and inactive wildfires as of July 31, 2017, as well as a map of the credit projects. Mr. Huser noted that at this time, the wildfires have not burned into current credit projects; however GRSG habitat was damaged with approximately 652,000 acres of PHMA, GHMA and OHMA being affected. Mr. McGowan then advised the SEC that Dr. Peter Coates would be unable to present Agenda Item No. 13, as he is out of the country, but will be available, if possible, at the next meeting. For the record, Chair Goicoechea advised the SEC and the public that Agenda Item No. 13 would be removed from today's meeting. Chair Goicoechea expressed his concern that the State of Nevada and its stakeholders knew that this was going to be a bad fire year and the stakeholders continue to hear that there is flexibility in the planning for the reduction of fuels, but yet no flexibility has been found, and at some point, the fuels must be reduced. Member Swanson noted that the most extensively applicable tool available is managed livestock grazing and he believes this is a problem that is difficult to solve and may take years to manage. Member Boies also expressed discouragement that when a range experiences a burn, the grazing is eliminated for a number of years and then the area burns again due to accumulated fuels. Member Boies stated that there must be flexibility in the reclamation and rehabilitation. Chair Goicoechea stated that at a future meeting, the SEC should be working on this subject with ideas including non-native species and targeted grazing. Ms. Todd advised the SEC that the BLM burn numbers are slightly different than the SETT and offered that 902,000 acres burned with 678,000 acres in GRSG. Ms. Todd said that she has participated in numerous conversations with regard to flexibility to reduce fuels and the process forward for short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions and those conversations need to be pursued.

E. Introduction of 2017 Improvements for CCS.

Mr. McGowan reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Introduction to Possible 2017 Improvements to CCS," a copy of which is located on the Program's website. Mr. McGowan described to the SEC that the improvements recommended are part of the SETT's annual process of adaptive management. Mr. McGowan stated that there are three items in particular that he would like to discuss: 1) Consider using the habitat suitability index (HSI) for calculating credit obligation on debits projects; 2) Guidance to address treated fire sites, protocols for assessing areas of non-habitat, landscape feature effects on weights and distances and incorporation into the HQT; and 3) Proposing new anthropogenic disturbance subtypes. Mr. McGowan said that with regard to item 1, the SETT is reviewing measures to streamline, simplify and lower costs relative to the CCS. Mr. McGowan stated that using the (HSI) for data collection rather than field verifiers would achieve that goal, and the HSI could be a reasonable option for debit producers. Mr. McGowan then discussed item 2, stating that the SETT has visited several credit site locations which were burned in the recent past and are recovering with sage-grouse on the location; however, the current system would determine those areas as unsuitable. Mr. McGowan believes that there should be an allowance when known leks are in a recovering area and that resources should be invested there. Mr. McGowan concluded with item 3, noting that the science is lacking in this area, but the SETT would like to work with partners and rural electric companies for data collection on raven nesting to determine if single-arm 3-phase power lines contain numerous raven nests. Mr. McGowan noted that the CCS is weighting those types of power lines at 75% and it may be that is overvalued on impacts to sage-grouse. Mr. McGowan stated that the SETT will be working with the science committee to ensure they agree with the weighting.

The members had discussion and questions with regard to all of the above items and a full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION.**

9. UPDATE ON 2017 STATUS AND TRENDS OF GREATER SAGE-GROUSE IN NEVADA - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* Shawn Espinosa, NDOW

*Note Chair Goicoechea took Item 9 out of order to accommodate the presenter's schedule.

Mr. Shawn Espinosa (NDOW) reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Nevada Sage-Grouse Lek Counts: Effort and Trends," a copy of which is available on the Program's website. Mr. Espinosa began by advising the SEC that NDOW has over 2,200 leks in the database, with locations in Nevada, Idaho, California and Oregon. The database extends from 1945 through 2017, with over 26,000 lek visits recorded. Mr. Espinosa stated that there are 674 known active leks in Nevada, 226 pending active leks, 350 inactive leks and 542 leks with an unknown status. In 2017, 942 leks were surveyed and 1,725 lek visits were conducted. Mr. Espinosa said that most visits were conducted via ground observation, but 499 visits were conducted via helicopter and 14 visits were conducted via infrared survey. Mr. Espinosa noted that 44 new leks were added to the database in 2017. Mr. Espinosa continued with the presentation on the lek results for 2017, showing a 10% decline in lek counts from 2016, however noting that the population is fairly stable over a 20-year period. Mr. Espinosa then presented nest and brood survival rates for 2013 through 2016. Mr. Espinosa explained that when the United States Geological Survey (USGS) builds the integrated models, recommendations can then be made for focusing on specific areas for the sage-grouse life cycle. Mr. Espinosa briefly covered the effects of wildfire this year on sage-grouse habitat stating that the two larger fires, the Rooster's Comb and Snowstorm Complex, did not affect as much PHMA as it did GHMA and OHMA. He noted, however, that rehabilitation efforts in those areas were affected. Mr. Espinosa said that the Long Valley fire, located in the Virginia Mountains, had a drastic effect on sage-grouse habitat and information recently received from the BLM indicates that 767,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat in Nevada has been affected by fires. Member MacKenzie inquired if there was any data available on the effects of the heavy snow this year on trend leks, and if sage-grouse move to inactive leks when the snow levels are high. Mr. Espinosa responded that he believes the snow could have affected lek counts this year, and that during dry years, sage-grouse use lek locations at higher elevations and in the higher precipitation years, they see lower elevation leks. Member Boies asked if NDOW actively searches for new leks with the infrared technology. Mr. Espinosa responded that they do by utilizing a potentially suitable lek habitat model based on landscape features of leks of which they are aware and the infrared fixed-wing contractor grids out those areas to search for new lek locations.

There were questions from the SEC and a full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION.**

Chair Goicoechea called for a recess at 12:39 p.m., and reconvened at 1:54 p.m.

10. UPDATE ON ELKO LAND AND LIVESTOCK/NEWMONT PROJECTED CREDIT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* *Jeff White, ELLCo/Newmont Mining*

*Note Chair Goicoechea took Item 10 out of order to accommodate the presenter's schedule.

Mr. Jeff White, Director of Rangelands, Newmont, North America, addressed the SEC telephonically providing an update on the activities regarding their Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Program (SECP) and the CCS. Mr. White stated that they continue implementation of their over-arching SECP comprised of: the multi-species landscape scale conservation plan; monitoring; adaptive management in association with implementation of plan components; the conservation bank; rangeland research; and the conservation framework agreement. Mr. White also stated that they have been working with the SETT on credit conservation projects, however, there were several wildfire ignitions in the project area of which 70,000 acres were burned on the Owyhee allotment. Mr. White advised that another wildfire burned part of the private land that was earmarked as part of a future CCS project. Mr. White stated that further conservation work has been suspended until Newmont is able to re-group and then planning efforts will continue to ensure conformance with the CCS. Mr. White said that they are committed to this project and the credit development system and hope to have credit projects completed by January of 2018. Mr. White also updated the SEC with regard to the Willow Creek Riparian Enhancement Pilot Project noting that field data collection has been completed, a plan has been developed and submitted, and they are in the process of scheduling review meetings with the partner agencies. Mr. White said that they are continuing with various research projects, including the long term effort with the use

of prescribed livestock grazing to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of native plant dominated fuel breaks. Mr. White also said that they are working with the use of prescription grazing for reduction of cheat grass and the facilitation of ultimate establishment of desirable deep-rooted perennial grasses.

Mr. White provided further updates to the SEC and a full account is available on the Program's website. Chair Goicoechea thanked Mr. White for his efforts and the information. ***NO ACTION.**

11. PRESENTATION ON LITHIUM EXPLORATION AND POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEVADA - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* *Richard Perry, Nevada Division of Minerals*

Mr. Richard Perry, Administrator of the Nevada Division of Minerals (NDOM) reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Lithium Exploration in Nevada," a copy of which is available on the Program's website. Mr. Perry began by explaining that there is a 12% world-wide increase in the production of lithium and that the mineral is used in batteries, ceramics and glass, casting and polymers, air treatment and pharmaceuticals. Mr. Perry noted that there are four major suppliers and lithium is a critical high-tech mineral. Mr. Perry said that Nevada has the only operating lithium mine in the United States, located in Clayton Valley, Esmeralda County, Nevada, and that lithium is a locatable mineral on federal land under the general mining law. Mr. Perry noted that there are 13,381 claims staked on the playas in Nevada, in 18 different hydrographic basins, with 25 different exploration entities and one producer. Mr. Perry advised the SEC that currently there is one lithium-bearing clay target located in the Montana Mountains which is located within sage-grouse habitat. Member Nappe noted that the Montana Mountains are one of the most ideal sites for sage-grouse and at the beginning of this meeting, a letter was presented to the SEC expressing concern with lithium exploration in that area, and inquired of Mr. Perry what he thought the development of mining in those mountains would be. Mr. Perry replied that he is unsure, but there is a current operating permit for a quarry on the south end of the Montana Mountains.

There were questions from the SEC and a full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION.**

12. REVIEW OF THE RANGELAND MONITORING HANDBOOK UPDATE AND A PRESENTATION ON THE EFFECTS OF MOWING SAGEBRUSH - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Dr. Sherman Swanson, UNR-UNCE

Dr. Sherman Swanson reviewed a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Synergistic Monitoring for Adaptive Management of Sagebrush Ecosystems," a copy of which is located on the Program's website. Dr. Swanson also updated the SEC with regard to the Rangeland Monitoring Handbook Update.

Upon conclusion of the presentation, the members asked questions, and a full account of the discussion is captured in the audio recording, which is available on the Program's website. ***NO ACTION.**

13. PRESENTATION REGARDING THE SHORT AND LONG TERM EFFECTS OF WILDFIRE ON GREATER SAGE-GROUSE – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* *Dr. Peter Coates, USGS*

Agenda item postponed. ***NO ACTION**

14. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS DISCUSSED DURING THIS MEETING AND SCHEDULING THE NEXT SEC MEETING – FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

- A. With staff assistance, the Council will review items discussed, as well as items acted upon during this meeting, and determine which of those they wish to direct staff to do further work on, as well as which items the Council wishes to act on that may not have been acted upon during earlier discussion.
- B. Review of Secretary Zinke's secretarial order and report to improve sage-grouse conservation. Chair noted that Item B may be the only item on the next agenda, dependent on the timing of the comment period.
- C. Report regarding the effectiveness of fuels management projects in 2017.
- D. Pinion Juniper lek report from Shawn Espinosa.
- E. Power line construction costs.
- F. Bi-state sage-grouse/state lands and the Walker River state park development.
- G. The Council scheduled their next meeting for Thursday, September 14, 2017, location and time to be determined.

FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS –

- A. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – (USFWS) Mary Grimm reported no further updates.
- B. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – Marci Todd reported regarding the set-up of a mobilization center the BLM established in Winnemucca for staging of fire resources. Ms. Todd further reported that the BLM has treated 43,000 acres of vegetation across the state to enhance, restore and conserve sagebrush habitat, with a targeted goal of 67,000 treated acres. Ms. Todd stated that BLM has completed its internal review and is prepared to sign the Good Neighbor MOU on August 15, 2017.
- C. US Forest Service (USFS) – Bill Dunkelberger reported that the USFS is also participating in a Good Neighbor Master Agreement with the State of Nevada, DCNR, Department of Agriculture (NDA) and NDOW. Mr. Dunkelberger also noted that there is also an MOU between the BLM, State of Nevada and USFS that allows work on large landscape restoration projects, fuels projects and cooperative monitoring agreements. Mr. Dunkelberger stated that the Good Neighbor Agreement is a Farm Bill authority which allows the expediting of planning, the transfer of funds, providing money to the State of Nevada more easily and for the payment of state employees working on federal lands. Mr. Dunkelberger also reported that the BLM and the USFS recently established a protocol and process to notify the SETT on forest service projects which may impact sage-grouse and confer cooperating agency status to the SETT.
- D. US Department of Agriculture (NRCS) – Ray Dotson reported that in September, the NRCS will be holding a conference with partners for the purpose of discussing locating projects that can utilize matches from federal funds, noting that the NRCS returned \$1 million last fiscal year as unused funding.
- E. Other – No update.

STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS

- A. Office of the Governor – No update.
- B. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) – Jim Lawrence reported that Greg Lovato has been appointed as the permanent Administrator of the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and Bettina Scherer has been hired as the program manager for the Conservation Districts. Mr. Lawrence also

reported that on September 19-21, 2017, there will be a Pay for Performance Workshop held in Reno, Nevada, which will bring together regional partners on conservation programs.

C. Department of Wildlife (NDOW) – Tony Wasley reported that there is a regional effort being undertaken by federal partners and state wildlife agencies to form Sage West, which is a communications network searching for ways to promote the value of the sagebrush ecosystem. Mr. Wasley also reported that there is a web-based communications portal through the Inter-mountain West Joint Venture providing resources and tools to landowners in conservation efforts.

D. Department of Agriculture (NDA) – Meghan Brown reported that the NDA is working on setting up a native seed forum this fall and will provide updates at the next meeting. Ms. Brown reported that NDA has been attending monthly meetings with federal and state partners and continuing to move forward on the Seeds to Success Program. NDA will be sending out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the grant received from USFS for sage-grouse, invasive species and noxious weed programs.

E. Conservation Districts Program – No update.

F. Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) – Mr. Kelly McGowan reported that the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website has been updated and encouraged the members and the general public to review it. Mr. McGowan further reported that the SETT has visited the Cottonwood credit project and enrolled that project in the CCS. Mr. McGowan stated that they also visited the Earthton and Heguy credit project sites. Lastly, Mr. McGowan stated that the Tumbling JR Ranch had established credits to offset the mine expansion at Bald Mountain and that project is close to a final transaction in the CCS.

G. Other – No update.

J. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Kirk Ellern, CMO, AboveGeo provide the SEC with an update and follow-up on their presentation from the June 8, 2017 meeting. Mr. Ellern noted that the USGS has received some funding through the BLM enabling AboveGeo to begin a pilot project near Bodie, California, to document spring-time foliage. The objective of the program is to improve the HSI and provide CCS data requirements, as well as identify the location of invasive species, fire fuel evaluations and reclamation opportunities. Mr. Ellern invited the members and the public to attend the data collection event in Bodie on August 24-25.

Mr. Kim Summers, RDD, Inc., addressed the SEC advising that the experience working with the SETT in the credit production area has been favorable, but expressed concerns with the interpretation of the science and building programs that are based on a 30-year time frame. Mr. Summers also noted a concern with the marketability of credits and that credit debtors are not required to participate in the CCS. Mr. Summers believes there should be a dedicated effort for a marketing strategy for the CCS. Mr. Summers also agreed with Chair Goicoechea's comments regarding fire hazards and requested that the agencies represented on the SEC become more flexible, aggressive and adaptive in the control of fine fuels on federal lands.

Mr. McGowan advised the SEC that the SETT has been working with BLM and USFS in order for the SETT to visit the various field offices; provide training to the district managers and field office staff on the CCS; and to discuss the benefits of the CCS over the long term.

K. **ADJOURNMENT** – There being no further business to come before the Council, Chair Goicoechea adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.