

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

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STATE OF NEVADA
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

Staff Report

DATE: 3/3/2017
TO: Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Members
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SUBJECT

Establish a process for implementing the Nevada Conservation Credit System (CCS) on public lands to fulfill projected mitigation demand and conserve the best habitat for greater sage-grouse in Nevada.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Report is to outline an approach and expected steps of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program (SEP) necessary to collaborate with federal land management agencies for implementing a process for generating credits on public lands.

This Report is intended for decision-makers from State departments and Federal land management agencies who have an understanding of the CCS.

ONGOING STEPS

- The Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) has identified multiple land owners currently participating in the CCS who are interested in developing credits on their public land allotments. In addition, there are land owners from the 2017 solicitation process who have also expressed interest in developing credits on their public land allotments.
- The SETT has been collaborating with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS) to develop a process for implementing credit projects on public lands. The USFS is currently circulating a briefing regarding this topic. We are anticipating a scheduled meeting between the State and federal agencies to occur early April, 2017.
- Collaborate with the BLM and USFS to identify the best credit project(s) on public lands.

- Identify additionality & durability recommendations to improve clarity in the CCS and provide confidence that credit development on public lands will work as intended to meet the goal of net conservation gain for greater sage-grouse in Nevada.

HISTORY

The primary goal of the CCS is to offset impacts from anthropogenic disturbances through the implementation of enhancements and protections that result in a net conservation gain for the greater sage-grouse in Nevada. To date, the credit system has not been operational on public land managed by federal agencies. However, developing credits on public lands has been the plan since origination of the CCS and will be necessary for the CCS to operate at an effective capacity.

In September 2015, the BLM and United USFS approved greater sage-grouse plan amendments (ARMPA) to incorporate specific conservation measures to conserve greater sage-grouse and its habitat in Nevada and Northeastern California. The federal land management agencies recognized the CCS as a tool that may be used as the ARMPAs are implemented to enhance mitigation options, improve habitat on federal lands in Nevada by authorizing credit development projects, and provide for mitigation to achieve a net conservation gain.

In March 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) [16-MU-11041730-020] was signed between the BLM, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and USFS to document the cooperation between the parties regarding the use of the CCS as a tool to enhance mitigation options, improve habitat for mitigation of residual impacts from anthropogenic disturbance that cannot be avoided or minimized to achieve net conservation gain for greater sage-grouse. The MOU acknowledged the SETT as the Administrator to process, manage, validate, and make credits available for debit offset. The MOU acknowledged that the Administrator of the CCS will work in coordination with the BLM and USFS to enhance mitigation options, and improve habitat on federal lands in Nevada by authorizing credit development projects. In addition, the MOU outlined the following agreements for both the BLM and USFS, in cooperation with the SETT, to implement a process for credit development on public lands.

- BLM is committed to allowing credits on BLM managed lands where appropriate and in accordance with Federal law. The BLM will work with the SETT to implement a process to achieve this outcome.
- The USFS will work with the SETT to pilot the development of policies for permitting credit projects on federally managed lands on a project-by-project basis.

During the January 26th, 2017, Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Meeting, the SETT introduced an improvement recommendation to invest SETT and contractor efforts to collaborate with credit developers, BLM, and USFS to define improvements to the CCS necessary to generate credits on public lands.

ADDITIONALITY AND DURABILITY SECTIONS THAT MUST BE REVIEWED

The sections below highlight areas where the CCS Manual incorporates credit projects on public lands. These sections are open to improvements to identify more efficient and effective ways to implement a process for developing credits on BLM and USFS managed lands.

- Section 2.3.3: Credit Site Eligibility
- Section 2.3.4: Calculating Baseline Habitat Function
- Section 2.3.5: Developing Credits on Public Lands and Other Designations
- Section 2.4: Credit Durability Provisions