State of Nevada Conservation Credit System

2018/2019 Findings Report
Agenda Item 11

October 11, 2018

STATE OF NEVADA
CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM

The *Findings & Improvement Recommendations Report* is an annual product of the Nevada Conservation Credit System. The Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team of the Nevada Division of State Land's Sagebrush Ecosystem Program produces the report.

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INTRODUCTION

Key to the long-term success of the Nevada Conservation Credit System (Credit System) is the adoption of well-supported improvements to the Credit System. Improvements ensure Credit System policies, procedures, and tools continue to support achievement of the Credit System's goal: for impacts from anthropogenic disturbances to be offset through restoration, enhancement, and protection that results in net conservation gain for sage-grouse habitat in the State of Nevada. Well-supported improvements depend on: (1) a process that identifies findings from both the operation of the Credit System and new science, and (2) thoroughly analyzed and documented recommendations that stakeholders can review before adoption.

This report contains improvement recommendations for the Credit System Oversight Committee - the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) - to consider as part of the 2017 continual improvement process. The findings and improvement recommendations described in this report were identified and formatted through the annual process outlined below. The initial version, version 1.0, of the Credit System Manual and Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) Methods Document were adopted by the SEC in December 2014. In December 2015, the SEC adopted 11, described in the *2015 Credit System Findings & Improvement Recommendations Report*, which were implemented in version 1.1 of the Credit System Manual and HQT Methods Document. In 2016, the SEC adopted 14 additional improvements, described in the *2016 Credit System Findings & Improvement Recommendations Report*, which were implemented in version 1.3 of the Credit System Manual, HQT, and other program documents.

Annual Process

Each year the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) synthesizes findings related to Credit System operations, achievements and challenges, along with any new science relevant to the Credit System. This process of synthesizing findings enables the SETT to identify implementation and policy issues, opportunities for program improvement, and emerging information needs. The SETT develops improvement recommendations for the Credit System that are based on the findings and are considered for adoption by the SEC at the annual *Credit System Improvement Meeting* each December. The findings and improvement recommendations are documented in an annual *Findings & Improvement Recommendations Report* to enable the SEC to make informed decisions and valuable improvements to the Credit System.

The process for producing this report is summarized in Section 3.3: Adaptively Managing the Credit System in the Credit System Manual. During the implementation of the first continual improvement cycle in 2015, the SETT defined a slightly revised five-step annual process, which is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The red circle indicates the steps in the continual improvement cycle during which this report is produced and the SEC considers adoption of the improvement recommendations in this report.
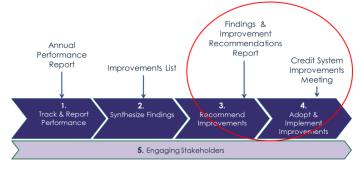

Figure 1: Credit System continual improvement process

2018/2019 DRAFT FINDINGS

Findings

This section contains a synthesis of key findings identified by the SETT, many of which are directly relevant to potential or recommended improvements to the Credit System. Findings not directly linked to improvement recommendations either support existing policy, require actions beyond the SETT's purview, are not currently actionable due to incomplete information, or lack of implementation resources.

The findings are categorized as "Operational Findings" or "Research & Monitoring Findings." Operational findings are derived from stakeholder feedback and from on-the-ground learning associated with testing and implementation of Credit System policies, procedures and tools. Research and monitoring findings are associated with new science or drawn from the results of monitoring data.

Improvement Recommendations

This section is a distillation of recommended improvements to the Credit System proposed by the SETT ranging from management strategies and policies to operational procedures and tools. Included are improvements that will affect the goal or scope of the Credit System, related policies and plans, state or federal agency partnerships, administrative responsibilities, or administrative liability, or improvements that will have a meaningful impact on credits and debits generated from future projects, or a meaningful impact on program operations. The SETT creates the improvement recommendations based on the findings and thorough analysis of potential improvements identified. The SETT presents these recommendations to the SEC for discussion and approval.

Within each category, the recommendation includes:

- Summary of improvement
- Specific improvement recommendation
- Rationale to support recommendation details

Each finding is summarized in the table below.

Potential Findings and Improvements Recommendations

1   **Finding**: Additional anthropogenic disturbance categories should be defined or clarified within the Conservation Credit System including mining exploration, pipelines, and landfills; mining expansions will also be examined to identify a potential minimum debit purchase in situations where mitigation using the CCS was not previously used.

2   **Finding**: The restoration and uplift processes need additional detail outlining each step, such as how release phases can work and how to further incentivize these actions.

3   **Finding**: Consideration of less-frequent reverification process in order to increase confidence and reduce credit developer expenses.

4   **Finding**: Proper Functioning Condition data is required to be gathered on every project, and it is incorporated into the management plan to be maintained or improved. However, there is no incentive to improve riparian conditions, so many project proponents maintain the riparian area at the level of function determined by the first verification.