



STATE OF NEVADA
SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
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DRAFT MINUTES

Date: Thursday, September 1st, 2022
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Place: Nevada Department of Wildlife Headquarters
6980 Sierra Center Pkwy #120
Reno, NV 89511

For virtual access, please click this URL to join.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83030547214?pwd=akV2MjFnTjZjdmpXTjlkY1VDTUV1UT09>

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Webinar ID: 830 3054 7214

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Council Members Present: JJ Goicoechea, Chris MacKenzie, Bevan Lister, Steven Boies, William Molini, Alan Shepherd for John Raby, Meghan Brown for Jennifer Ott, Cheva Gabor for Bill Dunkelberger, Justin Barrett, Chris Rose for Suzy Daubert, Anthony Walsh.

Council Members Absent: Sherm Swanson, Gerry Emm, Jim Lawrence, Tony Wasley.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Goicoechea called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Chairman Goicoechea stated a change to the agenda due to a speaker running late. Agenda Item 9 changed to Agenda Item 6 and Agenda Item 8 changed to Agenda Item 7. Agenda Items 6 and 7 then moved to Agenda Items 9 and 10. Member Boies moved to approve the new agenda; Member MacKenzie seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. ***ACTION**

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Member MacKenzie moved to approve the minutes for the meeting on June 23, 2022. Member Boies seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. ***ACTION**

5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE

No council member items or correspondence.

6. STAFF BRIEFINGS AND UPDATES TO THE COUNCIL

A. CCS PROJECTS AND TRANSACTIONS

Mr. Huser updated the Council on the status of the CCS. The report is available on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website. Member Boies asked if the SETT had considered how signing up for carbon credits would affect credit projects if that were considered additionality. Mr. McGowan replied that it would be taken on a case-by-case basis, like NRCS programs that are designed for sage grouse habitat enhancement, but it has not become an issue yet. Member MacKenzie asked about the amount of credits available versus the amount of debits available, and if there is a potential for the industries to partner with credit projects ahead of time to generate credits. Mr. McGowan replied that there is somewhat of a concern for running out of credits, but there is potential for the team to develop a list of potential private lands near proposed debit projects for the two to partner. Member Boies asked about discussions regarding the SWIP, and Mr. McGowan commented that is probably a higher-level discussion.

B. GOLD BAR AND GOLD BAR SOUTH MINE MITIGATION

Mr. McGowan presented to the Council the Gold Bar Mine mitigation plan that was met with and agreed upon by the mine, the SETT, and partners. The maps are available on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website. This includes removal of Pinyon and Juniper in the Robert's Mountain Area, adjacent to a current Eureka credit project with the hopes of expanding sage grouse range east into the mountains. Chairman Goicoechea asked if this benefits the credit project at all, to which Mr. McGowan replied it did not. Mr. McGowan also updated the Council on the status of Gold Bar South, as they have finalized a transaction to settle the first 1/3 of the required mitigation obligation and exhausted the credits for one of our producers.

C. GREENLINK NORTH – TRANSMISSION LINE

Mr. McGowan mentioned that Greenlink North is still working on siting and colocation. There are potential tie-ins that over time can be a concern. The maps are available on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website. Matthew Johns for NV Energy gave a brief description of the project and route. They are currently working through alternatives and NEPA is scheduled for May 2023. Member Molini expressed concern regarding the alternatives, and that this line would inspire other projects that would impact the area more. Mr. Johns assured the Council that the alternatives will be taken into account, and they are working with the agency to mitigate any impacts. A lot will be based on the scoping meetings and public comments. Ms. Gabor added that while the USFS is supportive of renewable energy development, they did reject the application for the Greenlink North on the Forest Service land as it is not consistent with the 2015 Sage Grouse Plan. Alternatives are being explored. Shawn Espinosa from NDOW asked about the disparity between the Land Use Plans for the USFS and the BLM. Mr. Shepherd answered that the BLM tries to avoid and minimize as best as possible, following the 2015 Plan. Ms. Gabor added that the disparity seems to be procedural differences. Member MacKenzie clarified that it seems like the USFS is avoiding and the BLM is starting with minimization. Member Boies asked how have powerlines evolved and how are they better – perch deterrents, frame design, etc. Mr. Shepherd commented that the BLM is open on what pole designs they allow in various habitats to avoid impacts as best as possible. Mr. Johns commented that they are looking at a tubular frame design for Greenlink North.

D. INTEGRATING POPULATION MODELING WITHIN THE CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM

Mr. McGowan updated the Council that the SETT continues to work with USGS and EI to analyze different projects using the CCS versus the USGS tools that incorporates population. The question is if they can work together or must be run separately.

E. WESTERN AGENCIES SAGE AND COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE WORKSHOP – LOGAN, UT

Mr. McGowan updated the Council that several members of the SETT traveled to Logan, UT for a workshop to talk about the most recent science and literature for sage grouse. There are several things introduced in the workshop that the SETT is looking into to help inform the System.

7. REVIEW THE OUTLINE INTENDED TO BE USED FOR UPDATING THE 2016 NEVADA STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN. THE SEC MAY ADOPT THE OUTLINE AS PRESENTED OR MAY PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Small updated the Council on the status of the Strategic Action Plan. The presentation is available on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website. Mr. Barrett asked for a rough timeline, to which Mr. Small added that the SETT hopes to have a draft by late fall or early winter but are awaiting the coordination with other plans and tools. Member Molini asked about coordinating with NDOW's State Action Plan. Mr. McGowan commented that the SETT has been coordinating with NDOW to ensure that both are aligned for sage grouse and their habitat. Member Lister commented that the landowners and interested parties haven't been contacted to coordinate, and Mr. Huser replied that as adaptive management gets back on, that would be the area the local working groups will be able to have direct input. ***NO ACTION**

8. REVIEW THE APPLICABILITY OF IMPLEMENTING CURRENT SCIENCE AND TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR ADDRESSING RAVEN ABUNDANCE AND REDUCING THEIR IMPACTS ON GREATER SAGE-GROUSE IN NEVADA. THE SEC MAY RECOMMEND INCLUSION OF THESE RESOURCES INTO EXISTING PROGRAM DOCUMENTS – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Coates presented his findings on Raven Abundance and Impacts. The full presentation can be found on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program's website. Many questions were asked regarding specifics of the studies and on other studies going on. Member MacKenzie asked what the responsibilities are for the powerline operators once a raven nest has been determined. Can they monitor for nest removal? Mr. Coates replied that they are working with the BLM and the state on this, but it is tough. There is a difference at the timing of a nest removal. If unoccupied, there is no permit required, but then the bird just rebuilds the nest when it returns. If occupied with a clutch, a permit is required, but the bird will not return, and the reproductive success of that bird is reduced. Mr. Coates added that there is a lot of debate on how effective perch deterrents are, but there is some evidence about how they create more stability for nests. ***NO ACTION**

9. REVIEW STATUS OF RAVEN PERMITS, PROCESS FOR APPLYING, METHOD OF PRIORITIZATION, AND APPLICATION BY AUTHORIZED AGENCIES. THE SEC MAY REQUEST STAFF TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE EFFORT – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Shawn Espinosa presented about priorities and permits. The presentation can be found on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website. Pat Jackson, Predator Management Staff Specialist for NDOW commented that they used funds from a \$3 Predator Fee to focus on lethal removal of ravens around sage grouse nests. Mark Ono from USDA-APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service), continued the presentation. The development of the SMaRT tool was for livestock protection, but the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to target ravens might not have application to open sagebrush landscapes. He is trying to create new SOPs. The label of the pesticide requires the applicator to go back and collect the treated eggs. They were doing more of a scatter gun approach to treat as many locations as possible, with no proof that ravens were actually being removed. Take model that is currently being used is also problematic. The estimation is based on consumption of the bait, but if you only check every seven days, it might not be very accurate. Through negotiations, they have increased the funding to start in the process to do it right. The past issues were lack of staffing, the scatter approach, and the lack of focus on nesting pairs. He hopes to increase staff to two and will be hiring seasonals to do surveying techniques and application, utilizing Survey123 to do those rapid assessment surveys pre- and post-application. Goals are to create a window of opportunity for the eggs to hatch, support USGS with their Survey123, and to develop an SOP for open sagebrush ecosystems. Looking forward, he hopes to use drones to detect and oil eggs. You cannot just shoot ravens. They are highly intelligent. That's why the eggs work because it's delayed so there's no correlation between eggs and death. Other hopes are to expand staff, expand efficacy of bait delivery systems, come up with a better system to estimate raven take, and update the pesticide label. Need for a deviation from the limitations of the depredation permit authority and develop an endangered animal plan permit to reduce ravens as a whole across the landscape. Depredation permits require them to not have a significant impact, but the populations should be reduced entirely and there's no permitting structure for that.

Mr. Jackson commented that they have working on an EA to increase take to 6000 this current year, as the depredation conservation order would not be considered until 2023 at the earliest. Mark Ono explained that a depredation order is an order within a specific region where anyone can remove at will the thing impacting the resource. It requires a lot of NEPA. A Conservation Order is for the intent of conservation, not to damage that resource, different from a Depredation Order.

The grander approach is a framework design where they can insert a species. There's been a lot of staff time to do this work but there are other priorities. There's a model the east is using for black vultures. They just don't know how this would parallel once other things take hold. Mr. Barrett offered any assistance to keep it moving, but since things take a while, if anyone had any ideas to do something now, they would love to start talking about it. Mr. Espinosa asked if there was anything to make pivots less attractive to ravens, such as effigies. Mark Ono commented that effigies work for a short time. Mr. Coates brought up the issue of knowing where to direct the lethal removal efforts. More tools are needed, and NEPA needs to be eliminated for a site-to-site basis. Mr. Jackson added that the \$3 Predator Fee is being discussed in the legislative session, and that it needs support to continue as it has been a match to fund Mr. Coates' research and to work with USFWS. ***NO ACTION**

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

Mr. McGowan reminded the SEC that the Semi-Annual and Performance Reports were due at the next meeting. The next meeting was proposed for Thursday, November 30, 2022. ***NO ACTION**

11. FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service

Mr. Barrett notified the Council that Marc Jackson retired and the USFWS is trying to hire for his position by end of the year. As for the Bipartisan infrastructure Law, the USFWS received \$50m over next 5 years across 9 states. They were asked to provide a list of Fiscal Year '22 and '23 projects and they were submitted to regional team. The USFWS received \$1 million for thirteen projects on private, one project on Native land, and others for FY22. They expect similar for FY23. USFWS received petition to list pinyon jay and are on the tail end of review. In the meantime, they have a 2020 conservation strategy on Partners in Flight website.

B. Bureau of Land Management

Mr. Shepherd commented that the modernization project for State RMP is still being completed. Funding plan still has not been approved and he encourages people to contact administration to encourage moving forward. New Sage grouse plans in limbo. State governor's taskforce is to be meeting about it and will have path forward regarding that afterwards. The BLM is continuing drought actions with permittees, working with drought EAs, and encouraging people to look at management options. December drought workshops will occur to understand drought documents and what can be done to encourage more discussion. The BLM completed two WHB gathers in July and August. Another gather is planned in the Winnemucca district in Calico complex. Mr. McGowan commented that a potential agenda item is for the BLM to present on how the gathers have impacted AML for those regions and how many horses have been treated fertility-wise, to project the impact to population.

C. US Forest Service

Ms. Gabor acknowledged the BLM's leadership on horse gathers. They had additional staff capacity to manage wild horse and burros. The Santa Rosa Range management plan briefs on that. In the meantime, they are looking at flexibility for grazing. The USFS recognized NVE leadership on hazardous fuels reduction. USFS funding is coming through four channels through competitive grants. They have money coming, just don't know how much, how to get on the ground. They are in conversations for addressing water developments but have challenges in permitting. The discussions are at the regional level and must be tightly aligned with other offices. Hope to have an update at the Cattleman's meeting.

D. USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mr. Rose informed the Council that Suzy Daubert is acting state conservationist until December. NRCS is in process to moving to new building, which they will occupy in late September. NRCS is to get \$20b across every program through the Infrastructure Act, but they are unsure how much Nevada is getting. It's a capacity issue to get projects on the ground and how to get the money out and who to work with. Capacity is a challenge especially engineering. FY23 is going to have an education campaign to remind people about NRCS and what they do. They can present for the SEC or other partners. NRCS does have programs dealing with sage grouse habitat like the working lands for wildlife, EQIP, agriculture conservation easement program and those programs have received money.

E. Other

12. STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. Office of the Governor

Mr. McGowan stated that he received an email that Jordan Hosmer-Henner has left the Governor's Office. Mr. McGowan will reach out to his replacement to engage her.

B. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Mr. McGowan informed the Council that Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Etchegoyhen are out with DOI Secretary Bordeaux to look at the Fallon Range Training Complex where the expansion is proposed.

C. Department of Wildlife

Mr. Espinosa informed the Council that the final numbers for lek counts were in: 1072 leks were counted, 427 active. Overall, there were 5597 males with an average of 13.1 males per lek. One more than last year but 30% below the 20-year average. The numbers are more bleak looking at trend leks. Of the 165 active leks, there were an average of 10.2 males. 0.3 males more than last year, but 57% below 20-year average. NDOW has closed hunt units. Only have 13 hunt units open for sage grouse with short seasons. Production looks to be improved. Decent insect year.

D. Department of Agriculture

Ms. Brown commented that the purpose of the Drought Meetings is to get engagement and how they can communicate better. NDA, with several other agencies, made a formal application for America the Beautiful funds for \$4.5m for native seed related activities and project implementation for wildlife priority areas. They will know in late November if successful in application. Looking to start up the foundation seed program in department. Ramping up with current emphasis on native seed and hoping that certified seed program for reclamation. Ms. Brown stated she would be happy to present on the program. First goal is to purchase and distribute seeds to growers. Jay Jake, Noxious Weeds Coordinator, is looking to set up meeting for early detection and rapid response.

E. Other

13. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Member Boies moved to adjourn, and Member MacKenzie seconded the motion. Chairman Goicoechea adjourned the meeting at 1:22 pm.

All details not covered in these minutes can be heard on the meeting recording at <https://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Meetings/>.