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STATE OF NEVADA
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
STAFF REPORT
MEETING DATE: October 1, 2014

DATE: September 30, 2014
TO: Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Members
FROM: Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
Telephone: 775-684-8600
THROUGH: Tim Rubald, Program Manager
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SUBJECT: Discussion, consideration, and possible adoption of the revised 2014 State Plan.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to discuss and possibly adopt the revised 2014 State Plan. In addition, further minor formatting or editorial changes may arise after SEC approval of the 2014 State Plan. The SETT requests the SEC authorize the SETT to make these minor changes, which do not alter the content or intent of the document. The SEC has been considering revisions of individual sections of the State Plan since their July 30, 2013 meeting. At the August 21, 2014 meeting, the SEC approved the DRAFT 2014 State Plan and submitted additional edits and comments after the meeting. Edits to the document since the August 21, 2014 meeting appear as “track changes.”

PREVIOUS ACTION

March 27, 2013. The Council directed the SETT to meet with USFWS and NDOW staffs to discuss the USFWS comments on the Nevada State Plan and report back to the Council.

April 22, 2013. The Council directed the SETT to further develop the Nevada State Plan and the EIS Alternative to incorporate the concerns expressed by the USFWS.

July 30, 2013. The Council adopted the Sagebrush Ecosystem Strategic Detailed Timeline, which included revision of the State Plan/EIS Alternative.

August 21, 2014. The Council adopted the DRAFT 2014 State Plan. The Council submitted suggested edits to the SETT by September 12, 2014.

DISCUSSION

This agenda item requests the approval of the content of the Final 2014 State Plan in its entirety. The SEC has reviewed and approved individual sections of the State Plan at most meetings between the July 30, 2013 and August 21, 2014 meetings. At the August 21, 2014 meeting, the SEC approved a DRAFT 2014 State Plan.

Edits and comments were submitted by the SEC in September and are addressed in this version of the State Plan. All changes made to the document since the August 21, 2014 appears as “track changes.” Additional minor edits to the document were made after the Final 2014 State Plan was released at the request of SEC members. These changes are included as Attachment 2.

Additional minor formatting and editorial changes may be necessary when finalizing the document. The SETT requests the SEC authorize the SETT to make any necessary minor edits, which do not change the content or intent of the document, without bringing it back to the SEC.

In addition, two policy considerations arose from the SEC comments received. These policy considerations are listed below for SEC discussion and consideration:

- What is the status of the State Plan if BLM/ USFS select a different alternative for the Sub-regional Sage-grouse EIS and LUPA? What is the status of the State Plan if USFWS lists sage-grouse under the ESA? Is a statement concerning these scenarios necessary in the State Plan?
- Does the State Plan, specifically SETT Consultation and the avoid, minimize, mitigate process, apply to state and local government lands?

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the SEC approve the Final 2014 State Plan and authorize the SETT to make any necessary additional formatting and editorial changes, which do not alter the content or intent of the document.

Staff recommends the SEC discuss the two policy considerations and determine if the concepts should be addressed in the State Plan.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the SEC agree with the staff recommendation, a possible motion would be: “Motion to adopt the Final 2014 State Plan and authorize the SETT to make any necessary additional formatting and editorial changes, which do not alter the content or the intent of the document.”

or

“Motion to adopt the Final 2014 State Plan and authorize the SETT to make any necessary additional formatting and editorial changes, which do not alter the content not the intent of the document, with additional amendments.”

There are no suggested motions for the policy considerations.

Attachments:

1. 2014 Nevada Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan
2. Additional minor edits to the 2014 State Plan

mf: TR

1 determined by the management categories the proposed project is located in.
2 Exemptions to the avoid policy will be granted if all the criteria in Table 3-1 are met. A
3 higher burden of proof is set for project proponents to demonstrate that avoidance is
4 not possible cannot be reasonably accomplished in areas that have higher densities of
5 sage-grouse populations and suitable habitat.

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DRAFT

1 *Core Management Areas*

2 The Core Management Areas supports ~~areas of~~ high densities of sage-grouse and areas
3 of high estimated space use in suitable habitat ~~in the State of Nevada~~ [\(See Section 6.0](#)
4 [for details on technical language\)](#). These areas include approximately 85% of space use
5 by sage-grouse in the State of Nevada. These areas represent the strongholds (or “the
6 best of the best”) for sage-grouse populations in the State of Nevada and support the
7 highest density of breeding populations. Thus, the management strategy is to conserve
8 these areas by avoidance of anthropogenic disturbances in order to maintain or improve
9 current sage-grouse population levels.

10

11 Project proponents must seek to avoid disturbances within the SGMA. If the project
12 proponent wishes to demonstrate that avoidance ~~is not possible~~ **cannot be reasonably**
13 **accomplished** within these areas, exemptions will be granted to this restriction as part
14 of the SETT Consultation. The project proponent must demonstrate that all of the
15 following criteria listed below (also see Table 3-1) are met as part of the SETT
16 Consultation process in order to be granted an exemption:

17

- 18 • Demonstrate that the project cannot be reasonably accomplished elsewhere –
19 the purpose and need of the project could not be accomplished in an alternative
20 location;
- 21 • Demonstrate that the individual and cumulative impacts of the project would
22 not result in habitat fragmentation or other impacts that would cause sage-
23 grouse populations to decline through consultation with the SETT;
- 24 • Demonstrate that sage-grouse population trends within the PMU are stable or
25 increasing over a 10-year rolling average;
- 26 • Demonstrate that project infrastructure will be co-located with existing
27 disturbances to the greatest extent possible;

2014 Nevada Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan

1 These habitat objectives are specific to Nevada and based on research conducted within
 2 the State. Additional information on the development of these objectives ~~is in~~-provided
 3 in Appendix B.

4 The State of Nevada recognizes that a resilient and resistant sagebrush ecosystem
 5 should be heterogeneous ([a mosaic of multiple seral states](#)) across the landscape and
 6 that achievement of these objectives resulting in a large-scale homogenous landscape is
 7 not desirable within the State of Nevada. [While rangeland health indicator assessments](#)
 8 [may be conducted initially, actual measurements identifying whether standards are](#)
 9 [being met will be used to determine whether or not habitat objectives are being met at](#)
 10 [individual sites.](#) [These habitat](#) objectives are intended to be used as guidelines at the
 11 site-level and do not apply as objectives at the landscape-level.

12 [\[\[Table 4-1 is the same as Table 2-6 in the BLM sub-regional EIS. The SETT would](#)
 13 [recommend that these habitat objectives be the same for the state and federal](#)
 14 [agencies. Table 2-6 is still undergoing review by a collaborative group \(USGS, USFS, BLM,](#)
 15 [NDOW, USFWS\) and changes are still possible. To this end, the SETT recommends that](#)
 16 [the Council approve this table with the caveat that the final Table 2-6 will be brought](#)
 17 [back to the Council for their consideration when finalized. \]\]](#)

18 **Table 4-1. Habitat Objectives for Greater Sage-Grouse**

Life Requisite	Habitat Indicator	Objective	Citations
GENERAL			
All life stages	Rangeland Health Indicator Assessment	Meeting all standards ¹	
Cover (Nesting)	Seasonal Habitat Needed	>65% of the landscape in sagebrush cover	Aldridge and Boyce 2007 Knick et.al 2013
	Conifer encroachment⁴	Not present	Casazza et al. 2011 Coates and Casazza In prep (A)
	Annual Grasses (landscape)	< %5	Blomberg et.al 2012
Security (Nesting)	Conifer encroachment	<3% phase I (>0% to <25% cover) No phase II (25 – 50% cover) No phase III (>50% cover)	Casazza et al. 2011 Coates and Casazza In prep (A)

1 **7.5 Livestock Grazing**

2 Farming and ranching on private lands in unison with authorized livestock grazing on
3 public lands has been a long standing arrangement for many private landowners in the
4 State of Nevada. Historically, many homesteaders began to farm and ranch much of
5 Nevada’s riparian and mesic landscapes due to the availability of surface water or
6 springs. Once developed, many of these mesic areas were expanded by the artificial
7 spreading of water or irrigation. These larger, irrigation induced, privately and publicly
8 owned meadows served to support many species of wildlife in addition to livestock. [This](#)
9 [expansion of late brood rearing habitat and an increase in sagebrush acreage due to an](#)
10 [absence of fire after consumption of fine fuels, \(Burkhardt and Tisdale 1976\) may be](#)
11 [causes of sage-grouse population expansion in the late 1800s and early 1900s \(Gruel](#)
12 [and Swanson 2012\).](#) ~~The meadows are not sufficient to support livestock year round.~~

13 Today, by allowing for the authorized use of proper and targeted livestock grazing on
14 public lands, private landowners and ~~federal land~~[wildlife habitat](#) managers can serve to
15 protect or even benefit each other if managed properly (by reductions in fuels, targeted
16 grazing of specific habitats and cheatgrass, etc.). The State of Nevada recognizes and
17 supports this long standing beneficial relationship [and the property interests associated](#)
18 [with grazing permits \(Figure 10\).](#)

19 Livestock grazing (primarily sheep and cattle) has occurred on the Nevada landscape for
20 over 170 years at varying levels. Many variables have contributed to the growth and
21 reduction of the size and number of homesteads, as well as the number of livestock
22 using the range, over the past century. ~~While livestock grazing continues to be a highly~~
23 ~~contested use on public lands in the West, the~~ [The](#) State supports the proper
24 management of livestock grazing on allotted public lands in Nevada. Davies et al. (2011,
25 p. 2575) concluded based on literature review that “Though appropriately managed
26 grazing is critical to protecting the sagebrush ecosystem, livestock grazing per se is not a
27 stressor threatening the sustainability of the ecosystem. Thus, cessation of livestock
28 grazing will not conserve the sagebrush ecosystem.”

1 timely, seasonal range management decisions to meet vegetation management
2 objectives, including fuels reduction.

3 **Objective 1.1:** In sage-grouse habitat, manage for vegetation composition and
4 structure that achieves sage-grouse seasonal habitat objectives (see Table 4.1),
5 enhancing resilience and resistance based upon the ability of the ecological site to
6 respond to management. This objective recognizes spatial and temporal variations
7 across ~~several~~ stages.

8 **Management Action 1.1.1:** Within sage-grouse habitat, incorporate sage-
9 grouse habitat objectives (see Table 4.1) and management considerations into
10 all BLM and Forest Service grazing allotments through allotment management
11 plans (AMPs), multiple use decisions, or permit renewals ~~and/or~~ Forest
12 Service Annual Operating Instructions.

13 Implement appropriate prescribed grazing ~~conservation~~ actions, at scales
14 sufficient to influence a positive ~~population~~ response in sage-grouse habitats,
15 such as NRCS ~~C~~conservation Practice Standard 528 for prescribed grazing (NRCS
16 2011).

17 **Management Action 1.1.2:** In sage-grouse habitat, work cooperatively on
18 integrated ranch planning within sage-grouse habitat so operations with deeded
19 land, and BLM ~~and/or~~ Forest Service allotments, can be planned as single
20 units, providing flexibility and adaptive management across all ownerships and
21 not altering stocking rates on operations for progressive management decisions.

22 **Management Action 1.1.3:** Continue the use of land health assessments on
23 BLM ~~administered~~ public lands or ~~other monitoring methods~~ the Sierra and
24 Central/Eastern Nevada Riparian Field Guides and the Resource Implementation
25 Protocol for Rapid Assessment Matrices on Forest Service-administered lands in
26 sage-grouse habitat to evaluate current conditions as compared to sage-grouse

1 discussions with stakeholders, the SETT will work to develop similar cooperative
2 monitoring agreements for additional resources with additional agencies and will
3 facilitate development of such to meet the needs for training and quality control.

4 See resources below for monitoring guides for ranchers and other stakeholders.

5 Oregon Cattlemen's Association (2014). Oregon Resources Monitoring Guide: The
6 Rancher's Guide to Improved Grazing.

7 Peterson, Eric. (2010). Implementing a Cooperative Permittee Monitoring Program.
8 Sublette County Extension. University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension
9 Service. B-1169. 28 pp. Available at:
10 <http://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B1169.pdf>

11 Swanson, S., Bruce, B., Cleary, R., Dragt, B., Brackley, G., Fults, G., . . . Wilson, D. (2006).
12 *Nevada Rangeland Monitoring Handbook, 2nd. Edition*. University of Nevada,
13 Cooperative Extension; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Bureau of Land
14 Management; U.S. Forest Service. Educational Bulletin 06-03;
15 <https://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ag/2006/eb0603.pdf>.

16
17 [Perryman, B.L., L.B. Bruce, S.R. Swanson, and P.T. Tueller \(2006\). *Rancher's Monitoring*
18 *Guide*, Educational Bulletin 06-04. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension,
19 University of Nevada, Reno, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural
20 Resources. USA. 48 pp. Available at:
21 <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ag/2006/eb0604.pdf>](http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ag/2006/eb0604.pdf)

22 Bureau of Land Management. (2004). Memorandum of Understanding with Public Lands
23 Council. BLM MOU WO220-2004-01. Available at:
24 [http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/im_attachments/2006.Par.82823.File.dat/im2006-
25 100attach2.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/im_attachments/2006.Par.82823.File.dat/im2006-100attach2.pdf)
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