

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

Progress Report: December 2017



Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

State of Nevada

201 South Roop Street, Suite 101

Carson City, Nevada 89701-5247



The Sagebrush Ecosystem Council's mission is to maintain and restore a functional and resilient sagebrush ecosystem to benefit all species while allowing for various land uses. This will be accomplished by working through a diverse coalition of public and private stakeholders.

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**Nevada Sagebrush
Ecosystem Council**

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor
State of Nevada

J. J. GOICOECHEA
Chairman
Sagebrush Ecosystem Council



NRS 232.162 § 8—On or before June 30 and December 31 of each year, the Council shall submit a written report to the Governor.



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BRIAN SANDOVAL

Governor



Kelly McGowan, Program Manager

Katie Andrie, Wildlife

Kathleen Petter, State Lands

Dan Huser, Forestry/Wildland Fire
Agriculture, Vacant

Letter from the Chairman Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

Dear Governor Sandoval:

Over the past six months, the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) has observed a historic transfer of credits to offset habitat loss, and have taken significant actions related to the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team's (SETT) recommendations to improve the Conservation Credit System (CCS). Our annual process of reviewing and adopting adaptive management, while implementing the CCS, came to fruition during this six month period when the SEC approved four Improvements. Improvement considerations were carefully designed and considered by the SETT, thoroughly vetted by staff from state agencies, federal agencies, and faculty from the University of Nevada, Reno and was developed into formal improvement recommendations by the SETT. The actions by the SEC to adopt these improvements will reduce user costs, increase efficiencies, and will result in improved and scientifically justifiable methods of applying the Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT). The HQT is the primary tool for assessing habitat values (credits and debits). With these improvements, we are confident that Nevada has one of the most scientifically sound habitat exchange programs in the nation. We also believe these improvements may provide greater confidence for its users and continue to protect Nevada's sagebrush ecosystem.

The SETT continues to work with private landowners to conduct conservation practices on their land that will enhance and protect Greater Sage-grouse habitats eventually leading to credit generation and the sale of credits to those needing to offset anthropogenic disturbances. Two annual rounds of state funding are complete, and currently the SETT is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help fund additional conservation efforts through their Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Collectively to date, credit projects with transferred, available and anticipated credits account for approximately 60,000 acres of private land and may generate as many as 22,000 credits. The SETT anticipates additional acreage and associated credits will be developed during the RCPP process. A summary page of the current credit projects is included in this report, as well as some of the organizational highlights of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program (SEP).

We are dedicated to the oversight and guidance of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program that will lead to responsible multiple uses of Nevada's natural resources while ensuring that unavoidable impacts are adequately offset through the use of the CCS.

Sincerely,

J.J. Goicoechea, Chairman
Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

Instrumental Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC) Decisions

July 2017 – December 2017

- 2017, September Secretarial Order (SO) 3353 - Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation and Cooperation with Western States, a report focusing on addressing the principal threats to rangeland health and sage-grouse habitat and future methods to manage sage-grouse populations was reviewed and commented on by the SEC. The Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) was asked to prepare comments regarding the SO, and present the information to the SEC at a future SEC meeting for their review and guidance on moving forward.
- The SETT was also asked by the SEC to prepare correspondence to the congressional delegation and Nevada legislators requesting a solution to fire-borrowing and funding of restoration and protection projects, as well as a letter asking for the full support and use of all tools contained within the Wild Horse and Burro Act in addressing the wild horse and burrow population. The SETT was also asked to prepare correspondence to US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requesting an increased take for targeted predator control.
- 2017, November The SEC presided over the first credit transaction which transferred 2,514 credits from the Kinross Gold Corporation's Tumbling JR Ranch to fulfill the current mitigation obligation of Kinross's Bald Mountain Mine .
- The SEC reviewed their response to the Department of Interior's (DOI) Notice of Intent (NOI) to amend the Land Use Plan and made further recommendations. A response was asked to be submitted to the DOI before the close of the comment period.
- 2017, December The SETT presented recommended improvements to the CCS Manual, which included alternatives to permanent credits, reducing sampling on debit projects where habitat is unlikely to meet baseline, clarifying how the removal of anthropogenic disturbances may generate credits, and shifting to determine credit project compliance through site-specific measures within the credit producer's control. The SEC reviewed and approved all recommended improvements.
- The SETT also introduced future improvements that will be finalized by the next council meeting.
- The SEC reviewed and approved the aforementioned letters.
- The SEC reviewed and unanimously approved the semi-annual progress report to the Governor.

SETT Activities and Accomplishments

July 2017 – December 2017

- Worked cooperatively with Kinross Gold on the Tumbling JR Ranch credit project to develop the Management Plan, create Performance Standards to be met for the term of the credit project, calculate and finalize the necessary financial assurances, and complete their participant contract.
- Transferred 2,514 of the 4,177 awarded credits from Kinross Gold Corporation's Tumbling JR Ranch credit project to offset their current mitigation obligation for the Bald Mountain Mine in White Pine County. This was the 1st transfer of credits to offset disturbance within the CCS.
- Continued work with Newmont Mining Corporation on their planned enrollment of the Greater Phoenix Mine into the CCS.
- Worked with the BLM, the Gold Rock and Marigold Mines, and the McGinness Hills Phase 3 Geothermal Plant, among others, on their potential CCS enrollment.
- Continued to finalize agreements to fund 2017 state solicitation projects, which accounted for approximately \$1 million obligated toward seeding credit projects.
- After thorough reviews of HQT results and the signing of management plans for credit projects, approximately 7,400 credits (accounting for approximately 23,000 acres) from four credit projects are now reported as available or transferable online. An estimated 15,000 additional credits are anticipated to be made available within the next year from nine credit projects (accounting for 35,000 acres).
- Collaborated with the USDA-NRCS to implement the \$1.2 million of the total Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award to benefit Nevadan landowners, improve sage-grouse habitat in the state, and develop additional CCS credit projects. The winter enrollment period is likely to invest \$400,000 in awards to producers for habitat improvements with credit potential also determined per project.
- Continued to collaborate with federal agencies to move toward allowing credit generation on public lands. Improvements on the conifer removal process within the CCS will be presented and finalized in early 2018, with the goal of transacting the 1st public lands credit project the desired outcome.
- Drafted, thoroughly vetted, and presented to the SEC on three significant Improvements to the CCS, with the intent to secure unanimous approval by the SEC.
- During each SEC meeting, the SETT updated the SEC with reports regarding planned and ongoing projects, agreements consultations with federal agencies and updates regarding the CCS.



Signing of the first transfer of credits

CCS Credit Project Status

PROJECT NAME	CREDITS	COUNTY	ACRES CONSERVED	WAFWA ZONE	STATE SEED-FUNDED
TRANSFERRED CREDITS					
Tumbling JR Ranch	2,514	Elko, White Pine	5,868	III	Yes
AVAILABLE CREDITS					
Tumbling JR Ranch	1,663	Elko, White Pine	3,882	III	Yes
Cottonwood Ranch	711	Elko	1,009	III	Yes
John's Ranch	164	Elko	1,073	III	Yes
Crawford Cattle	2,365	Humboldt, Elko	11,134	III, IV	Yes
ANTICIPATED CREDITS					
RDD	TBD	Humboldt	1,155	V	Yes
Eureka Livestock	TBD	Eureka	1,641	III	Yes
Coleman Valley Ranch	TBD	Washoe	1,045	V	Yes
Squaw Valley Ranch	TBD	Elko	198	IV	No
West IL Ranch	TBD	Elko	14,630	IV	No
Heguy Ranch	TBD	Elko	6,450	IV	Yes
Earthton Holdings	TBD	Elko	1,578	IV	Yes
Estill Ranches	TBD	Washoe	1,671	V	No
Falen	TBD	Humboldt	7,070	IV, V	No



The SETT team attending a site visit to Eureka Livestock.

CCS Debit Project Status

PROJECT NAME	DEBITS	COUNTY	ACRES OF DIRECT IMPACT*	WAFWA ZONE
DEBITS MITIGATED				
Bald Mountain Mine	2,514	White Pine	2,521	III
ANTICIPATED DEBITS				
Bald Mountain Mine	2,737	White Pine	2,745	III
Greater Phoenix Mine	211	Lander	513	III

*The number of debits generated is dependent on the quality and quantity of greater sage-grouse habitat. There is not a direct ratio applied to each debit project based on acres alone.

For further information on CCS progress please see Addendum 1: the 1st CCS Annual Performance Report.

Other Involvement and Activities

SETT Activities and Accomplishments Unrelated to the CCS

July 2017 – December 2017

- Held, presented at, and invited experts to present at four SEC meetings in the six month term. Speakers on various sagebrush ecosystem related topics included John Axtell, Matt Magaletti, Paul Peterson and Marci Todd of the BLM, Bill Dunkelberger and John Shivik of the USFS, Dr. Peter Coates of USGS, Pam Robinson of the Office of the Governor, Dave Voth of Nevada Department of Agriculture, Shawn Espinosa of NDOW, Kacey KC of NDF, Richard Perry of Nevada Division of Minerals, Dr. Sherman Swanson of UNR-UNCE and the SEC, Hank James of the Nevada Rural Electric Association, Brad Schultz of UNR-UNCE, and Jeff White of ELLCo/Newmont Mining.
- Collaborated with the SEC on several iterations of aforementioned letters to DOI and USDA.
- Summarized and investigated relevant science and the State Plan in relation to the recent S.O. 3353 and DOI NOI to amend the land use plans for the SEC in order to draft their response.
- Provided comments to federal agencies regarding multiple proposed actions on federal lands within Nevada.
- Continued to work with state and federal agencies and disturbance proponents to ensure quality mitigation for projects considering enrollment in the CCS.
- Explored the usage of drones in habitat monitoring and CCS verification, corresponded with specialists, and sent SETT representative, Katie Andrle, to a drone habitat monitoring exhibition and to serve on a DCNR committee exploring potential drone use by state agencies.
- SETT member Katie Andrle continued to assist NDOW on several sage-grouse research and monitoring efforts in the field as well as contribute to related data analysis and GIS components.

Population Status of the Greater Sage-grouse

Each year NDOW surveys approximately 40% of the 1,886 known sage-grouse leks and approximately 75% trend leks identified within the state. Trend leks are a subset of total leks in Nevada that are monitored several times each year to enable a better trend estimate for sage-grouse populations in Nevada. In addition to lek monitoring, NDOW collects hunter harvested sage-grouse wings to conduct a demographic analysis to estimate recruitment into the population. Average male attendance from trend leks in 2017 was 25.4 males per lek, which indicated a 10% decrease from 2016 and 4.4% decrease compared to the long term average of 26.6. However, trend lek data collected from 1997–2017 indicates an overall stable trend when a logarithmic trend applied to the dataset (Figure 1; NDOW 2017).

Recruitment during the 2017 season determined from hunter harvested sage-grouse was 1.05 chicks per female, which may result in a male lek attendance decline during the 2018 breeding season but lek declines will more likely be expressed in 2019. This is a reduction from a three year average of 1.5 chicks per female during 2014–2016. Despite high precipitation Nevada received during fall and winter 2016-2017, NDOW biologists speculate that drought and atypical weather patterns and conditions exhibited over the past several years have likely had significant impacts on nesting and survival of chicks in Nevada. Coupled with severe fire seasons, environmental and habitat conditions have not provided optimal conditions for sage-grouse during the breeding and brood-rearing seasons.

NDOW. 2017. Nevada Sage-grouse Conservation Project: Final Performance Report. September, 2017.

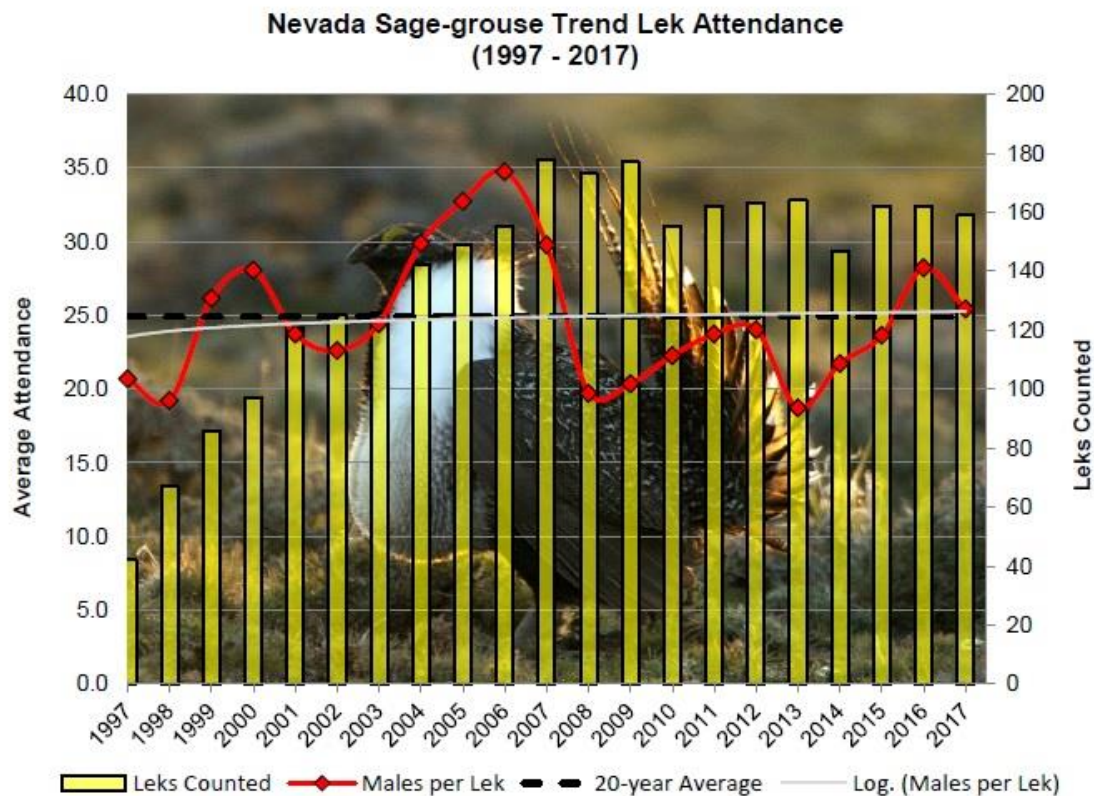


Figure 1. Trend lek attendance from 1997-2017.

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council

J.J. Goicoechea, Chair
Local Government Representative

Chris MacKenzie, Vice-Chair
Board of Wildlife Representative

Allen Biaggi
Mining Representative

Steve Boies
Ranching Representative

Gerry Emm
Tribal Nations Representative

Starla Lacy
Energy Representative

Bevan Lister
Agriculture Representative

William Molini
Conservation and Environmental Representative

Dr. Sherman Swanson
General Public

Ex-Officio Members

Jim Barbee
Director, Nevada Department of Agriculture

Ray Dotson
State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

Bill Dunkelberger
Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest Supervisor, U.S. Forest Service

Jim Lawrence
Deputy Director, Nevada Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

John Ruhs
State Director, Bureau of Land Management

Carolyn Swed
Interim State Supervisor, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tony Wasley
Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife

Tina Nappe
Conservation and Environmental Representative

Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team

Kelly McGowan—Program Manager
Technical Team

Katie Andrie- Wildlife
Technical Team

Dan Huser—Forestry/Wildland Fire
Technical Team

Kathleen Petter—State Lands
Technical Team

Currently Vacant—Agriculture
Technical Team

List of Acronyms

The list of acronyms below contains many of the terms used by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team in describing its activities.

BLM	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
CA	Cooperating Agency
CCS	Nevada Conservation Credit System
CDP	Conservation District Program
DCNR	Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
DOI	Department of Interior
ESA	Endangered Species Act
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRSG	Greater Sage-grouse
GSGAC	Governor's Sage-grouse Advisory Committee
HSM	Habitat Suitability Modeling
HQT	Habitat Quantification Tool
LAWG	Local Area Working Groups
LUPA	Greater Sage-grouse Land Use Plan Amendment
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDA	Nevada Department of Agriculture
NDF	Nevada Division of Forestry
NDOT	Nevada Department of Transportation
NDOW	Nevada Department of Wildlife
NDSL	Nevada Division of State Lands
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
SEC	Sagebrush Ecosystem Council
SEP	Sagebrush Ecosystem Program
SETT	Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
SGMA	Sage-grouse Management Areas
SO	Secretarial Order
SWG	Science Work Group
TRG	Technical Review Group
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey



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