



STATE OF NEVADA
SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
201 South Roop Street, Suite 101
Carson City, Nevada 89701-5247
Phone (775) 684-8600 - Fax (775) 684-8604

MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, February 25th, 2020
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Place: Nevada Legislature – Room 4100
401 South Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701

A full audio recording of this meeting is accessible through the following website
[http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Sagebrush Ecosystem Council Meeting/](http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Sagebrush_Ecosystem_Council_Meeting/)

Council Members Present: JJ Goicoechea, Chris MacKenzie, Allen Biaggi, Steven Boies, Bevan Lister, Sherm Swanson, Starla Lacey, William Molini, Cheva Gabor for Bill Dunkelberger, Justin Barrett, Jon Raby, Ray Dotson, Jim Lawrence for Bradley Crowell.

Council Members Absent: Gerry Emm, Jennifer Ott, Tony Wasley

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Goicoechea called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Karen Boeger provided comment regarding wild horse and burro management on public land. Ms. Boeger expressed interest in how horse and burro impacts factored into the adaptive management triggers.

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

Member Boies moved to approve the agenda, Member Lacey seconded the motion. ***ACTION**

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Member Biaggi requested amendments to the minutes that included grammatical corrections and the recording of the final vote disposition for agenda items 6 and 7. Chairman Goicoechea requested that the minutes be tabled until they could be approved with the additions at the next meeting. ***NO ACTION**

5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence.

6. UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF BI-STATE AND GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CA/NV, THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSERVATION PLANNING TOOLS AND THEIR UTILITY TO THE SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM PROGRAM, AND UPDATE ON THE POPULATION ASSESSMENT (2018-2019)- *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Dr. Peter Coates gave a presentation related to sage-grouse populations and new tools that may become available for sage-grouse management in the future. The presentation may be found on the program website. Member Biaggi commented on the ability of the research presented to help move management of habitat forward. Member McKenzie commented on the ability of the Conservation Planning Tool to create priorities for management. Member McKenzie also asked what type and timing of precipitation is most beneficial to sage-grouse? Dr. Coates replied that grouse demographics at specific life stages are influenced by precipitation and gave several examples, and that the question likely depends on the life stage of interest, but that the previous year's precipitation is most impactful. Member Lister asked for clarification regarding the scale of raven density assessment, and the threshold of 0.4 per square kilometer. Dr. Coates replied that the density assessment was a population scale. Member Lister asked about satellite data in the Conservation Planning Tool and the applicability to detecting plant succession over time? Dr. Coates replied that the satellite data assigns a recovery value based on recovery rates that are in turn based on field data. Dr. Coates indicated that they could have a predicted value of how the recovery process affects sage-grouse recovery, and that this tool is a far more accurate process. Dr. Coates indicated that the end result is sage-grouse oriented, but that the underlying model products are useful for any type of recovery planning. Member Lacey asked how much historical data is available relating to raven density and if the 0.4 number could be the natural raven population for some areas? Dr. Coates answered that there is 40 years of bird index data that is good data and available, and accounts for detection error, and that the data shows increases. Dr. Coates also indicated that the threshold number indicates that is where the average sage grouse nest survival is at what average raven density, but that it was not exactly background raven activity. Member Lacey asked if there was an ability to put raven control suggestions as a context for raven effects on sage grouse populations to make sure that the appropriate context is communicated when management actions are being considered. Dr. Coates commented that there is much more information available on the subject and mentioned that there is an upcoming workshop in April in Elko to discuss raven management actions and that some of these topics could be discussed at that workshop. Dr. Coates offered to come back to the council to report on the results of that workshop. Member Molini thanked Dr. Coates for his work. Member Boies asked about the effect of cold and wet springs on chick survival and if that is included in the population modeling. Dr. Coates responded affirmatively and commented on the variable effect that climate can have on demographics at different life stages and re-nesting. Member Boies commented that he often sees additional nesting in response to climatic conditions. Member Boies asked about PJ removal and how much and where the SEC should direct the removal of PJ? Dr. Coates responded that the Conservation Planning Tool is designed to guide actions to where they will return the greatest return on investment. Dr. Coates indicated that the Conservation Planning Tool could be used to compare different restoration actions and the return on investment. Dr. Coates also commented that the threats are working multiplicatively and no one thing is more important than another, but that wildfire is certainly a large threat. Mr. Lawrence asked how to package all the concurrent planning tools and efforts that are occurring across the state? Chairman Goicoechea concurred and commented that NDOW and USFWS needs to help focus management actions along with the SEC Adaptive Management process. Member Swanson asked if Dr. Coates had any data that tied the functionality of the meadow system to the extent of the late brood rearing habitat and the associated effect on sage grouse? Dr. Coates responded that he could not think of an analysis that has been done, but he may have the information needed to make that type of analysis and commented on projects that are currently looking at wild horse and burro use of meadow systems and the effect on sage grouse. Member Swanson asked if any of the datasets that are current such as the HAF are included in analyses? Dr. Coates indicated that it may be possible in the future with drones and remote sensing data. Mr. Dotson asked when the Conservation Planning Tool would be fully available? Dr. Coates indicated that by midsummer it should be automated, but that the tool is available to be run by the USGS staff. Mr. Raby commented that it is incumbent upon the SEC and the SETT to develop an approach to come up with solutions to a multi-pronged problem. Mr. McGowan reiterated the appreciation for increased tools available for prioritization efforts. Chairman Goicoechea asked if the SEC could host a meeting relevant to the roll out of the Conservation Planning Tool in midsummer. ***NO ACTION**

7. OVERVIEW OF THE RESPONSES RECEIVED FROM LOCAL CONSERVATION GROUPS TO ADDRESS SAGE-GROUSE POPULATION AND HABITAT WARNINGS/TRIGGERS RELATED TO THE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCESS MOVING FORWARD - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Mower gave an overview of the adaptive management report. This report is available on the program website. Member Lister asked if the conservation district program manager was going to pick up any facilitation duties. Mr. Mower responded that working closer with the conservation district staff was high on the SETT's priority list. Mr. Ormsby responded that yes, he would be taking over some facilitation duties and merge CD and SETT resources to accomplish better facilitation. Chairman Goicoechea commented that there are some suggestions that will need to coordinate actions between partners. Mr. McKenzie asked if the number of triggers was a surprise? Mr. Mower responded that the number of triggers was not a surprise, but that the workload associated with the process was a

surprise. Chairman Goicoechea commented that tools provided by Dr. Coates will be useful to help with proactive management. Member Boies commented that the process was useful and commented that the population data was very outdated and asked what the process was to get updated data. Ms. Andrie commented that the habitat triggers accounted for disturbances from the previous three years. Dr. Coates indicated that there is data up to 2018 and that it should be released soon with an updated modeling approach. Member Molini asked who was going to implement the actions indicated in the report? Mr. Mower indicated that the SETT would attempt to account for and report on actions implemented, but that individual agencies will be responsible for implementing the actions requested. Ms. Gabor mentioned that the recommendations were varied and mentioned that there might be a need for continued discussion with local groups to explain why actions may or may not be taken. Ms. Gabor mentioned that there may be actions that will not be taken based on a lack of understanding of the agency's abilities. Mr. Mower acknowledged that the quality of recommendations was reflective of the facilitation challenge. Ms. Gabor commented that she appreciated the honesty and mentioned that there may be some middle ground that would be needed. Mr. Raby commented that he shared Ms. Gabor's concerns, but that the specific items will result in program direction so that there is a track record for accepting the recommendations. Mr. Dotson commented that there has been a resource needs assessment completed for most areas and that could be a filter. Member Lister commented that the recommendations were the heart of what needs to get done, and that the SEC would use tools to get the best return on investment, work through the conservation districts to move forward. Member Lister expressed the view that the SEC would use this information to set priorities. Mr. Lawrence commented that it has been a huge amount of effort, and one of the things to work on is documenting the process as it goes forward. Mr. Lawrence asked how it could be most helpful and useful feeding into the federal agencies processes and whether it needs to be something to be approved by the council? Mr. Raby replied that it would be helpful to be approved by the SEC. Forwarding suite of recommendations that had been filtered by technical experts could be helpful. Chairman Goicoechea asked for a final to be issued and could be approved at the next meeting. Mr. Mower replied that the SETT does not feel comfortable removing items but that the council could edit as they saw fit. Ms. Gabor commented that the partners meeting could be a potential filter. ***NO ACTION**

8. UPDATE FROM THE HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST ON THE 2019 FIRE SEASON AND CURRENT REHABILITATION AND PLANNING EFFORTS. - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Kendal Young gave a presentation regarding 2019 fires and the BAER response. Mr. Young's presentation is available on the program website. Chairman Goicoechea asked regarding the Joint Chiefs request for funding targeting rehabilitation and livestock operations. Mr. Young replied that the proposals have been selected, but that the USFS had not yet received word on any selections. Mr. Young noted that they were successful lobbying the regional office for additional funding for infrastructure and rehabilitation. Mr. Dotson commented that there is already existing NEPA in the area, and producers can immediately apply for EQIP funding to complete certain actions. Mr. Young agreed that EQIP was a key component to get all the needed work done. Chairman Goicoechea asked for clarification on how much NEPA was available? Mr. Young responded that NEPA is completed to replace fencing in their original location. If locations are altered additional NEPA might need to be completed. Ms. Gabor commented that a need for individuals to apply for EQIP is a large need and that the Dept. of Wildlife has been working hard to implement rehabilitation efforts. Also, the Nevada Dept. of Forestry has offered SB508 funds as a match. Member Biaggi asked if there was a specific BAER budget yearly or if the funds are collected from various locations. Mr. Young responded that the funds are held and allocated out of the Washington office and disbursed to regional offices. Any request less than \$500k can be approved by the regional office. Mr. Young did not know if there is an allocated budget for either the regional office or the Washington office, but that he suspected the dollars were associated with the fire program overall. Member Boies asked if the referenced EQIP money qualified for some of the infrastructure replacement that was referenced earlier, and if watering facilities were included? Mr. Dotson replied that anything on federal lands that had NEPA completed and is in the NRCS practice standards is eligible. Mr. Dotson also noted that within the farm bill exists a \$450k limit for any entity or individual for the life of the farm bill. Some operators may have to choose and prioritize actions. Member Boies asked about replacing pipelines if they are within the original areas? Ms. Gabor and Mr. Young confirmed that anything in its original position would not need additional NEPA. Chairman Goicoechea asked about the burn severity map and whether the Forest Service includes invasive weeds in the prioritizations of rehabilitation areas and treatments especially competitive plant species? Mr. Young responded that the ecological consequences of a fire are much different from the emergency stabilization of burned area and the distinction is what plays into what BAER dollars can be used for. Mr. Young concurred that the risk of invasion by invasive species is higher in burned areas, and the vectors are numerous. The USFS does concentrate efforts in areas that have higher risk. The USFS hopes to get better at that aspect of rehabilitation actions. Member Lister asked when rehabilitation recovery and restoration planning occurs if not during the BAER process? Mr. Young responded that it does not happen during the BAER process, but that it occurs after the fact at the district ranger level. There may not always be a written plan

developed, but a hard look is usually done to see what the response could be. Member Lister also asked about a comment Mr. Young made regarding closing an area to remove problems. Member Lister asked about what types of problems the forest service looks at. Mr. Young responded that closures are usually related to human traffic and safety reasons. Chairman Goicoechea asked about whether firewood gathering is discussed during the BAER process? Mr. Young replied that it was not looked at for these specific fires discussed, but that different actions may be done to mitigate human traffic safety issues. Mr. McGowan offered the councils and the SETTs assistance for any needs the Forest Service might have. Mr. McGowan mentioned that he was alarmed that there might not be sufficient action being implemented regarding invasive species and perhaps chemical treatment when responding to fires. Mr. McGowan asked what this body could do to improve treatments on the ground more rapidly? Mr. Young appreciated the offer and indicated that the USFS was looking at new more effective tools for the future. Chairman Goicoechea asked for the USFS to reach out to the SEC if any assistance could be offered. Ms. Gabor commented that the Josh Nicholes, the District Ranger for the Mountain City/Jarbridge District is aware of the impacts related to the fires that have occurred, and that he has been a strong advocate for increased funding for range improvements and replacing of infrastructure. Ms. Gabor also acknowledged that limited funding is a continual issue as the USFS does compete with other areas for funding. Ms. Boeger also spoke in support of closing areas and roads that keep off-road vehicles from damaging treatment and restoration areas. Member Lister asked for more clarification about the post-fire action planning that happens and who gets priority for funding. Mr. Young responded that the USFS needs to complete a planning process via NEPA before any rehabilitation could be done. Funding allocations are already allocated and seem to decrease typically. The USFS usually looks to partners and grants to help complete work. Mr. Young indicated that there are no new dollars that are allocated for these rehabilitation efforts. Ms. Gabor asked Mr. Young to confirm that rehabilitation efforts are not part of a formalized program and that it is left to the districts to identify money that could be used for treatments, planning efforts, etc.? Mr. Young confirmed and commented that within large planning efforts conditions are being referenced so that restoration efforts may be included under NEPA that is already done. ***NO ACTION**

9. UPDATE AND DISCUSSION ON HOW THE BLM IS IMPLEMENTING THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE LAND USE PLANS IN LIGHT OF THE COURT INJUNCTION ON THE 2019 PLAN AND THE RELEASE OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS TO THE 2019 PLAN - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Raby indicated that a supplemental EIS has been prepared to address the concerns the judge had regarding the 2019 plan, if the court decides that the effort was inadequate the BLM will decide how to proceed at that point. The comment period is open, and all parties should submit their comments regarding the supplemental EIS. The BLM will continue supporting the CCS and the BLM will by and large stay the course for commitments made and hopefully by April there will be a decision from the court. Chairman Goicoechea expressed the frustration that local government was not involved in the development of the SEIS. Mr. Goicoechea asked for the point to be made that local government needs to be better engaged as a partner in developing NEPA related actions. Member Biaggi asked for clarification about the role of the judge in the SEIS, whether he had veto power or not. Mr. Raby responded that he had never seen a situation like this, and that this was a preemptive way to engage the court in the elements they have found deficiencies in. Member Biaggi expressed that this was a big issue for mining because 2 million acres of minerals are on the line. Mr. Raby responded that the mineral withdrawals are off the table. Chairman Goicoechea asked for clarification that the SFA boundaries are still on the table. Mr. Raby responded yes. Member Lister asked if there was public comment available and if the council could provide comments? Chairman Goicoechea responded that the next meeting could be scheduled before the close of the comment period before April 6th. ***NO ACTION**

10. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSAL BY THE FEDERAL COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY TO MODERNIZE NEPA IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS AND POSSIBLE EFFECTS IT MAY HAVE ON STATE AGENCIES -*FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. McGowan commented on the solicitation for comments regarding modernizing NEPA and indicated that the SETT intends to submit comments relevant to the change in regulations. Some of these materials may be found on the program website. Mr. McGowan commented that the SETT's comments will be related to safeguarding protections and addressing impacts relating to sage grouse. Member Biaggi commented that there is now a state program that requires mitigation, and that impacts should be covered. Mr. McGowan responded yes, but that the impacts in the SEC were specific to sage grouse and primarily vegetative impacts. Member Biaggi expressed thanks to Mr. Raby for streamlining NEPA in Nevada and asked if shorter timelines in Nevada could continue to be shorter. Mr. Raby commented that the secretarial order asking for shorter timelines would supersede any CEQ regulations. Member Lister asked if the SETT could comment on a stronger coordination aspect of NEPA. Member Lister also expressed the need for a categorical exclusion for fire rehabilitation. Chairman Goicoechea concurred with Member Lister and asked for more support for

categorical exclusions for wildfire response. Ms. Gabor indicated that there were many exclusions available for wildfire and she would provide information to the staff. ***NO ACTION**

11. STATUS UPDATE AND FORECASTS FOR CREDIT AND DEBIT PROJECTS WITHIN THE CCS-FOR POSSIBLE ACTION****

Mr. McGowan reviewed a presentation related to credit and debit status within the CCS. This presentation is available on the program website. Member Biaggi asked if spatial proximity could be represented in future graphics to account for the proximity factor. Mr. McGowan answered that that information was available in the website, and that such information will be provided in the future, and that a spreadsheet has been created which will inform credit buyers of their obligation in the context of the proximity factor. Member MacKenzie commented that buy in by debit producers will be the key to the success of the system. ***NO ACTION**

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

An update on wild horse and burro program status and planning was requested. An update on wildfire rehabilitation success from BLM and NDOW was requested. Concurrent with that discussion a comparison between states was requested. Mr. Barrett commented that the Nevada Native Seed Forums Strategy would be a good presentation. Ms. Gabor commented that at a future meeting the USFS could present on wildfire rehabilitation and that WRI could factor into a comparison between states. A discussion regarding translocation of sage grouse, and captive breeding could be useful at a future meeting. A presentation of invasive annual grasses would be a useful presentation, especially regarding medusahead. Next council meeting will be a call-in meeting on March 26th at 1:00 PM and an in-person meeting for a possible transaction ceremony for a date to be determined in April. ***NO ACTION**

13. FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service

Migratory Bird Program is airing webinars regarding raven management. The USFWS service is participating in the Nevada Shared Stewardship Group, and the Nevada Native Seed Strategy will be mentioned in this program. Lahontan Cutthroat Trout planning efforts are under way in June. The field supervisor position has been closed.

B. Bureau of Land Management

FEIS for fuel breaks ROD is expected to be released in March. DEIS for fuels reduction in the Great Basin is expected to be available for comment in March/April. BLM grazing regulation meetings in Elko was attended by 250 people, from a diverse group. The last failed attempt to update the regs was 2006. This is meant to streamline grazing processes. ESR program is continuing, Elko has completed 15k acres of herbicide treatment on the Martin fire, and drill seeding 24k acres. Ongoing work on the Goose Fire includes 5k acres of drill seeding. Battle Mountain District completed 2k acres of herbicide treatment, and 500 acres of drill seeding with 400 acres of aerial seeding. Ely District completed 3500 acres of aerial seeding along with some willow transplanting efforts. Carson City completed 6200 acres of drill seeding. Winnemucca planted 310k sagebrush seedlings have been planted and drill seeding of 13k acres. Since Oct 5 horse gathers have been completed removing 2500 animals.

C. US Forest Service

Ms. Gabor commented that the Sage Grouse plan amendment will have an additional objectors meeting in April, and the plan may have to wait several months to a year to finish any work on addressing objections. March 3rd will be a coordination meeting with the Nevada Dept. of Wildlife. The Forest is working on a programmatic NEPA document for prescribed fire forest wide. Partner agencies should expect to see initial comment period in April. The shared stewardship agreement has been signed and work is beginning for an executive committee to try and mesh programs of work.

D. USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mr. Dotson talked about the Conservation Stewardship Program renewals are happening and signups are due March 20th. EQIP signups are ongoing and the demand is higher than the supplies. The Joint Chiefs announcement is coming soon. The last week of March will be the Statewide Technical Advisory Committee meeting. NRCS 101 is an effort from the Nevada NRCS to communicate about NRCS programs between state partners. The office has hired an engineer for the state offices and a resource soil scientist. Other positions are open.

E. Other

14. STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

- F. Office of the Governor
- G. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- H. Department of Wildlife
- I. Department of Agriculture
- J. Conservation Districts Program
- K. Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team
- L. Other

15. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public Comment.

16. ADJOURNMENT

Member Boies moved to adjourn the meeting. Member Lister seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 1:20 PM.