



STATE OF NEVADA
SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
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DRAFT MINUTES

Date: Thursday, March 26th, 2020
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Place: Teleconference Access:
Teleconference Number – 877.411.9748
Participant Code – 3474617#

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, Gerry Emm, William Molini, Bill Dunkelberger, Lara Enders for Justin Barrett, Jon Raby, Ray Dotson, Tony Wasley, Jennifer Ott, Jim Lawrence for Bradley Crowell.

Council Members Absent: None

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Goicoechea called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Floyd Rathbun provided comment regarding talking about certain executive orders and secretarial orders regarding updating NEPA regulations and reducing wildfire. Mr. Rathbun also asked to talk about categorical exclusion for sage-grouse and mule deer habitat conservation, part of the 2018 Farm Bill, which is being held up by the availability of targeted and outcome-based grazing on Department of Interior land.

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

Member MacKenzie moved to approve the agenda, Member Molini seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. ***ACTION**

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Member Biaggi noted that prior requested amendments to the minutes have been corrected satisfactorily. Member MacKenzie requested his name be spelled correctly. Taking this into account, Member MacKenzie moved to approve the minutes for the December 5, 2019 and February 25, 2020 meetings, Member Biaggi seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. ***ACTION**

5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence.

6. REVIEW COMMENTS SUBMITTED TO ADDRESS THE PROPOSAL BY THE FEDERAL COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY TO MODERNIZE NEPA IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS (SUBMITTED MARCH 10, 2020) – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. McGowan went through the comments made by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT) that were submitted to the Federal CEQ on March 10, 2020. Chairman Goicoechea reminded Mr. Rathbun that these comments have already been submitted and the SETT was just updating the Council on what was submitted. The SETT was thanked for their work. ***NO ACTION**

7. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED ON THE NEVADA AND NORTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA GREATER SAGE-GROUSE DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (COMMENTS DUE APRIL 6, 2020) – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. McGowan began going through the comments made by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT), due April 6, 2020. He mentioned the fact that the Mitigation Regulations passed in October 2019 are now codified into NAC 232.400-480. Chairman Goicoechea asked Mr. Raby if the new state regulations on mitigation requirements can be included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, to which Mr. Raby replied that it should be able to but would let the Council know if that is not possible. Once Mr. McGowan finished presenting, Chairman Goicoechea began with a question on Section 2.6, page 2-20, regarding replacing the wording that was removed. He wanted to ensure that the statement that the SETT was adding would not require mitigation for routine activities or emergency functions. He questioned the purpose of adding that statement. Member Molini stated he understood the chairman's concerns but favors the language due to it being consistent with the mitigation policies and programs. Mr. Raby stated the language in red would require some level of site-specific review, which could lead to a situation where road maintenance might be occurring, and the noise could be an adverse impact. Having that language in there can be problematic for routine functions. It was removed to reduce uncertainty with routine activities. Mr. Lawrence suggested that the words "would have no adverse impacts on Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat" be removed and keep the rest. The councilmembers agreed and a motion was made to approve with the correction. Member Biaggi moved to approve the motion and Member Lister seconded it. The motion was unanimously approved. ***ACTION**

8. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED PERTAINING TO THE BLM PROPOSAL TO EXPEDITE REVIEW OF PINYON-JUNIPER RESTORATION PROJECTS (COMMENTS DUE APRIL 13, 2020) – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. McGowan began going through the comments made by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team (SETT), due April 13, 2020. Member MacKenzie questioned what the likelihood of success would be in getting 100% treatment of Pinyon-Juniper (P/J) for this categorical exclusion? Mr. McGowan answered that the point was to ensure careful consideration in classifying projects as habitat improvement for sage-grouse to avoid creating "sinks". Projects treating less than all Pinyon/Juniper should be identified as fuels or fire related. Member Boies asked about Section 2, page 20, why there is mention of limitations on grazing. He recommended removing "For instance, the Bates et al. 2005 study relies on livestock exclusion to some extent, which may not be a part of most CX projects." Member Swanson recommended adding into the comments "increased resilience leads to increased flexibility for grazing management." Member Swanson also asked Mr. Raby if this categorical exclusion was initiated by the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council wanting a more cost-effective way to conduct habitat treatments. Member Molini mentioned that concern has been expressed over non-target species losing habitat with the increased loss in P/J, but he personally did not have a concern with the loss with the amount of P/J across the state. Member MacKenzie asked Mr. Wasley if he was comfortable with the comments, to which he replied he was. A motion was introduced to approve the draft comments with slight modifications, and Mr. McGowan is to send out to the Council for final feedback to ensure the comments are correct. Member Swanson moved to approve the motion and Member Molini seconded it. The motion was unanimously approved. Chairman Goicoechea left the meeting and turned the chairmanship to Member MacKenzie. ***ACTION**

9. STATUS UPDATE AND DISCUSSION ON THE JOINT CHIEFS' FUNDING AWARDED TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC AREAS IMPACTED BY FIRES, AND ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES AVAILABLE TO MAXIMIZE TREATMENTS AND COVERAGE – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Mr. Dunkelberger began, saying after applying twice to joint chiefs, last year and this year, the US Forest Service was awarded \$175,000 this year to address rehab needs on South Sugarloaf. Intermountain Regional Office also gave

\$480,000 towards restoration in Elko forest areas. This money will be used to address fence rebuilding, done by Nevada Department of Wildlife and contractors, noxious weeds, and road repairs. They are working with NDF to match funds from SB 508, as well as with NRCS to find ways producers can apply for EQIP for replacing forest range improvements. Josh Nichols, District Ranger for the US Forest Service, added that it was a large amount of fencing and other improvements impacted with the South Sugarloaf Fire. They are working with permittees to identify areas that are important to address. They are hoping to replace 60+ miles of fence with awarded funding. Mr. Dotson added that NRCS has \$110,000 available for joint chiefs for permittees, with \$100,000 requested for the next two fiscal years. Permittees do have the right and ability to utilize EQIP dollars on USFS land, with active sign-ups taking place. KC Kacey of the Nevada Department of Forestry added that NDF will ask for \$766,000 in match, which, added to the Forest Service and NRCS funds, will be \$1.5 million total for fire restoration and rehabilitation. Josh Nichols mentioned that the USFS has received some funds and volunteers to do work from local non-profits, but the size of the area affected is the largest issue. Mr. Lawrence asked if there is anything the Council can do to increase the chance of increased funds in the future. Mr. Dunkelberger replied the Joint chiefs' program was established for proactive watershed rehab, so Nevada was lucky to get anything as a response to fire. What Nevada needs is more federal funding for longer term restoration. Mr. Dunkelberger also thanked NDOW for their support in both funding and in-kind work to help obtain more federal funds. ***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 reviewed the list from last meeting, which was to review adaptive management report, to hold a ceremony for our first Conservation Credit System sale, and to review and approve the semi-annual report. Mr. Molini asked to discuss adding a Wild Horse and Burro representative to the council. Mr. Lawrence replied that if there was an entity to add as a voting member, then it would take legislation to add, but the governor can add non-voting members, but it can be discussed. Mr. McGowan was asked to send out a Doodle Poll to schedule the meeting before the end of the of the fiscal year. ***NO ACTION**

11. FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service

They are open but working virtually. USFWS is soliciting information through migratory birds program on ravens, on fws.gov/regulations/raven, to develop large scale strategies for ravens across west. The comments are due March 30. The listing decision for bi-state sage-grouse is due April 1. The ruling will publish March 31.

B. Bureau of Land Management

They are 70-80% working from home depending on office location, with key work is still trying to get done, such as permit renewals. They may extend public comment periods but are continuing as much as they can. They are also doing minimal level of field work but must go through a risk assessment. They are not seeing any disruption to activities, as things are still moving forward. Offices are closed to public.

C. US Forest Service

They are closed to public with minimal staff working, as most are teleworking. They are still conducting work and meetings with permittees, and the fire staff are still working. They did form a technical team to decide where to prioritize fuels treatments and can report out in a future meeting for shared stewardship. They are prohibiting gathering of more than 10 people in Nevada on USFS lands.

D. USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service

EQIP deadline is April 10th, and they are still taking applications through email or mail. Jim Gifford, District Conservationist in Minden is now State Resource Conservationist. Anthony Bush is the new State Biologist. They are rescheduling meetings and "NRCS 101" in order to do it by telephone.

E. Other

12. STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. Office of the Governor

B. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

DCNR is closed to public, with the goal of is 90-95% of the staff teleworking. They are accepting applications and information at the front door, but the building is closed. State Parks closed campgrounds and visitor and picnic areas. They did get some inquiries and requests to pause water pollution control permits and mining permits but are unable to do that.

C. Department of Wildlife

Their offices are closed as well, while maintaining business operations. Like State Parks, they closed wildlife areas for camping. The lek counts were not able to be gathered. Absent trend ground data, the only sage-grouse vital rate data will come from sport harvested and wing collection. Thanks to USFWS for allowing NDOW to provide input and data relative to rule on bi-state sage-grouse. Hopefully there will be good news next week.

D. Department of Agriculture

E. Conservation Districts Program

Conservation District meetings are on hold and the program will be discussing their role in adaptive management plan at the next State Conservation Commission meeting along with further discussions to figure out how to move forward. Kevin Shoemaker at University of Nevada Reno is conducting research on P/J removal effects on non-target species. It may be useful to reach out to him for information pertaining to that.

F. Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team

If this quarantine period continues, this can influence verifiers' collecting field data. If field data is not able to be collected, that may create issues and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council may have to have an emergency meeting to address that. Caleb McAdoo of NDOW submitted fire rehab reports. It may be worthwhile to have them present on the reports at a future meeting. The reports demonstrate the partnership efforts being made in Nevada by NDOW addressing fire rehabilitation.

G. Other

13. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Member Biaggi moved to adjourn the meeting. Member Molini seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 2:57 PM.