



# State of Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

## NEW DISTURBANCE CATEGORIES

May 2021

# FINDINGS

The CCS identified anthropogenic disturbance categories do not always capture every type of proposed anthropogenic disturbance on the landscape. This improvement aims to create new disturbance categories to classify disturbances that do not fit within existing categories and are expected to be relatively uncommon or unconventional.

# IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATION – OTHER DISTURBANCE CATEGORY

- The SETT recommends the creation of a new anthropogenic disturbance category “Other Disturbance” Type to capture miscellaneous, ancillary, and other types of disturbances that are analyzed as disturbances but do not fall into an existing CCS disturbance category. Examples could include:
  - Hydroelectric power projects
  - Gravel pits and mineral materials sites
  - Certain renewable or non-renewable energy projects (excluding solar, wind, and geothermal)
  - Maintenance stations, transfer stations, staging areas

# IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATION – OTHER DISTURBANCE CATEGORY

- Proposed Disturbance categories:
  - Other Disturbance – High: 75%, 6km\*
  - Other Disturbance – Medium: 50%, 3km
  - Other Disturbance – Low: 25%, 1km
  - Ranking of criteria and a comparative analysis using established anthropogenic disturbances and new science as guidance will determine which category is most appropriate for a given disturbance.

\* The SETT intends to capture the majority of disturbances within the provided weights and distances. If warranted, the SETT may determine the 75% weight for the High category be adjusted to 100% under certain circumstances. The SETT would bring any proposed disturbances that may warrant a 100% weight to the SEC for consideration.

# IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATION – OTHER DISTURBANCE CATEGORY

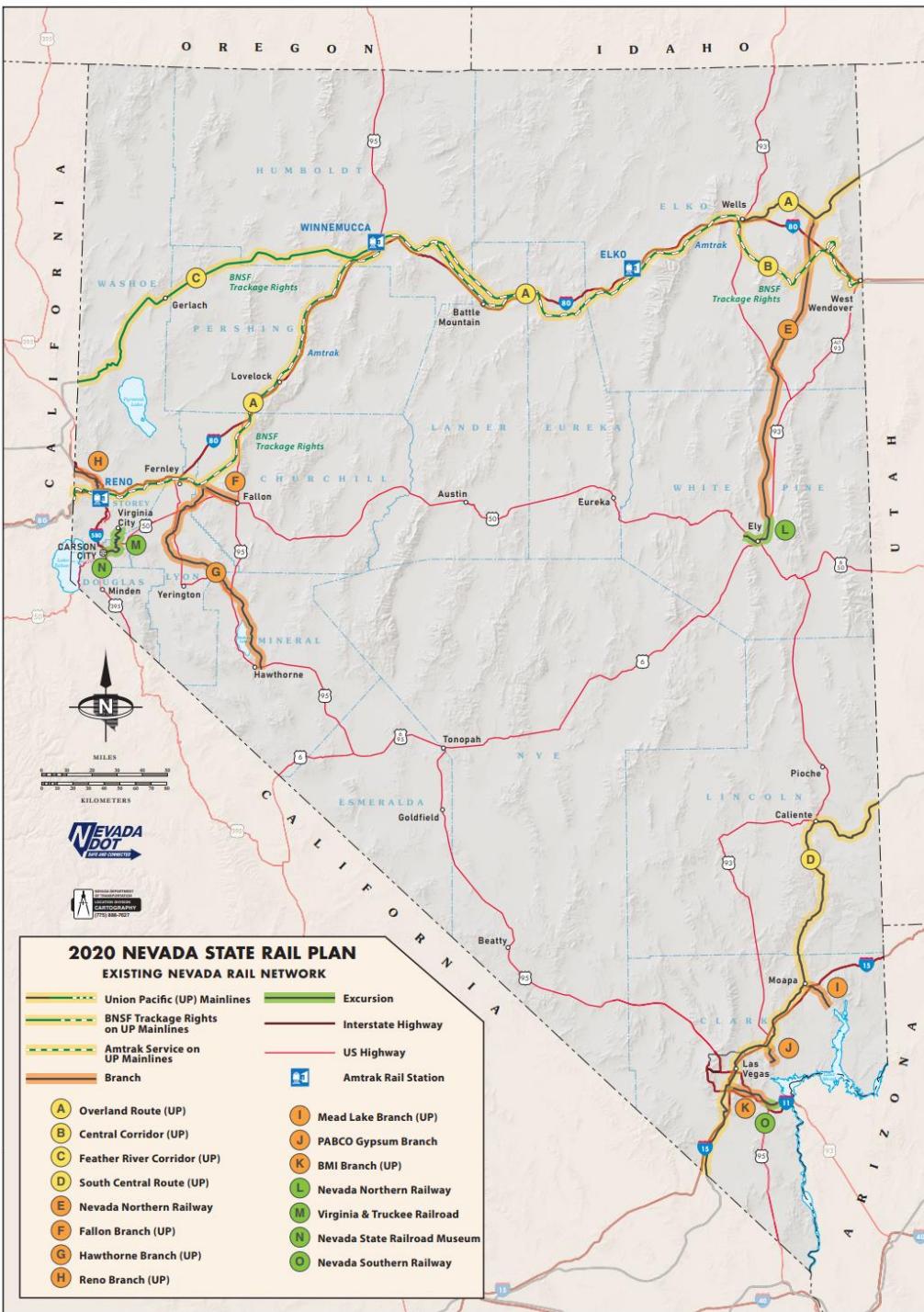
- Minimum term length will default to the standard 30 years. However, under certain circumstances consideration may be given for projects authorized for less than 30 years. Minimum term in these cases will be 10 years.
- This recommendation does not supersede the exceptions process defined in NAC 232.400 – 232.480 and the definition associated with de minimis activities in the CCS Manual.

# RATIONALE – OTHER DISTURBANCE CATEGORY

- The range of the recommended weights and distances incorporates the various indirect impacts associated with high vs low impacts that have already been defined for existing disturbances.
- Other Disturbance – High: Proposed disturbance will be of high impact and will exhibit one or more of the following impacts:
  - Structures that could be used as perching and nesting by ravens.
  - Consistent or continuous noise from construction and operation of the disturbance (i.e., greater than 10 dBA following disturbance).
  - Subsidies that would act as predator attractants.
  - Continuous activity and other attributes that suggest large-scale disturbance (e.g., ground disturbance, heavy use or traffic).
- Other Disturbance – Medium: Proposed disturbance may exhibit similar impacts as listed above but have been minimized or have a lower scale of impact and could include:
  - Disturbances that are minimized using measurable methodologies.
  - Intermittent or less continuous noise and activity (i.e., noise less than 10 dBA following disturbance).
- Other Disturbance – Low:
  - Does not exhibit significant indirect impacts as listed above. General presence of infrastructure, direct habitat loss, and potential for invasive weed spread from ground disturbance will be the primary impacts expected from a Low category.

# IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATION – RAILWAY CATEGORY

- There are five main operating railways that currently operate in Nevada within sage-grouse habitat.
- The SETT recommends creating a new railway category to include the existing within the anthropogenic disturbance layer. Any new proposed railways would also be included within the railway category.
- Impacts from railways used for freight or passenger trains are expected to have similar impacts as high use roads; therefore, the SETT recommends the weight and distance associated with railways be the same as for High Use Roads (100%, 3km).
- The only exception will be the Nevada Northern Railway that operates a passenger tour in association with the Nevada Northern Railway Museum in Ely; this railway will be given a weight of 25% and distance of 1km similar to the Low Use road



# RATIONALE – RAILWAY CATEGORY

- Railways and trains can negatively affect wildlife and the environment in ways similar to roads and vehicles (including wildlife mortality, habitat loss and fragmentation, and disturbance)
- Existing railroads in Nevada (with the exception of the Nevada Northern Railway museum tour line) that fall within sage-grouse habitat run approximately eight trains per day to 20 or more trains, depending on location (Hill, 1991, NDOT 2012).
- With the frequency, speed, and noise associated with railroads, it is most appropriate to use the High Use Road weight and distance classification for the new Railway category.