

## **Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team Responsibilities and Staffing**

Staffing within the Program has remained constant since 2013.

Program Manager

Conservation, Wildlife, Environmental Specialists (four positions)

Since its inception in early 2013, the Program has been primarily focused with developing the Nevada Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan (2014 & 2019) and corresponding Strategic Action Plan (2016), and the development and implementation of the Conservation Credit System (2015). These planning and implementation tools are developed through significant collaboration and coordination with many diverse groups, agencies, industries, and individuals. The SETT also serves as staff to the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, providing them reports, recommendations, technical and informational presentations, etc.

### **SETT Staff Primary Duties**

#### **Implementation of CCS/Mitigation 75%**

##### ***Credit Projects***

- State funding solicitation process and management for selected projects
- Review of proposed projects, land ownership, potential threats, credit estimate, etc.
- Pre-Field Submission review and transect establishment
- Coordination with numerous verifiers through the Habitat Quantification Tool (HQT) desktop and field work processes
- HQT final submission quality assurance (QA) process
- Iterations generally lead to finalization of HQT QA
- Management or mitigation plan development, draft reviews, and finalization
- Assessing and finalizing financial assurances and their instrument
- Assist with transaction documents and navigation of proximity ratio
- Ensuring securement of financial assurances
- Reviewing annual monitoring reports
- Five-year site visits with credit producers
- Ensuring management in accordance with plan
- Financial assurance tracking
- 15-year full verification - HQT submission, QA process, and finalization
- Working through issues that arise over the lengthy project terms including transfers in ownership

##### ***Debit Projects***

- Review of proposed disturbances to determine potential as debit projects
- Notify and educate qualifying project proponents on mitigation requirement and process
- NEPA coordination/comments (avoid, minimize, mitigate hierarchy analysis) with additional emphasis placed on the review and potential for minimization during the process
- Pre-field submission review, corroboration of debit estimate, and transect establishment

- Review and submit debit estimates for inclusion in NEPA documents
- Coordination with verifiers through the HQT desktop and field work processes
- HQT submission quality assurance (QA) process
- Iterations generally lead to finalization of HQT QA
- Education on purchase and transfer processes
- Guidance and coordination on public land mitigation plans
- Tracking projects to ensure
- Assist with transaction documents and navigation of proximity ratio
- Conduct end of project reviews/closure/reclamation checks

#### **Other CCS Workload**

- Holding annual verifier training that includes testing for certification
- Maintaining quality data from often iterative credit and debit processes
- Maintaining and improving the CCS registry
- Maintaining and operating the reserve account
- Coordinating with subcontractors to maintain and improve GIS tools and populate additional anthropogenic disturbance layers
- Making improvements to improve efficiency, process, or account for new science
- Maintaining online program information and conducting reporting
- Reporting to the SEC and Governor's Office
- Updating/Improvements to CCS tools and documents (Manual, HQT, User's Guide, Registry, Uplift Tool, Website and Web Tools)

#### **Other conservation, networking, and planning efforts 15%**

- *Adaptive Management coordination/participation – Final Report*
- *Strategic Action Plan – 2022 Updates and implementation (Ongoing)*
- Five-year review of plans and documents (State Plan, Strategic Action Plan, CCS)
- Coordination on federal land use and resource management planning processes
- Periodic review or proposal for changes to NRS and NAC (SEP relevant)
- Participation in multi-agency and stakeholder group meetings, tours, site reviews (Nevada Creeks and Communities Team, NvCCN, ROGER, Sagelands, Shared Stewardship, State agency plans [primarily with NDOW]) WAFWA)
- Presenting (annual meetings, UNR, agencies, industry, etc.)
- Public outreach and education

#### **Sagebrush Ecosystem Council 10%**

- Preparation of documents (Findings, Improvements, Recommendations, Reports/Updates, etc.)
- Assistance in adopting and implementing policy and regulation
- Fulfilling Council member requests
- Coordination for SEC meetings and tours
- Production of meeting minutes

## CCS Workload

The current upward trend in CCS activities was expected as compensatory mitigation became a requirement and as initial planning for projects began in 2016, those projects are now being developed. Another anticipated trend will be the associated workload to implement credit projects on public lands (siting, coordination, monitoring, etc.). This should be done in close coordination with state and federal agencies and may also involve input or participation from permittees, industry, NGOs, local work groups, etc. Credit projects should also be implemented by using the guidance from the plans that were developed to enhance effectiveness, applicability, and maximize resources through closely coordinated efforts.

- Credit Projects – 2016 – 2021 (6-25) \*
- Credit Projects – 2020 – 2021 (16-25) \*
- Debit Projects – 2016 – 2021 (5-53) \*\*
- Debit Projects – 2020 – 2021 (23-53) \*\*
- Transactions – 2016 – 2021 (0-21)
- Transactions – 2020 – 2021 (3-21)

*\*Does not account for potential projects being analyzed, but not developed*

*\*\*Does not account for projects analyzed where mitigation was not required*

The increased workload associated with implementing the CCS/mitigation from pre to post regulation adoption is equivalent to a doubling of the workload being processed by staff annually.

It should be kept in mind that while these numbers are increasing steadily, the potential infusion from ‘green-energy’ projects and their associated infrastructure over the next decade is anticipated to be significant. Additionally, it’s important to highlight that each completed transaction requires over 30 years of staff management on an annual basis (years 5, 15, 30 represent a higher level of management).

We consider all primary duties to be essential functions within the Program. We take pride in executing each duty with the highest degree of professionalism, thoroughness, and timely execution (and that should be maintained as the standard). However, a hierarchy exists within those duties. We must first ensure that we are able to fulfill our obligation to implement Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 232.161, NRS 232.162, NRS 321.592, NRS 321.594 and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 232.400 – 232.480 and implement the Nevada Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan.

### What does this mean?

In essence, the workload associated with implementing mitigation has reduced the Programs ability to dedicate adequate time and effort in the following areas (primarily from the “Other” primary responsibilities list outlined above):

- Strategic Action Plan update and implementation
- Applying adaptive management strategies (State Plan) and monitoring results
- Minimization of authorized project impacts
- Providing greater guidance on instruments available for Financial Assurance establishment
- Public land mitigation (analysis and implementation)

- Updating or pursuing changes to NRS or NAC (fees, assessments, enforcement, etc.)
- Comprehensive review of projects requiring NEPA, and federal land/resource management planning efforts within the sagebrush ecosystem
- Incorporating the best available science into tools and documents

**As a Program, we have often discussed the potential to expand our conservation efforts to address threats within the sagebrush ecosystem not associated with compensatory mitigation. To date, we have not had the capacity to adequately pursue implementing additional conservation practices to address the other significant threats.**

**Significant opportunities exist to apply for and administer matching funds to implement and monitor pilot or demonstration projects to enhance meadow and riparian systems, upland sagebrush habitats, fire/cheatgrass rehabilitation, etc. These efforts would be further enhanced through our respective collaborative planning efforts and complementary implementation strategies with partners.**

**The Program has generated significant gains in efficiently implementing the Conservation Credit System and is using the recently developed tools that provide additional guidance to achieve improved conservation. It is necessary that we move toward the next level of conservation implementation within the sagebrush ecosystem. The need is as great as it was over a decade ago and requires an ‘all hands on deck’ approach to assist in the efforts to protect, rehabilitate, and conserve an imperiled ecosystem.**