



STATE OF NEVADA
SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL
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DRAFT MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, November 02, 2023
Time: 8:30 a.m.
Place: Nevada Department of Agriculture
405 21st St
Sparks, NV 89431

For virtual access, please click this URL to join.

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_NDNjYzNIM2ItOGVjNi00MTQ4LTk5NWYtYTdiMTE3ZWZjNjI4%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22id%22%3a%22e4a340e6-b89e-4e68-8eaa-1544d2703980%22%2c%22oid%22%3a%225f27adb5-98e8-401c-b352-34b647b87a9c%22%7d

Meeting ID: 278 868 569 189

Passcode: HCzF7z

Or Phone: +1 775-321-6111 *435304089# US (Reno)

Passcode: HCzF7z

Council Members Present: Chris MacKenzie, Chair; Jake Tibbitts, Vice Chair; Bevan Lister, Steven Boies, William Molini, Sherman Swanson; Daphne Emm-Hooper; Mathew Johns; Kyle Davis; James Settelmeyer, DCNR; Alan Jenne, NDW; John Tull, USFW; Cheva Gabor, USFS; Tim Bowden, BLM; Greg Becker, USDA; JJ Goicoechea, NDA

Council Members Absent: None

1 CALL TO ORDER

Chairman MacKenzie called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.

2 PUBLIC COMMENT

None

Public comment will be made on any matter relevant to the Council. Public comments will be taken at the beginning and end of the meeting and may be taken at the discretion of the Chair on specific agenda items. Public comments may be limited to 3 minutes per person at the discretion of the Chair. Comments will not be restricted based on viewpoint. No action will be taken on any matters raised during the public comment period that are not already on the agenda. Persons providing comments will be asked to begin by stating their name for the record.

3 APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

***ACTION:** Member Lister moved to approve the agenda; Member Swanson seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4 APPROVAL OF MINUTES - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Error on Agenda should be Minutes from August meeting, so item was tabled for correction to bring to next meeting. ***NO ACTION**

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Vice Chair Tibbitts asked the group if the SEC was a cooperating Agency as a Board on the Greater Sage Grouse? Do any of the members know if we submitted feedback as a cooperating agency or were comments just submitted through the department? I only bring it up because of the change in the Open Meeting Law, allowing for a closed meeting with a federal agency, not to make decisions but to discuss pre-decisional and deliberate information. So, the whole council could have a firsthand discussion with BLM and that's NRS 241.028. I think we should consider for a future agenda that the council be a cooperating agency. Chair MacKenzie asked to have this item added to the next agenda.

Kathleen Steele informed everyone that the letter for ESA Extension Request was submitted and included in your packets. Also, we do have new staff that have joined the team and they introduced themselves earlier, and we will also have a third starting in another week.

Member Lister wanted to mention that the BLM has done a great job in the Eastern part of the State with the habitat manipulations, but in the design of those manipulations, changes they leave the islands. I know the history and wildlife and stuff, but for the benefit of the Sage Grouse we don't want those tall structures left, we don't want those islands because they are more harmful than they are good. How can we get some input or is there good science to design those projects to best meet the needs of things like Sage Grouse? Chair MacKenzie asked to have this item added to the next agenda, and maybe someone from BLM can help us discuss this. I believe that Pete Coates has a module to help demonstrate that. Mr. Jenne stated that when we design those, we also must consider whether we may have archeology sites or older class trees under protection, so if you have those types of circumstances you end up with islands and other biological concerns. Chair MacKenzie said let's deliberate this topic at a future meeting and hopefully address Member Lister's concern.

6 REVIEW THE UPDATED SCIENCE AND THE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT TO THE CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM'S HABITAT QUANTIFICATION TOOL. CONSIDER ADOPTION OF UPDATED SCIENCE TOOLS, SPECIFICALLY UPDATES TO THE ASUI AND THE HSI. - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* *SEP Staff – Kathleen Steele, Program Manager*

Kathleen Steele shared her presentation and wanted to reiterate the purpose of the to adequately offset disturbances that are impacting directly or indirectly the Greater Sage Grouse Habitat for the purpose and concern of the listings. We want to provide assurances to the Fish and Wildlife that we have adequately in place to offset these disturbances. We can all agree that preventing a listing is to the benefit of us all. Most have seen this presentation, but I did want to go through it for the new people and to remind us of some of the stipulations in our manuals and plans. Kathleen highlighted the point that modifications to methods should consider the best available science and functions according to current laws, policies, and regulations and is consistent with best available science from the Nevada State Plan. Kathleen also highlighted from the CCS Manual that incorporating the best available science and other new information into the program and HQT ensure accuracy of the calculation of credits and that we gain input on new scientific information from the committee that is incorporated into the CCS's tools and processes. Just a reminder we are enlisted to update these, and we have not since inception. Please follow along with the presentation [Here](#).

Member Johns asked for a brief explanation about the process and tool itself. Kathleen explained what all goes into the calculator and that the computer calculates what is average per site and explains that the number does get calibrated. Member Johns also asked about how the science is brought into the model itself and calibrated. Pete Coates with USGS responded to the questions with the explanation of how there are more than just this model that help make the predictions and that each goes through a validation process. Questions regarding clarification of what is being done here is that the maps are being changed out, but the values stay the same just adjusted to what is considered an important habitat now. To clarify the values are same just switching out one to one map. Vice Chair Tibbitts asked about who is on the science committee that is referred to. Kathleen mentioned we have representatives from BLM, Forest Service, Fish & Wildlife, NDA and NDOW, sometimes bringing in the public depending on the topic being addressed. We meet quarterly and are very active. Vice Chair Tibbitts followed up with a statement regarding the two tracks, one with BLM, using the same maps but different processes and purposes, he feels this is an issue that what best available science should be addressed. Discussion of Vice Chair Tibbitts' concerns were discussed, and further explanation was given by Mr. Coates regarding his presentation information on the modeling and mapping. Chair MacKenzie drew the discussions to close by asking for clarification if this is a concern drawn from the existing system or the new? Vice Chair Tibbitts states if we approve this, this is what the Feds are going to use as well as the maps. Chair Mackenzie asked for clarification if his concern is the way the State is going to use this or the Feds? Vice Chair Tibbitts response was his concern with the Feds and so Cheva Gabor responded with some clarification and concerns, asking for a follow-up conversation since she felt there was not a disconnect and that conversations were rapid. Clarification and discussions continued with no agreement on the topic at hand, and the group felt like the discussion was coming away from what the original point was. Member Molini brought the discussion back to the issue at hand and closed the conversation with a motion.

***ACTION:** A motion by Member Molini to approve item 6 option to update science tools and the specific updates of the ASUI and HSI. The motion was seconded by Member Swanson. Further discussion was addressed. Member Lister opposed this motion. Motion passes.

7 REVIEW THE UPDATED SCIENCE AND THE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT TO THE CONSERVATION CREDIT SYSTEM'S HABITAT QUANTIFICATION TOOL. CONSIDER FOR ADOPTION THE METRIC PROPOSED IN THE CALCULATION OF CREDITS AND/OR DEBITS WHILE APPLYING THE UPDATED SCIENCE. - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* *SEP Staff – Kathleen Steele, Program Manager*

After a quick break Kathleen Steele continues her presentation and goes over the proposed population metric to address lek importance covering the Credit Projects. Scenario one takes the updated Habitat Suitability Index multiplied with 1 + a quarter (0.25) of the Abundance and Space Use Index and takes into account population and space use while still increasing net gain for greater sage-grouse. However, further incentivizes preservation while marginally encouraging habitat improvement (uplift) and requiring increased commitments from the Credit Project Proponent. Scenario two takes the updated Habitat Suitability Index multiplied with 1 + Abundance and Space Use Index for Uplift Credits Only. It considers population and space use while still increasing net gain for greater sage-grouse and incentivizes uplift and public lands projects which may lead to more effective mitigation. Scenario three takes the updated Habitat Suitability Index multiplied with 1 + Abundance and Space Use Index and considers population and space use, however, does not generate any additional net gain for greater sage-grouse unless uplift is applied and achieved. Please follow along with the presentation [Here](#).

Discussion was brought up on the new versions and how well the predictors work and what the key focuses are. A back-up plan, set aside assured financials and must sign a participant contract that states regardless of the funds in account they are required to maintain the same habitat. They are subject to physical and financial checks every five years and after fifteen years they are required to rerun the system to ensure their percentages. Kathleen discussed the three focuses. Also, a question regarding the credit option was addressed and how the versions are locked in and if they expire. Kathleen addressed these questions and let the group know that after 30 years a program can be retired. Further discussions and explanation were addressed and a question on the value of the LEK was asked. Member Davis voiced concerns regarding the project's numbers listed could have drastic impact and that there are not enough credits vs debits. Kathleen and Justin explained how this could be fixed and discussed what effect retroactive would have.

***ACTION:** A motion by Member Molini to adopt the Debit/Credit of Scenario three; Second by Steve Boies. Discussions by Member Davis; Member Lister and Member Davis both opposed this motion. Motion passes.

8 UPDATE ON COMMON RAVEN MANAGEMENT TO PROTECT GREATER SAGE GROUSE. USGS, NDOW, APHIS-WS

[Pete Coates Science and Tools Available for Addressing Raven Abundance](#)

Raven numbers have increased 4.6 times since 1966 in Cold Deserts

Problem:

- Expansion of raven distribution and abundance
- Anthropogenic resource subsidies
- Predation effects on sensitive species

Solution:

- Science-based tiered framework
- Decision support tools – SMaRT

Presenting: PowerPoint on Application of a tiered management framework for raven management in Nevada – Online Tool walkthrough

[Cali Weise Application of a Tiered Management Framework for Raven Management](#)

Problem:

- Raven predation on sage-grouse
- Where are there enough ravens to warrant direct removal
- What treatment areas would benefit sage-grouse most

Solution:

- Science-based tiered framework
 1. Identify priority areas
 2. Estimate site-level raven densities
 3. Compare estimate to ecological threshold
 4. Provide management options
 5. (Re)assess management action(s)
- Decision support tools - SMaRT
- USGS raven and sage-grouse products

Challenges for adaptive management:

- Goal to use the Rapid Assessment Function (RAF), to estimate density with data with < 50 individual observations
- Time and Effort needed to sufficiently survey ravens
- Flexibility in survey location selection process for field logistics
- Improvements needed for navigating to survey locations

Upon return from our brief break Shawn Espinosa explained how they have been working closely with Cali and Pat on prioritizing the 17 projects. There were a few that ranked low that we still thought were important in Lincoln County, especially since we have been treating Raven density in these areas for 15 or so years. He went on to explain why they made the decisions they did. Member Molini had questions about the adaptive management tool. Mr. Espinosa reviewed the number of Raven permits that each entity holds and asked Mr. Coates to compare that with the Raven population currently.

[Mark Ono Common Raven Management to Protect Greater Sage-Grouse](#)

Mark Ono (State Director, APHIS) with information regarding where we stand in the process of what we have done and what we have learned since the September meeting. Please follow along with the presentation [Here](#).

9 REGULATORY TOOLS FOR COMMON RAVEN MANAGEMENT. CONSIDER DIRECTING THE STAFF TO FOLLOW UP ON DISCUSSION OR START A REQUEST PROCESS FOR RAVEN POPULATION CONTROL. - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* USFWS – Dan Blake, Chief & Thomas Leeman, Deputy Chief

[Daniel Blake Regulatory Tools for Common Raven Management](#)

Regulatory Options:

- Depredation Permits • Control Order • Conservation Order • Depredation Order • Hunting • Removal from MBTA protections • Agency Species Protection Regulation and Permit

Suggested Actions:

- Letter of support for the Agency Species Protection regulation • Continued support in increasing take limits for depredation permits • Continue to look for subsidy removal – education and awareness

Alan Jenne will reach out to other states to put together a singular letter, one voice then we will put something together, he will report back. ***NO ACTION**

10 STAFF BRIEFINGS AND UPDATES TO THE COUNCIL

A. CCS STAFF UPDATES

Kathleen Petter Presentation PowerPoint: [Agenda Item 10: Staff Update](#)

- Forty-four mitigation transactions have been finalized using the CCS since inception of the program, conserving almost 30,000 acres for at least a 30-year term.
- Five mitigation transactions have been finalized using the CCS so far in 2023. The entirety of that project has already been committed to be conserved according to their management plan over the long term.
- The SETT intends on meeting with Adobe Peak for their Five-Year Qualitative Assessment next week. These visits are good to also meet with the proponent, answer any questions, and establish/maintain relationships.
- Several debit projects representing various industries are working towards their quantification of debit, either with fieldwork or moving forward with a desktop analysis.
- The SETT spent a day touring the TS Power Plant and Solar Field and NGM mines Leeville mine. This helped the SETT understand the impacts and minimizations measures industries deal with, along with forming relationships with industry folks.
- CCS mitigation transactions: 29,931 Acres Conserved; 9,558 Credits Transferred or sold
- Available & anticipated credits: 55,401 Credits Available; 170,908 Acres
- Status of unmitigated debit projects: 59,926 Estimated Term Debits; 41,947 Acres Direct Impact

New SETT team members Justin Lambert (Forestry/Wildland Fire) and Cheyenne Acevedo (Wildlife) introduce themselves.

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

- With staff assistance, the Council will review items discussed, as well as items acted upon during this meeting, and determine which of those they wish to direct staff to do further work on, as well as which items the Council wishes to act on that may not have been acted upon during earlier discussion.
- CCS & Protection vs Uplift – What is being done and the more that can be done and how we are working amongst agencies, how do we get done what we want- A pretty good chunk of land being held by State of NV Lands – what can we change or do on the State Lands to benefit Sage Grouse. Would like to see a presentation. Would the SEC like that Monitoring committee give recommendations?
- Zoom meeting to get Governors Report completed. Early December 12/5/2023 @ 11am.

12 FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service – JOHN TOLLES

Still looking for a Project Manager, this position would be the one to attend these meetings. With the Bipartisan Infrastructure updates, we have put in 1.2 million dollars each year for conservation restoration actions, Sagebrush Ecosystem to benefit Sage Grouse. Member Lister asked a question directed to USFWS on how do these projects get credited on the checklist? Mr. Tolles responded that yes these get captured on the Conservation efforts database since around 2015/16, a lot of partners information goes into that.

We are applying our dollars strategically with the Greater Sagebrush design in mind and yes, the system has the big picture with priority landscapes in mind. We have done a lot of outreaches with NDOW and CD's and plan to continue to bring those conversations in. We feel good about the way we have approached this. Mr. Jenne also commented on how the local discussions/actions with CD's need to be captured, since others are not involved in these. Mr. Tolles will reach out to folks with USGS and get feedback on these and where we are with support from those groups.

B. Bureau of Land Management – *TIM BOWDEN*

I will report back to Mr. Shepard on the discussions and conversations from today. Just clarifying, the SCC is currently requesting the Cooperating Agency status, or will this be on the next meeting's agenda? Response was that that is correct, and it will be brought back for a brief discussion at December's meeting. Also, there was discussion about a request for a presentation on the Greater Sagebrush Plan, is that something the group would like? The group's response was yes that would be appreciated. Member Lister asked if there is a date that the plan would be publicly available. Unknown exact dates of when draft will be out, but all must be completed by end of 2024.

C. US Forest Service – *CHEVA GABOR*

We are looking to accomplish about 40,000 acres of fuels treatments, many bringing benefits to the habitat for sage grouse, so good news there. We have more than seven million signed with State agencies and we will be working through our Nevada Shared Stewardship structure to make sure things match up with our priorities. We have funds to bring the Cheatgrass Challenge here and Greg will mention that as well. Some bad news is that our Aerial Herbicide PA is behind schedule, it is with an enterprise company which is a third party and is taking longer than expected, like a year out. We did hire our Bridgeport Ranger and are hopeful to keep Aaron at least for a few years and, I will mention that Bill Dunkleberger will be retiring at the end of this calendar year, and we hope to share who the new supervisor will be soon.

D. USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service – *GREG BECKER*

We are excited to have the ability to bring the Cheatgrass Challenge to the State, it is funded through federal funds and matched at the State level as well as several different funding sources. The timeline for the program should be coming out soon. The NRS programs due set aside IRA funds for smaller projects that come alongside of these bigger projects. The first sign-ups are November 17th, and the second time is around March. We have about 19 million in cost share available. It would be good to sit down with you all and discuss how our conservation efforts correlate with the Conservation Credits, there is some confusion and I believe there is no conflicts with this program and what we do. I am the acting State Conservationist, and Mrs. Ramsey should be here in the middle of January coming from NRS out of California

E. Other

11 STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS:

A. Office of the Governor – *None in attendance*

No one was present. New contact information needed.

B. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – *James Settelmeyer*

Dominique Etchegoyhen, Deputy Director, provided an update for the Department of Conservation and National Resources noting Kathleen Petter promoting to the Program Manager, the Nevada Division of Forestry's (NDF) position will start soon, State Lands position is now open and posted. Additionally, Dominique Etchegoyhen provided an update regarding the Conservation Camp Program at NDF.

C. Department of Wildlife – *Alan Jenne*

We are looking at our restoration rehabilitation position and other positions being backfilled. In the last years NDOW has spent 618 acres, 18 million dollars on restoration and conservation work. He also gave out some other projects and cost and the history. Justin Small working on the Bi-State Action Plan. On the Sagebrush Habitat Plan, we just met with partners for some feedback, coming the new year we are looking

at going out and hosting some smaller public meetings. Discussion of Ecosystem tool and the standard of communication of projects. Pete Coates is working on developing an application.

D. Department of Agriculture

We have been working on securing some additional funds for our Native Seed Program. And we are still actively looking for someone to fill the position on the SETT that has the AG background as well as the Conservation knowledge.

E. Other

12 PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

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No public comment.*

13 ADJOURNMENT

Chairman MacKenzie adjourned the meeting at 2:42 pm.

All details not covered in these minutes can be heard on the meeting recording at <https://sagebrusheco.nv.gov/Meetings/Meetings/>.