

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

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STATE OF NEVADA
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program

Draft Minutes

MEETING OF THE SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL

Thursday, April 16, 2026

8:30 AM

Physical Location

Nevada State Legislature Room
2135 401 S Carson St, Carson City,
NV 89701

Zoom Access for the Public

Phone number: 888-475-4499

Meeting ID: 880 6045 8926

Live streaming can be accessed on the NV Legislature

Website: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/Calendar/A/>

NOTICE: Items on this agenda may be taken in a different order than listed, combined for consideration, or removed from the agenda at the discretion of the Chair

1. CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at 8:32am

Members and Ex-Officio Present: Chris MacKenzie (Chair); Jake Tibbitts (Vice-Chair); Kyle Davis; Martin Paris; Bevan Lister; Sherm Swanson; Daphne Emm Hooper; Mathew Johns; Kelly McGowan; Cheva Gabor for Jon Stansfield; Kristen Jule; Alan Shepherd for Jon Raby; Heidi Ramsey; J.J. Goicoechea; Vinson Guthreau; Mark Freese for Alan Jenne

Members and Ex-Officio Absent: None

Other Staff Present: Ms. Steele, Casey Adkins, Skyler Monaghan, Sarah Hale, Richard Yien, Dominique Etchegoyhen, Jessica Wood.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

William Molini expressed that he was stepping down off the Council, said goodbye, and expressed his appreciation for his time served on the Council. The Council expressed their gratitude and presented him with a gift for his time and service.

James Simmons, Natural Resources Director for the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe, a Federally recognized tribe with a Reservation in remote Northwestern Nevada. He is requesting from the Council a de minimis exemption from the CCS program for scientific instruments that the Tribe would like to deploy on BLM Land in the Summit Lake watershed. The Mission of the Tribe is "To Promote Conservation with protection and enhancement of Tribal Natural Resources." This mission is in line with the mission of this Council and this project they are proposing for exemption. A few years ago, the tribe received a Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for research or on the ground projects to improve their understanding of Sagebrush Ecosystem Aquatic Ecology or improve instream or riparian habitat on and off reservation with partnerships.

The project is called Summit Lake Watershed Environmental Observation Network (SLWEON). This idea came from Dr. Sudeep Chandra at the Global Water Center at UNR. The vision was to create an automated watershed scale network of environmental sensors to collect data on water resources, climate, and fish and wildlife populations to inform science-based management of the Summit Lake Watershed. The hope was to send data collection from the Reservation to your phone. Most of the sensors are on the Reservation but they would like to install 9 pieces of equipment in the upper watershed on BLM Land. The proposed equipment is standard and has a small footprint. The equipment includes 1 steam gauge, 1 water quality sonde, 2 repeater stations, 3 pit tag antennas, 1 game tag camera, and 1 climate station. BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service have reviewed the locations and equipment and support the project and provided approval via Categorical Exclusion.

This project is not only for the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe, but the data will also be shared with the Public, Academic Institutions, State Agencies, and Federal Agencies and potentially this program. And it would not be possible and could not be sustained with the close partnership and MOU that the Tribe has with UNR specifically Global Water Center, The Nevada Seismological Lab, and NSHE Computing Services.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA- *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

- A. Approval of agenda for Thursday, April 16, 2026.
Motion to approve by Member Johns, Seconded by Member McGowan

Chair MacKenzie departed. Member Davis took over as acting chair.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES -*FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

- A. Approval of minutes from the SEC meeting held on Wednesday, October 22, 2025.
October minutes motion to approve by Member Johns and seconded by Member Lister.
- B. Approval of minutes from the SEC meeting held on Tuesday, December 02, 2025

Kyle Davis had questions on Item 9 regarding going against the directors. Ms. Steele advised that it was regarding the discussion of the maps, that she would review the recording and would clarify.

December minutes motion to approve baring clarification of item 9, by Member Lister and seconded by Member Emm Hooper.

5. COUNCIL MEMBER ITEMS AND CORRESPONDENCE - FOR DISCUSSION

Member Emm Hooper stated that she would like to discuss the public comment by James Simmons further, to talk about the process that they went through, some of the challenges and how they can better address them moving forward.

Ms. Steele advised that the Summit Lake Tribe had come to them with a project that was various equipment and a weather station, typical weather tower. Going through the analysis of just a general estimate that is always provided to all Debit project proponents it was clear that the minor sondes and all the pit tag readers and the water quality are small enough footprint that they really did not generate hardly anything. However, the Tower was the big problem in that is located in what looked like a pristine area, high quality PHMA and that generated a significant amount based off of the tower layer. They sent that back to the Tribe, went back and forth on a couple of questions and then they have not heard from them since. Ms. Steele stated that she is aware that they were bringing it forth to their Elders and were going to get back to them.

Member Davis asked if they would need to come to the Council for an exemption or can that request be made directly to Ms. Steele.

Ms. Steele advised that they can come through her, however she does not have much support on a full tower exemption and the concern with making anything that's scientific de minimis is about setting a precedent, but they can look at it internally and can be brought to the Council or it can go straight to the Council.

Member Emm Hooper stated that she would like to bring it to the Council and would like to discuss it further with Ms. Steele to hopefully bring this forward.

6. RANGE CAMP PRESENTATION – *Anna Shane, Camper*

Anna Shane, Camper, presented. SEC members and SETT provided feedback, and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

7. NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE - FIRE RESTORATION UPDATES – *Matthew Glenn, NDOW*

Alexa Lyons presented updates on NDOW's fire restoration methods and activities over the past several years and Mark Freese provided additional clarification. SEC members and SETT, provided feedback, and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

8. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATE ON THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE APPROVED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* Timothy Bowden, BLM

Timothy Bowden, BLM presented an overview of the 2025 GRSG approved Resource Management Plan amendment elements, changes from previous versions, and goals. SEC members and SETT provided feedback and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

Member Davis handed control of meeting back over to Chair MacKenzie.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATION OF GREATER SAGE-GROUSE POPULATION MANAGEMENT UNITS CHANGES FOR VERSION 2.2 TO BETTER ALIGN WITH THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* Ms. Steele, SETT Staff

SETT staff presented, and Justin Small from NDOW and Ms. Adkins provided additional information regarding changes. SEC members and SETT worked through the presentation, provided feedback, and asked questions. Alan Shepherd clarified that BLM clipped their smoothed map to the PMU as well. Alan Shepherd outlined the process that the BLM goes through to ensure the appropriate projects consult the SETT through the CCS.

Chair MacKenzie asked whether the CCS map would incorporate the smoothing that BLM incorporated. Ms. Steele clarified that the SETT will not adopt the smoothing. We are determining whether we need to alter the service area to include GRSG habitat that is not inside of an existing BSU or PMU.

Kyle and Bevan asked clarifying questions.

Member Swanson motioned that they should keep the step-by-step process clear. The map of what is important should be what is important, and within that, the PMUs should be adjusted. But the basemap is the map is the important piece for overall management. No Second, motion dies.

Member Davis motioned to direct staff to work with NDOW to come up with new maps that adjust the PMUs in a way that makes sense with public input and to bring it back for the next meeting. Seconded by Member Swanson – Motion passed

There were also two Public Comments online. Member Lister supported the motion but thought it sounded to him that it's going to take a bit of study. Need a very robust conversation about each of these aspects. He'd like the maps side by side with all the pieces to compare.

Ms. Steele commented that changes will be incorporated in Version 2.2 in January 2027 so there is time to do this. The SEC is a public process, and people are more than welcome to come and meet/discuss what we bring up, or is the council suggesting additional process outside of SEC meetings.

Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

10. STAFF BRIEFINGS AND UPDATES TO THE COUNCIL - FOR DISCUSSION - SETT Staff

A. CCS Projects Update – Ms. Hale and Mr. Monaghan, SETT, presented regular updates and highlights for projects, SEC members and SETT worked through the presentation, provided feedback, and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

B. Bill Draft Request Update - Ms. Steele presented the submitted Bill Draft Request (BDR). Per prior discussions and a presentation in the past, the SETT received the go ahead from the Council to propose a bill draft request to the DCNR Director and hopefully moved on to the Governor. Ms. Steele was just giving the update that this was submitted and hopefully out for review. Mr. Etchegoyhen clarified that this is the difficult time of the year when we are moving forward with BDR requests and this is part of a confidential process that they are working with the Governor's office. This has been taken and they are having discussions, however this is a process that they cannot be candid about at this time. SEC members and SETT provided feedback, and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

11. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATE ON THE 516 DM 1 - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HANDBOOK OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT IMPLEMENTING PROCEDURES - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION* Carolyn Sherve, BLM

Carolyn Sherve, BLM presented for the new DOI NEPA Regulations. SEC members and SETT provided feedback, and asked questions. Please refer to Audio Recording for further details.

Member Davis asked if project proponent wanted to have more public comment than required, is that considered and granted by BLM? Ms. Sherve replied it would be considered on case-by-case basis; they would need to make sure public comment won't prohibit meeting the 2-year deadline.

Member Swanson asked in the past, the NEPA process has been very integrated with our process [SEP]. Does the SETT foresee a need to have additional discussion of that or will this mesh with our process? Ms. Steele clarified that it is vaguer now, but still some benchmarks we can use.

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

- A. Ms. Steele, SETT- possible items for the next meeting.
 - a. Semi Annual that will need to be approved by the Council.
 - b. Potential Forest Service NEPA update.
 - c. They are working on some guidelines for renewing projects and reclamation, working on the general specifics on how to implement those procedures outlined in their documents and might have something by next meeting to review.
 - d. Potentially something with the Summit Lake Tribe depending on how fast things will move.
 - e. Possible Raven Presentation from NDOW.
 - f. Looking at a potential tour for the next Council meeting, would like to do a 2-day tour. Day 1 ½ day travel and ½ day Council meeting and Day 2 ½ day tour and return travel.
- B. Scheduling for the next Council meeting, Ms. Steele will send a date poll to get the date set for the meeting date to do a Tour in June. The SETT would like to take the Council members to potential credit projects. Next meeting details will be provided at a later date.

13. FEDERAL AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS-FOR DISCUSSION:

A. US Fish and Wildlife Service – Kristen Jule

USFWS is still navigating the recent administration changes. There could be some development soon on potential organizational changes at a higher level and overall they have fewer staff in the Reno office. They are doing everything that they can to keep their projects moving forward. They do have a budget and are not on a funding freeze this year. They are pausing on lateral reassignments and are able to do some temporary details which are occurring both in the region as well as nationally so that should help to keep things covered. Their Partner's Program is initiating their revision of a strategic plan that they undergo every 5 years. The process includes identification of priority species and habitats and drives where project funding is directed. Partner input is a really important part of the process, Susan Abele and her staff will be meeting with partners in June. Partners should reach out if they are interested in providing input. There has been a noticeable slow on the publications in the federal register, since 2025 a few have been published effecting Nevada, such as the Proposed endangered bleached sandhill skipper and the proposed Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee. There are also several 90-day findings. They have also received petitions to list wall canyon sucker and Sodaville milkvetch.

B. Bureau of Land Management – Alan Shepherd

Actively moving solar projects forward across the state. For greater sage-grouse, they are going to the field offices and walking staff through changes in the plan for updates and revision. Last week they visited Winnemucca, Battle Mountain and Elko and next week they go to Ely state office in Reno and Carson City. They are hosting and have sent out invitations to the various chairman's and agency leads covering the changes that they are going over in the field. Thursday, April 23, they will be holding the 2nd co-operators meeting at the Nevada State office at 2pm. There is a lot of horse activity planned and ongoing, they have 6 bait and water trap gathers going on right now across the state in various locations and 2 of those have already been completed. If they are able to catch all of them that will be about 3000 animals this winter. Most are from S. Nye County. Beatty had over 500 burrows. One hundred sixty have been gathered from around Spring Mountain and we are targeting around 850 in that area. Working in multiple counties try to stem off some of the drought that we normally hit during the summer. Gather activity planned for the Callahan complex, the Jacksons, Lake Lahontan and Mt. Moriah totaling about 3400 animals. From what they have done and what is planned they are looking at about 7100 animals for the year. The BLM has already started on the 2027 gathering plan that will start in October. Drought updates – districts are to monitor drought and talk to permittees. Working through budgets right now, all the programs have lost money this year. The BLM is looking to see how they can do some field work, as they are about 60% staffed currently across the state. Jon Raby is retiring at the end of next week.

C. US Forest Service - Cheva Gabor for Jon Stansfield

Staffing is at 85% of permanent fire positions filled and looking to be staffed for the season. Working with Nevada Forestry Foundation for the Rual areas. Signed two significant NEPA decisions in Mountain City and Ruby Mountains area - one of them was Jarbidge the other was east Humboldt and Ruby Mountain. The focus is to ensure that those NEPA decisions authorize every single tool that they think they might use to treat vegetation and reduce the risk of wildfire habitat. Both include prescriptive grazing as an option and may want to discuss

further. Truckee watershed was another major decision that was signed. The USFS is slammed with minerals projects, primarily gold, and they are short staffed and are working on how to maximize their processes to be able to get the information out as much as possible.

D. USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Heidi Ramsey

NRCS Nevada is working on a regional conservation partnership program project. They are working on a project with NDOW and other partners on a big game wildlife corridor in the Elko area. They are looking at working with NDA and DCNR to try to bring funding to the table on Humboldt River corridor to do some possible inventory to help that situation. Reviewing the Draft cultural resources programmatic agreement between the State Historic Preservation Officer and the Nevada NRCS that describes how they work with SHPO on what they don't have to consult with them on. Seeking qualified individuals with the implementation of soil health testing, new program regenerative pilot program that focuses on soil health. Advisory meeting is virtual, May 21, from 9-12. Meeting today with Fish and Wildlife Service about an agreement that they have not been able to use for the past few years. Credit to Dr. Sherm Swanson for asking about the Ecological Site Descriptions, as she was able to dig into it more and are very proud of the accomplishment. NRCS completed work on their provisional documents. NRCS is just about 50% staffed, they are trying satellite staff from the state office to the offices that need help. They have 2 engineers in the whole state. They are able to hire an engineer in Elko and are also looking for an archeologist to replace Pete who is the current archeologist.

Member Swanson stated that he would like to discuss how to better integrate the ecological sites, the descriptions and all the tools into what we do here for sage-grouse habitat conservation. Would like to bring it forward for a future meeting if the Council would be able to have them.

14. STATE AGENCY UPDATES AND COMMENTS-FOR DISCUSSION:

A. Office of the Governor – None

B. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources - Vinson Guthreau

He is the new Director, officially started 03/30/2026. New State Engineer under the Division of Water Resources is Joe Cacioppo. New State Forester is Ryan Shane. Forestry hiring for seasonally currently, inter agency is working with NRCS and NDA on the Humboldt River Corridor as Heidi Ramsey had mentioned.

C. Department of Wildlife - Justin Small

Mike Scott, Dep Director, will be retiring in early July along with Shawn Espinosa. Mike Cox and Carl Lacky are also retiring. Sage-grouse lekking season is fully underway, peek male attendance has been surveyed and it will run to the first week of May and look to be 10% under what they were at last year. Recruitment dropped off after the survey looking at the wing bee data from 2024. It went from 1.4 lambda to 0.8. USGS predictions show they might squeeze 1 more year out of it but believe that they reached the peak last year of 10,954. They have hit the 10-year population cycle and are on the back side of it.

D. Department of Agriculture – J.J. Goicoechea

Enrollment is open for native seed growers. NDA received approval this morning for \$900k worth of lab equipment to keep plant health in compliance moving ahead due to successfully combining two budget accounts last legislative session and adjusted fee schedules to meet their needs. NDA plant pathology lab became just the 3rd State Department of Agriculture lab in the Nation to become a core accredited lab of the National Plant Diagnostic network, effective March 1.

Mr. Monahan commented that the director and everyone at Agriculture have been putting together State Fair, which will be on June 11-13 at the Reno Fair Grounds.

15. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

16. ADJOURNMENT

Member Lister motioned to adjourn, Member Swanson seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 2:05 pm.

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Notice of this meeting was posted in the following location:

Department of Wildlife, 6980 Sierra Pkwy #120, Reno, NV

Sagebrush Ecosystem Program, 201 S. Roop Street, Ste. 101 Carson City, Nevada

Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 901 S. Stewart Street, Carson City, Nevada

Department of Agriculture, 405 South 21st Street, Sparks, Nevada

Department of Wildlife, 1100 Valley Road, Reno, Nevada

Capitol Building, 101 North Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada

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<http://sagebrusheco.nv.gov> and the Nevada Public Notices Website at <http://notice.nv.gov/>

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