Greeting Council Members

Thank you for the opportunity to explain what we are doing on our ranch.

In 2016, we entered the Nevada Conservation Credit System.

A couple of years later, we decided to focus on improving the soils on the south side of the ranch. This area consisted of old irrigated native meadowland that had been flood irrigated for more than 100 years. It was marginally productive and had become less productive over time, with wiregrass (Juncus) increasingly becoming the dominant plant species.

To address these challenges, we began working with a soil expert from New Zealand, Nicole Masters. We learned that the soil had become depleted of essential nutrients, minerals, and biological activity due to the constant presence of water throughout the spring and early summer.

Before we could begin rebuilding soil health, we first needed to gain better control of the water. After evaluating several options, center pivots appeared to be the most practical and cost-effective solution. With the assistance of a grant through the SETT Program and support from NRCS, we installed two pivots.

The results have been remarkable. If someone had told me beforehand that we could achieve the level of productivity we are now seeing on that land, I would not have believed them.

The area previously produced mostly wiregrass and a few other native grasses. It contained virtually no forbs or legumes and provided very poor wildlife habitat. Today, it supports a diverse mix of five grass species, three legumes, and a variety of forbs. As a result, wildlife has flourished.

Antelope regularly use the area and have raised their young there. Mule deer graze and bed there, and sage grouse move in after the fields have been grazed or mowed. We alternate between grazing and hay production, creating a management system that benefits both livestock and wildlife. What is good for the herd is good for the bird, and the sage grouse clearly agree.

We would now like to expand this success to the lower portion of the south side by installing two additional pivots. However, under the current proposal and regulations, we would be required to return 85 conservation credits. This would create a significant financial burden.

To me, this outcome makes little sense. We are taking land that currently provides minimal wildlife value and transforming it into highly productive habitat that supports a wide range of wildlife species.

Therefore, we respectfully ask the Council to waive the credit penalty associated with this project and to establish a process that allows pivot projects to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis rather than being subject to a blanket regulation. We are asking for flexibility instead of a one-size-fits-all prescription.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Agee Smith