

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act of 1998, as Amended

Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project - Project Summary

Round 12

Project Name: Pioche/Caselton Wildland Urban Interface Project

Round: 12 **Tab #:** 3 **Priority #:** 1

County: Lincoln

Location: 1,710 acres of BLM land surrounding the towns of Pioche and Caselton

Nominating Agency/Entity: BLM

Funding Requested: \$460,500

Recommended Funding: \$460,500

Project Description:

The proposal is to reduce the threat of wildfire to the towns of Pioche and Caselton, Nevada, and surrounding area by treating vegetation on approximately 1,710 acres of public land.

In response to the 2000 fire season, the Departments of Interior and Agriculture prepared a report to the President recommending increasing investments in projects to reduce fire risk and to work with local communities to reduce fire hazards close to homes and communities. Communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire were listed in the Federal Register on January 4, 2001 (Volume 66, Number 3), and Pioche was listed as one of those communities.

Based on BLM fire data from 1980 to 2008, 149 fires have been recorded within the vicinity of Pioche and Caselton. Nine of these fires consumed approximately 3,000 acres, with six of the nine burning within or immediately adjacent to Pioche. In 2005, the Nevada Community Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment for Lincoln County was prepared by Resource Concepts Inc. This assessment identified Pioche and Caselton, in the Extreme Hazard category for wildland fire risk. This assessment also recommended implementing fuel reduction treatments on a larger scale than normal defensible space treatments.

Funding was previously provided to complete cultural inventory for the project area through a Round 7 Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) pre-proposal planning project (PE01). An environmental assessment and decision record has also been completed for the project area and the project is ready for implementation. Funding to treat approximately 50% of the project area is being provided in Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 by BLM wildland urban interface fuels reduction program. If funded, this proposal would complete the entire project as identified in the environmental assessment.

Goals of the project are listed below:

- Reduce the threat of wildfire to communities and infrastructure of Pioche and Caselton, and the historic mining district
- Short Term Objectives (immediately post treatment)
- Reduce the canopy cover and fuel continuity of pinyon, juniper, and shrub species to prevent crown fire potential over 28 to 41 percent of the project area.
- Long Term Objectives (5 to 10 years post treatment)
- Reduce the FRCC rating within the project area from FRCC 2 to FRCC 1.

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Round 12

Project Name: East Schell Bench Wildlife Habitat: Protection and Restoration

Round: 12 **Tab #:** 1 **Priority #:** 2

County: White Pine

Location: The East Schell Bench is located in Spring Valley, White Pine County

Nominating Agency/Entity: BLM

Funding Requested: \$535,600

Recommended Funding: \$535,600

Project Description:

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) formerly described the East Schell Bench as “acre for acre; the most important mule deer habitat in White Pine County”. Fires in 1982, 1984, 1998, and 1999, burned approximately 6,350 acres (30%) of the winter and spring mule deer range and significantly diminished habitat values for mule deer. Additional losses (3,256 acres) were sustained in 2006 and brought losses of winter range in this area to approximately 60%. Deer populations have declined.

Prior to the fires, four sage grouse leks were located within the burned area and five more occurred within five miles of the burned area. At present, sage grouse use of the bench is minimal.

Currently, native shrubs and forbs are rare and large portions of the bench are dominated by annual grasses and forbs including exotic and native species. Because future fires could easily burn through old burn scars and into unburned habitat, unburned sagebrush communities and private in-holdings are threatened by potential fires. Additional losses would be devastating. This project would:

- Protect unburned habitat and reduce the size of future fires
- Improve native rangeland and habitat values for mule deer, sage grouse, and other wildlife
- Set the stage for additional, partner-funded implementation projects on this bench
- Provide additional scientific information of the design and implementation of large-scale restoration treatments
- Provide significant educational value to White Pine County School District (WPCSD) students

BLM, USFS, NDOW, WPCSD, and Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition (ENLC) propose to cooperate to accomplish this project. The Nature Conservancy would provide additional support and data. A coordinated effort is intended to improve the efficiency of treatments and the project as a whole with consideration for habitat improvement and cost containment. With technical assistance from USFS, NDOW, and TNC, the BLM would complete NEPA and cultural clearances for approximately 1,500 acres of current projects and 2,500 acres of future projects. BLM would collect seed, treat noxious weeds, and seed 1,000 acres of the bench. NDOW would contribute and plant 14,000 sagebrush seedlings and would coordinate with other potential parties to treat additional acres of burned habitat. ENLC would plant 2,000 bitterbrush seedlings. WPCSD would bury antelope bitterbrush seed caches and assist with monitoring and other activities. USFS would support the planning and weed treatment efforts. TNC would provide the BLM with models that they are developing independently. It is probable that sportsmen’s group(s) would fund an additional 2,500 acres of treatment.

The project would be complete when identified tasks including implementation, short-term monitoring and future planning/cultural clearance efforts were finished. The size of treatment areas listed above reflect anticipated available Round 12 SNPLMA funds for this project and the total project amount requested.

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Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project - Project Summary

Round 12

Project Name: Restoration of Basin Wildrye Ecosystems in Great Basin National Park

Round: 12 **Tab #:** 4 **Priority #:** 3

County: White Pine

Location: Northeast quadrant of Great Basin National Park

Nominating Agency/Entity: NPS

Funding Requested: \$106,434

Recommended Funding: \$0

Project Description:

Basin wildrye ecosystems are one of the only true grassland plant community found in the Great Basin. These plant communities have been severely degraded due to overgrazing and conversion into agricultural fields and are now limited in distribution relative to pre-settlement. The Basin wildrye ecosystem was identified as the most endangered plant community found within Great Basin National Park through the park-wide watershed analysis and conservation planning assessment process completed with SNPLMA Round 9 funding. Due to highly productive soils and run-on subsidies from adjacent uplands and wetlands, Basin wildrye communities are highly recoverable. We propose to restore 208 acres of basin wildrye plant communities through a combination of reseeding, chemical and mechanical treatments. This management strategy was recommended by The Nature Conservancy as a key restoration action in restoring park plant communities to desired future condition. Implementation of this proposal will restore 59% of the basin wildrye community to within a natural range of variation. We propose a combination of mechanical, chemical and seeding treatments to restore 97 acres of the Basin wildrye ecosystem from uncharacteristic vegetative states, FRCC 3, back to a natural range of variation for this ecosystem. We also propose to treat 111 acres of FRCC II wild rye community for a total of 208 acres treated. Due to deep loamy mollic soils, ease of establishment of wildrye from seed, and water subsidies from flooding and run on, the wildrye community is one of the most recoverable upland ecosystems in the Great Basin (L. Provencher; pers. comm.). These restoration actions would increase the proportion of wildrye in FRCC 1 from the current 14% to 52% a substantial improvement in park resources and significant move towards the desired future condition of this ecosystem. Treatments will also target tree and shrub encroached areas.

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Round 12

Project Name: Mount Moriah Restoration Project

Round: 12 **Tab #:** 2 **Priority #:** 4

County: White Pine

Location: North Snake Range (Mount Moriah), White Pine County

Nominating Agency/Entity: USDA FS

Funding Requested: \$705,000

Recommended Funding: \$0

Project Description:

The Ely Ranger District is requesting funds through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project to complete a landscape assessment, cultural and wildlife surveys, and NEPA within 120,000 acres of National Forest (USFS) lands and 250,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands on the North Snake Range (Mount Moriah). This Mount Moriah restoration project will build on the existing North Schell and Ward Mountain restoration projects. It will continue the landscape scale assessments/surveys and provide a base for future vegetation treatments including prescribed fire and mechanical methods.

The loss of sagebrush habitats to pinyon and juniper encroachment, and the loss of aspen habitats to white fir encroachment are significant concerns throughout Nevada and the west. The assessment and surveys will evaluate opportunities to restore native ecosystems and the wildlife that depend on them, and restore fire to a more natural role within areas which are designated as wilderness. This proposal is part of a larger process and plan to address the planning and implementation of vegetation treatments at a landscape scale to restore ecosystems and wildlife habitats and reduce fuels. This project will create future opportunities for landscape scale treatments using prescribed fire and mechanical methods by analyzing the current condition, determining the desired condition, and completing NEPA to be able to work toward the desired conditions of the overall vegetative community. Vegetation restoration methods will include mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, stewardship contracts, harvesting, hand cutting and seeding, and are dependent on the physical and biological characteristics of each individual site and the recommendations of local restoration experts. This project will work towards preserving and enhancing mountain brush, sagebrush steppe and aspen communities, which in turn will improve the desired habitats for species such as the northern goshawk, sage grouse, flammulated owl, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and others.