



Wildlife Heritage Account Project Proposal Form

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Person Submitting Proposal/Project Manager: Shawn Espinosa, Upland Game Staff Specialist

Organization/Agency: Nevada Department of Wildlife

Date: January 2, 2020

Address: 6980 Sierra Center Parkway

City: Reno

State: NV

Zip Code: 89511

Cell: (775) 771-4243

Phone: (775) 688-1523

Email: sespinosa@ndow.org

Fax: (775) 688- 1495

NDOW Monitor (if the project would be managed by someone other than a NDOW employee):

Shawn Espinosa - NDOW

Susanna Danner - Eastern Sierra Land Trust

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Desert Creek Conservation Easement

State Fiscal Year(s) Wildlife Heritage Account Funds are Needed: FY21

Project Location: This property is located in Lyon County south of the town of Wellington. Access is from the Desert Creek/Risue Canyon Road.

Amount of Funds Requested from Heritage Account: \$100,000

Is a Project Map Attached? Yes No

(a map must include the project title, map scale, date map was created, and a north arrow)

Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this project is to conserve an essential piece of private land for the long-term conservation of the Bi-State sage-grouse Distinct Population Segment (DPS) and other wildlife species in western Nevada. The Desert Creek Ranch provides a significant amount of breeding and brood rearing habitat for the Bi-State sage-grouse. A lek is located on the property that had 17 males observed displaying on it during the spring of 2019 and two other leks are located in the vicinity of the property. This property was identified in the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan as being one of the high priority properties in Nevada for the conservation of the Bi-State sage-grouse. The Nevada Department of Wildlife is working in conjunction with the Eastern Sierra Land Trust and other partners to purchase a conservation easement on this property and prevent potential future subdivision and development of the property.



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Detailed Description of Project (include any development plans such as vegetation removal, planting, seeding, or installation of structures; also include the schedule for obtaining any necessary permits, completing NEPA compliance, etc.):

This ~1,228-acre cattle ranch is owned and operated by father and son Bruce and David Park. The property is primarily irrigated pastureland with Desert Creek running through the western and southern portion of the property, and upland sagebrush steppe surrounding the wet meadows. The ranch is composed of two disjunct parcels. The ranch is mostly surrounded by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, except for an area of multiple private properties adjacent to the west side of the northern parcel.

The property contains valuable habitat for the Bi-State population of Greater sage-grouse. The property was identified in the Bi-State Action Plan under Action MER2-2: "Secure a conservation easement or agreement with the Desert Creek Ranch to maintain essential brood rearing habitat in proximity to Desert Creek Lek #2 in the Desert Creek-Fales PMU."

The property contains more than one mile of Desert Creek and approximately one mile of Fourmile Hill Creek. The property has significant use by mule deer, Bi-State greater sage-grouse, mountain quail, sage thrasher, American badger, golden eagle, pinyon jay, short-eared owl, and neotropical migratory songbirds. Desert Creek, which runs through the property, has native fish including Paiute sculpin as well as a trout fishery. This project meets the goals of the Bi-State Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) by protecting key wet meadow ecosystems and would improve water quality in Desert Creek. Additionally, the landowners have already initiated fence marking (to reduce sage-grouse fence collisions) and invasive weed control projects on their land. Their conservation practices are a good demonstration for nearby private and public landowners who may wish to conduct similar projects.

The ranch has appropriate water rights in Desert Creek, which is a tributary to the West Walker River. Its headwaters are in the Sweetwater Mountains of California at greater than 9,000 ft. in elevation. The water rights used to flood irrigate the meadows are fully adjudicated under the Walker River Decree in Equity (C-125) entered April 14, 1936 and amended in April 24, 1940. The use of this water right is regulated by the federal watermaster in accordance with the Rules and Regulations for the Distribution of Water on the Walker River Stream System under the Provisions of Paragraph 15 of the Decree in Equity, No. C-125 as approved by the Federal District Court on September 3, 1953 and subsequent orders and amendments that specify that irrigation water may be applied beginning March 1 and ending October 31 each year with a water duty of 1.6 cubic feet per second for each 100 acres of land. Water rights under this decree include pre-1914 rights with priority assigned by year. This water has been diverted and spread to maintain the irrigated pasture on the ranch, enhancing wet meadows and riparian species, and supporting habitat for the Bi-State sage-grouse and other wildlife.



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How Would this Project Help with “the protection, propagation, restoration, translocation, introduction and management of any game fish, game mammal, game bird or fur-bearing mammal in this State; or the management and control of predatory wildlife in this State”? (See NRS 501.3575)

The property is rich in wildlife, habitat types, and provides corridors for movement of wildlife including mule deer. Habitat of special interest on the property includes healthy sagebrush steppe, riparian and meadows critical to sage-grouse in the Desert Creek Population Management Unit (PMU) of the Bi-State Sage-grouse DPS. Bi-State sage-grouse associated with three nearby leks are plentiful on the property, and the meadows provide important brood-rearing habitat. Mule deer, golden eagle, mountain quail, and many other species of wildlife frequent the ranch.

The grasslands on the property have been identified through various planning efforts including the Bi-State Action Plan for Conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse Bi-State DPS (2012). The property is located in the Desert Creek-Fales PMU for sage-grouse in a region specifically identified for protection with a conservation easement under the “Minimize and Eliminate Risks” section, Action MER2-2: “Secure a conservation easement or agreement with the Desert Creek Ranch to maintain essential brood rearing habitat in proximity to Desert Creek Lek #2 in the Desert Creek-Fales PMU.”

The importance of the property to sage-grouse has been further documented by GPS and VHF transmitter occurrence data. Existing sage-grouse telemetry data shows intensive sage-grouse use of the property. The property is also located in an important movement corridor, containing winter range for the Wellington and Pine Grove mule deer herds.

Also, within the Bi-State Action Plan, urbanization was identified as a high risk for the Desert Creek/Fales PMU. Lyon County has designated parcels in this area the Land Use Designation of “Agriculture”, with 1 development unit per 20 acres, and RR5 (Land Use Code 600: Agricultural Qualified per NRS 361A - Vacant). According to the Lyon County Planning Department, “The purpose of the AG zone is to implement the Lyon County master plan, to conserve agricultural resources, retain open spaces and the rural character of the county, and to direct urbanization into manageable and identified development areas. This is a low-density land use district. Unless otherwise specified in this development code, no more than one primary residence per parcel is permitted in this land use district”. However, even under this designation, Desert Creek Ranch would have 56 development units. Given the level of development near Wellington, the western edge of Smith Valley and along the lower section of Desert Creek Road, conservation of the remaining intact quality habitat is of even greater importance.

Legal Description of the Property on Which the Proposed Project is to be Located (must include the property address, access roads, township, range and section):

The majority of the property is located in Township 9N, Range 24E within portions of section 4,5, 8 & 9. The property is also located in Township 10N, Range 24 E within portions of section 32 & 33.

Does this Project Have Additional Funding Sources Other than Your Wildlife Heritage Account Request? Yes No

Does this Project Involve Habitat Restoration and Improvement of a Long-term or Permanent Nature? Yes No



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Please Describe in Detail the Reason Why You Need Wildlife Heritage Account Funding to Fund this Project:

We are currently seeking as many funding opportunities as possible. The full market value of the property is approximately \$3,046,667. Recently, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, through the NRCS, acquired \$2,285,000 (75% federal share) for the acquisition of this easement and we are cooperatively seeking the 25% non-federal share of \$761,667. Under the Farm Bill, the landowner can negotiate a bargain sale component and reduce the non-federal share by a maximum of \$571,250. This requires at least \$190,417 of matching funds to make up the difference. Aside from this request, an additional \$50,000 has been acquired by NDOW through the Question 1 bond initiative, leaving a balance of \$140,417 of non-federal funds for match. If approved, this proposal would further drive that balance down to a point where non-governmental organizations would likely feel more comfortable donating reasonable amounts to fulfill the remaining balance.

Project Duration: one year two years three years more

Estimated Start Date: July 1, 2020

Estimated End Date: June 30, 2021



Desert Creek Ranch property with Desert Creek Peak in background.



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PROJECT FUNDING

The funding breakdown below should cover the total funding needs of the project. While projects may be extended beyond the fiscal year for which money was awarded, such an extension must be due to unusual circumstances and be approved by the Wildlife Commission (see NAC 501.340). Double click on the table to activate the embedded spreadsheet.

1. Amount of Heritage Account Funds Being Requested		\$ 100,000
2. Other Cash Funding Sources for this Project		
a. Nevada Question 1 bonds		\$50,000
b. NRCS - RCPP		\$2,285,000
c. NGO (Potential)		\$ 40,417.00
d.		
e. Total Other Cash Funding Sources (lines a - d)		\$ 2,375,417.00
3. In-kind Services for this Project		
a. Volunteer Time		
b. Equipment		
c. Materials		
d. Potential Bargain Sale by Landowner		\$ 571,250.00
e.		
f.		
g.		
h. Total Donations/In-kind Services (lines a - g)		\$ 571,250.00
4. Total Project Funding	\$ 3,046,667.00	



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Are There Going to be Any Ongoing Costs for This Project? Yes No

If There are Ongoing Costs Associated with This Project, is There an Anticipated Funding Source for These Costs? Yes No

Do You Anticipate Needing Additional Wildlife Heritage Account Funds Beyond the Upcoming Fiscal Year? If So, Please Describe What You Think Your Funding Requirements will be and for What Purposes (As noted above, extensions beyond the first fiscal year must be due to unusual circumstances and approved by the Wildlife Commission.):

We do not anticipate needing additional Wildlife Heritage Account Funding beyond that being requested in this proposal. However, that is contingent upon our ability to garner the anticipated match requirement for easement acquisition of this property. We anticipate non-governmental organization funding will help supplement the match requirement.

How Will You Give Credit to the Wildlife Heritage Account and Other Funding Sources?

Eastern Sierra Land Trust has a website (eslt.org) with a section for "Success Stories". The Desert Creek Conservation Easement, if acquired, would be a great success story for the Bi-State DPS sage-grouse with recognition of NRCS -RCPP and Wildlife Heritage Trust Account providing funding for the project. In addition, the Bi-State local working group also has a website (bistatesagegrouse.com) with a section on "Land Conservation and Sustainable Agriculture" under Conservation where a story would fit nicely for a project such as this.

Authorizing Signature:

Review Date 4/10/2020

