



NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

Project Proposal Report

Project Name: South Schell Land Acquisition

Project ID: 921

Lead Agency: Nevada Department of Wildlife

Project Manager: Madi Stout Nevada Department of Wildlife

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Project Partners

Name	Agency	Role
Southern Nevada Water Authority	Southern Nevada Water Authority	Private Landowner
RMEF	RMEF- Aaron Swift	Non-Agency Cooperator
Bob McCready	NWF - National Wildlife Federation	Non-Agency Cooperator
Patrick Smorra	NDSL - Nevada Division of State Lands	Agency Cooperator

Project Schedule

Project Start Date: 01/03/2022 (FY 2022)

Projected Completion Date: 12/31/2024 (FY 2025)

Multi-year Project: no

Project Schedule:

Yellow book appraisal completed September 2023.

Final review appraisal completed October 2023.

Projected Closing June of 2024.

Project Location and Land Status

Location Narrative:

The Project is located approximately 23 miles southeast of Ely, Nevada, in the southern portion of the Schell Creek Mountain Range. The Project Area is located on private lands surrounded by USFS and BLM lands in the Ely Ranger District.

NDOW Region: Eastern

NDOW Management Units: 111

Nevada Sage Grouse Population Management Unit: Spring/Snake Valley, Steptoe/Cave

County: White Pine

Land Status

Land Status	Acres	Percent of Project
Private	1712.8	99.2

Bureau of Land Management Office: Ely District - Bristlecone Field Office

US Forest Service Ranger District: Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest - Ely Ranger District

Special Land Designations: N/A

Project Summary and Justification

Project Activity and Sub-activity: INFRASTRUCTURE and LAND: Land or water right acquisition

Project Objectives:

- To measurably increase wildlife populations, wildlife use, or habitat for the benefit of public use and hunter success.
- To measurably increase access for wildlife-dependent recreation.
- To prevent conversion to agriculture and other anthropogenic development and fulfill conservation goals

NDOW Initiative Addressed:

- Mule Deer Enhancement Program (NDOW)
- Wildlife Connectivity Plan (NDOW)

Strategic Habitats and Threats Addressed:

- Aspen woodland: Anthropogenic development
- High-elevation sagebrush dominated shrubland: Anthropogenic development
- Linear riparian: perennial and ephemeral rivers and streams: Anthropogenic development
- Low-elevation sagebrush dominated shrubland: Anthropogenic development
- Pinyon-juniper woodland (not encroachment): Anthropogenic development
- Upper montane coniferous forest and woodland: Anthropogenic development

Priority Resource Impacted: Big Game, Upland Game

Priority Species Impacted: Elk, Greater sage-grouse, Mule deer

Does this project benefit Greater Sage-grouse or Greater Sage-grouse habitat: yes

Project Clearance or Authorization Status: Not Applicable

Project Rationale:

The primary purpose of the South Schell Land Acquisition is to purchase approximately 1,720 acres of land from Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), including approximately 14 different water rights. The properties are located in the Schell Creek Mountains, in White Pine County, Nevada. The property consists of inholdings with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management lands (BLM), within Hunt Unit 111. Consisting mainly of high elevation mountain shrub habitat, several large mahogany stands, and numerous seeps and springs, the property serves as crucial summer and transition habitat for elk, winter and summer habitat for mule deer, brood rearing habitat for sage-grouse, year-round habitat for blue grouse, and nesting habitat for a variety of migratory birds and raptors.

There has been a significant loss of wildlife habitat in Cooper Canyon and Cave Creek over the last 50 years. Repeat photography shows a significant increase in conifer expansion into aspen, riparian/meadow systems, and mountain brush communities. In the Cooper Canyon May 1972 photo (below), many of the open meadows are the private parcels that NDOW is seeking to acquire. In the 2021 repeat photo some of the meadows are not visible, and those meadows that are visible have been drastically reduced and encroached by conifers. The Cooper Summit location is in between the Cooper Canyon and Cave Creek private parcels. The Cooper Summit 2021 photo shows that an entire aspen stand has nearly been lost to conifer encroachment since 1972. Aspen is one of the most wildlife diverse habitats that occur in Nevada. While Cooper Summit is not on the private parcels, it is indicative to what is occurring on the landscape.

In 2022, NDOW conducted 4,700 acres of hand thinning in Pinyon-Juniper trees on mule deer winter range below the Cooper Canyon parcels. A 300-acre mastication project will be starting this year in the dense trees on the left side of the Cooper Canyon June 2021 photo. NDOW has plans to continue habitat treatments in this area to reverse the significant loss of habitat. While mule deer in this area are currently at low levels, the past and future habitat projects will significantly change the quality of habitat in the area and benefit mule deer and potentially sage grouse.

The Steptoe Valley WMA (SVWMA) is located south of Ely, NV, and consists of over 12,000 acres. The SVWMA includes Comins Lake, Cave Creek, Steptoe Creek and Willow Creek and consists of wet meadows, riparian corridors, sagebrush, and pinyon and juniper uplands. This WMA supports an abundance of different fish and wildlife species that contribute to the biological diversity of eastern Nevada. By purchasing the South Schell lands, we will be ensuring that even more habitat is being conserved and enhanced in perpetuity for Nevada's wildlife. Historically, the Steptoe WMA, previously the 3 C Ranch, was managed as a cow/calf cattle operation. When NDOW purchased the property, they continued to use the ranch for agricultural purposes and created a multiple use management plan that would benefit livestock, the ranching community, and wildlife alike. Similarly, the South Schell's project was historically a sheep/livestock operation and once added to the SVWMA, will carry on the conservation minded multiple-use concept.

The State of Nevada has many land interests in the area and this acquisition would further compliment those interests. Many of the parcels proposed for purchase are immediately adjacent to Cave Lake State Park and the SVWMA and this acquisition would provide further benefit to both NDOW and State Parks by consolidating ownership into state-owned land. The acquisition of these parcels will allow for greater habitat improvements and protections for all wildlife and prevent development threats into the future.

Project Treatments and Actions

Treatment Name: South Schell Acquisition

Acres: 1,727.2

Action: Land acquisition

Approach Narrative:

Target acquisition date is 6/30/2024, but could take as long as 12/31/2024.

Planned Start: 07/2024

Project Monitoring

Monitoring Plan:

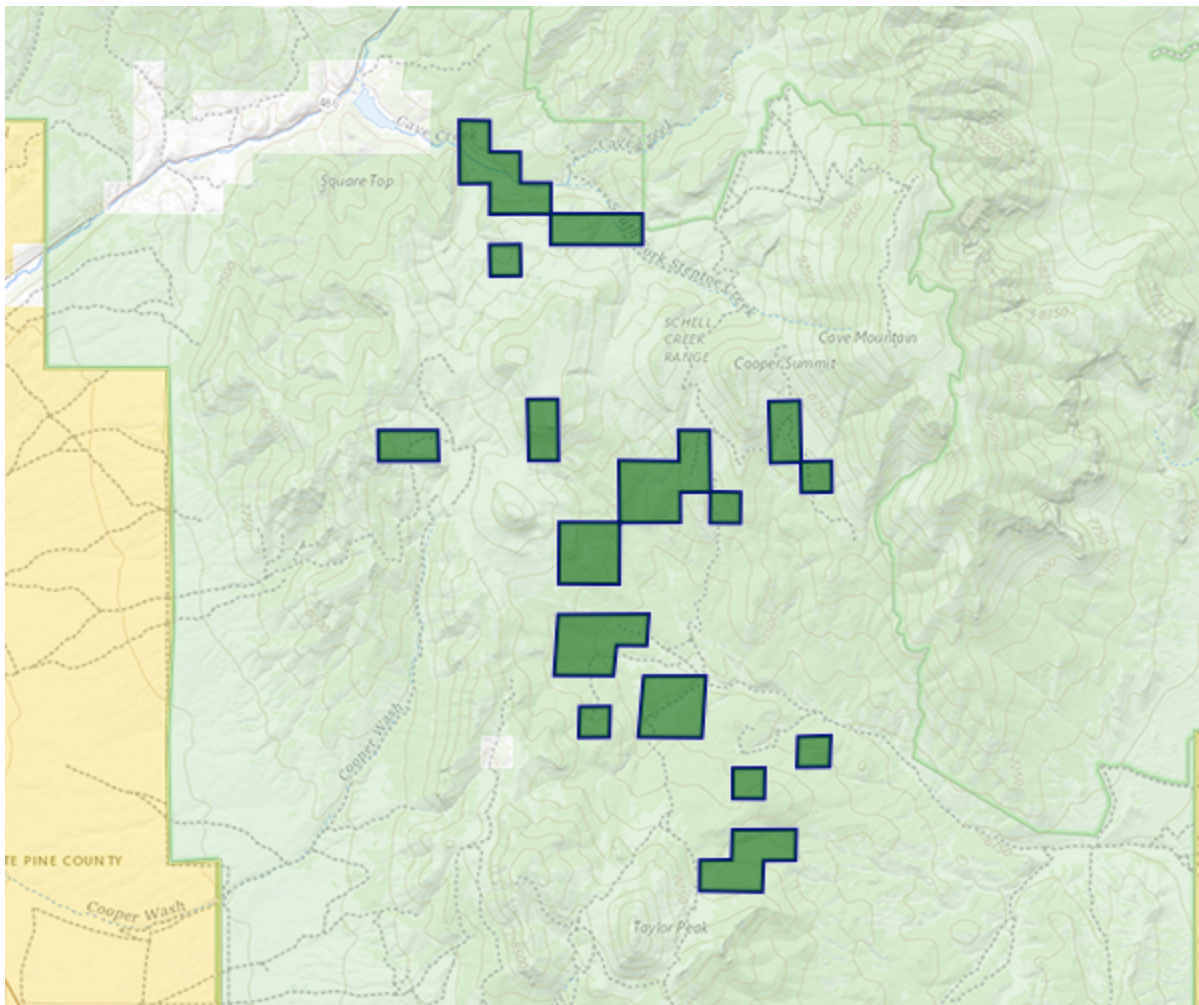
A monitoring plan is not applicable to this project.

Project Funding and Budget

Budget Item	NDOW Heritage Trust Account 2023	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation 2023	Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 2024	Nevada Dream Tag 2024	NGO Donations 2024	US Fish and Wildlife Service 2024	Subtotal
Land Acquisitions/Easements							
	\$750,000	\$50,000	\$250,000	\$100,000	\$70,000	\$500,000	\$1,720,000
Total Costs:	\$750,000	\$50,000	\$250,000	\$100,000	\$70,000	\$500,000	\$1,720,000

Budget Narrative:

RMEF committed \$50,000, with all other funding sources pending approval. If all funds are received we estimate that less Heritage dollars maybe needed than the requested amount. All funds will be used for the purchase of the South Schell Land Acquisition.



Boundaries

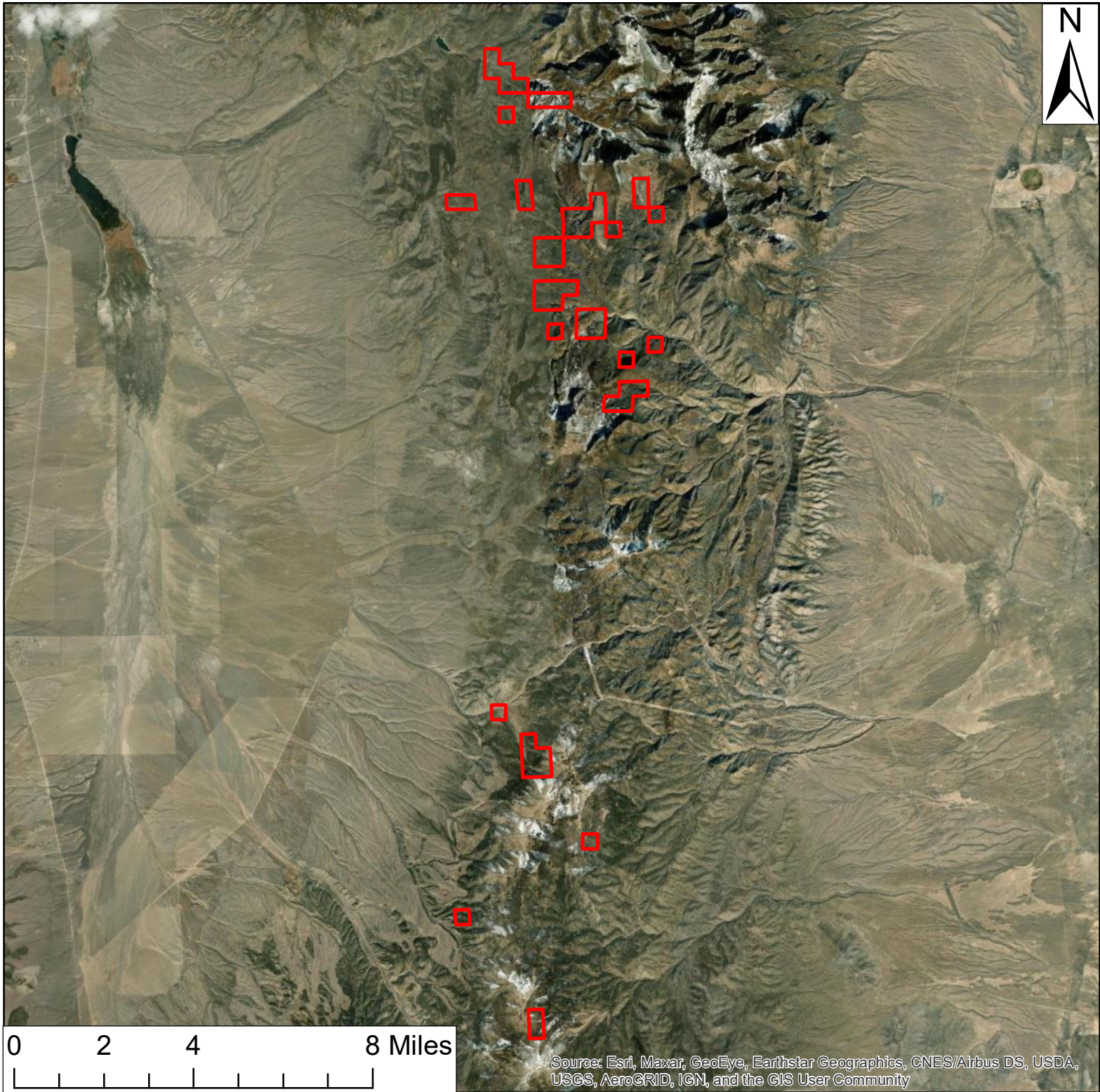
- County Boundary ● USFS Office Boundaries ● BLM Office Boundaries ● NDOW Region Boundary

Land Status

- Bureau of Indian Affairs ● Bureau of Land Management ● Bureau of Reclamation
- Department of Defense ● Department of Energy ● Fish and Wildlife Service ● US Forest Service
- National Park Service ● Nevada State Lands ● Nevada Park Service ● Private ● Other

Project Geometry

- Project Boundary ● Treatment Area: South Schell Acquisition



Legend

 South Schell Parcels



South Schell Land Acquisition

11/20/23

Projection: UTM Zone 11 North, NAD83
No warranty is made by the Nevada Department of Wildlife as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.









