

Sierra Nevada Conservancy-FINAL REPORT

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control River and Coastal Protection Act of 2008 (Proposition 84)

Grantee Name: Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District

Project title: Project Coordinator, Buffalo-Skedaddle Landscape Restoration and Conservation Initiative

SNC Reference Number: SNC 070180 **Submittal Date:** July 30, 2010

Report Preparer: Tina Mudd, Coordinator **Phone #:** (775) 722-8339

Check one:

6-Month Progress Report
 Final Report

<p>6-Month Progress Reports should reflect the previous six months. Final Reports should reflect the entire grant period.</p>

A. Final Report Summary:

The Project Coordinator has continued to host monthly meetings, update the website (buffalokedaddleprojects.com), draft contracts for project activities and seek other sources of funding. The Project Coordinator is also on site to evaluate the progress of currently contracted projects. The project coordinator has also worked with the Bureau of Land Management to secure \$303,000 in ARRA Stimulus funding to continue juniper reduction projects. Additionally, the project coordinator has received preliminary notice that the group has received a \$10,000 Intermountain West Joint Venture Grant.

Without the funds provided by SNC, the Buffalo Skedaddle Group would not have been able to secure additional funds and begin implementing projects in their first year. The Project Coordinator donated approximately 60 hours in in-kind match during a period when grant funding was not available. The Initiative is gaining momentum, the Group and Coordinator was not willing to allow the momentum to lessen due to lack of grant funds.

The Initiative has just completed a 1,000 acre juniper treatment at Cold Springs Mountain. The Group also is wrapping up a contract with Resource Concepts for cultural and botanical surveys of the Dodge Reservoir Project. The first two units of Dodge have been cleared and 530 acres are currently under treatment. This treatment includes removing juniper from Unit 7's riparian area and fencing the riparian area for recovery. The Juniper has been cleared and the fence will be in place later in the summer. Juniper removal is also currently taking place on Unit 1 of the Dodge Reservoir project. These projects would not be possible without the

assistance from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy funding the Coordinator position for the Initiative.

B. Deliverables or Outcomes completed during this Reporting Period or Milestones Achieved: (Include specific information, such as public meetings held, agency participation, partnerships developed, or acres mapped, treated or restored.)

The Coordinator has hosted meetings at the Eagle Lake Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management in Susanville every month since September, 2008. The monthly meetings are held the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 10:00am to 11:15am, pending weather and participant's field schedules allow for it.

In addition to the monthly meetings, the Project Coordinator has maintained a website that includes the meeting agendas and minutes as well as information on our on-going projects. The Project Coordinator also coordinated the applications for eight separate grant applications for private and public funding sources. The Group has secured approximately \$413,000 to date. (\$100,000 Bureau of Land Management Healthy Lands Initiative Funds; \$303,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds and \$10,000 in Inter-Mountain West Joint Venture Funding.)

Currently, the Initiative is completing 1,000 acres of juniper removal by August 15. An additional 530 acres will be cleared this summer as we have recently completed 1,300 acres in Botanical and Cultural Clearances on the Dodge Reservoir Project. The Coordinator has secured American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to conduct more than 530 acres in juniper removal projects as well as fencing of sensitive riparian areas. This work began in June, 2010 and will go through October 2010.

Most importantly, through the Coordinator, the Initiative has forged new relationships and is in the process of working with other groups to secure additional funds, partner on projects and make the most impact with the available resources. This certainly demonstrates the capacity building that has taken place over the past year and a half. New relationships with the NRCS, FWS and other federal agencies are allowing us to work with local agencies and private landowners to preserve a number of valuable resources in Northeastern California.

C. Challenges or Opportunities Encountered:

Challenge: *The first major challenge that the group faced with was the SNC budget freeze. The group certainly misunderstood that we could remain working on the grant because we had advanced the funds. Because of this, the Project Coordinator scaled back her hours and volunteered hours as well.*

Opportunities: *Although the SNC budget freeze created some challenges, it also created the opportunity for the Project Coordinator to donate some time to the Initiative which increased our match portion as well as lengthened the time the Coordinator was under contract. This was an overall benefit to the future of the group.*

Challenge: *The second most evident challenge is the nature of the work we need to accomplish to have a positive impact on the sage-grouse and their habitat. Most of the work we have planned to complete in regards to Sage-grouse habitat is directly related to the removal of invasive Western Juniper. Although the removal of juniper is shown to improve watershed quality and water quantity in springs, seeps and ephemeral streams, the very nature of the work (“Juniper Removal”) is not generally publicly visible or comprehensive enough (such as river restoration) to acquire adequate grants funds. We certainly see this as a challenge and as a result have forged new relationships with our partners in order to work more comprehensively on watershed level projects.*

Challenge: *Because the habitat we are working to protect is sensitive, it is difficult for the group to pin-point exact project locations and benefits to granting sources. The most critical locations (Leks) are currently located on private ground. We are working with the NRCS, RCD and others to secure private landowner partnerships and in some cases acquire critical Lek habitat. The locations of Leks remain private due to the sensitivity of the Leks as outlined in the Conservation Strategy. This can present a challenge when trying to rally support for projects through demonstration projects.*

D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved: (Please describe any additional successes beyond completing scheduled tasks or meeting scheduled milestones.)

The Project Coordinator continued to work through the SNC budget freeze, as well as through the period when the grant ended as a volunteer. Much of our project contracting took place during this time. However, because the momentum of the group was so positive and strong, the Project Coordinator insisted on staying on to see the projects through. This was a great benefit as a neighboring BLM office was not able to utilize Stimulus funds in time, the funds were granted to the Initiative because of the great work we had underway. Had we not been able to demonstrate the successful ability to implement restoration projects, we may have been passed up for this additional funding opportunity.

E. Compare Actual Costs to Budgeted Costs: (Please refer to your grant agreement to list your deliverables/budget categories and budgeted costs compared to actual costs incurred during this reporting period in the table below.)

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	Budgeted SNC Dollars	Actual Dollars
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Coordinator Position	\$48,000	\$48,000
GRAND TOTAL	\$48,000	\$48,000

F. Do you have information to report on the project-specific Performance Measures for your project?

(See Letter A in the following section).

G. Were there any other relevant materials produced under the terms of this Agreement that are not a part of the budgeted deliverables? If so, please attach copies.

H.

The Project Coordinator and the Initiative Partners are currently producing our landowner guide, sage-grouse habitat enhancement program and other education and outreach materials. The Project Coordinator is volunteering her time to complete these tasks and is working to secure additional grant funds to cover the printing costs.

We request that you visit our website at buffalokedaddleprojects.com. We also have attached pictures of our Cold Springs and Dodge Projects.

I. Next Steps: (Work anticipated in the next 6 months, including location and timing of any scheduled events related to the project.)

As mentioned previously, we will continue to implement the 2300 acre Dodge Project, of which 530 acres will be treated this year, 2010. The Cold Springs project will be completed this summer, 2010 as well. In the near future we will continue to seek additional sources of funding to support the projects identified by the Conservation Strategy as well as increase our education and outreach efforts.

The Initiative and the Coordinator are also working to implement a monitoring protocol for our projects. We anticipate working on this in the next 6 months.

Lastly, the Initiative is working to participate in the recent Conservation Initiative push by the NRCS to involve landowners. We will continue to support this effort as well. The first two of the ten priority projects outlined in the Conservation Strategy are underway, we will continue to implement the project list as permitting is completed and funding is acquired.

Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY

Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders:

(What partnerships did you initiate or strengthen as a result of this project? How did they affect the project outcome? If applicable, how did this grant increase your organization's capacity? What is your plan to sustain this increase?)

By fostering the already strong relationship between the Bureau of Land Management and the Resource Conservation District, we were able to conduct our projects in a timely manner. The ability to get our projects on the ground in the first year of the Initiative's existence was a great accomplishment for maintaining momentum.

The Sage Grouse Initiative on a national scale also provided an opportunity to further coordinate on the issue with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and participating landowners. The group's work on fostering the development of the Initiative also has led to coordination on other resource projects including working within the Susan River Watershed to restore and improve riparian areas. Riparian areas are essential to Sage Grouse, especially young chicks. Because of this type of relationship, the Initiative Group is able to continue with their primary objective which is Juniper removal and assist other groups with their secondary objective to improve riparian area habitat.

The Initiative's partnerships have provided sound project design guidance, information and opportunities to obtain new sources of funding and a medium to continue to partner with other organizations working toward similar goals. The Initiative's success has begun to bring new partners to the table, insuring the group's survival.

Continuing to lead by example and complete on the ground projects will provide the Initiative the opportunity to continue to build capacity: Partnerships, Funding, Volunteers and Technical Assistance.

Description of Project Accomplishments:

1. Most Significant Accomplishment

Describe in one concise, well-written paragraph, the most significant accomplishment that resulted from this grant.

The Buffalo-Skedaddle Landscape Restoration and Conservation Initiative began its efforts with two grants from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Since hiring the Coordinator, the Initiative has acquired almost \$400,000 in additional funding and has forged new relationships with other resource groups and individuals interested in preserving local resources. The group has acquired funds for both Restoration (Juniper reduction for Sage Grouse Habitat) as well as education and outreach

funds. The Initiative was also able to implement two large projects totaling more than 1,500 acres of Sage grouse habitat restoration in its first two years as an Initiative.

2. WOW Factor

If applicable, please describe anything that happened as a result of the project or during the project that is particularly impressive.

During the time when SNC funds were frozen, the group continued to volunteer time and effort to insure the Initiative would continue. This commitment demonstrated the importance of the Sage Grouse Initiative and has provided the momentum the group required to move into the future. In our first two years of establishment, the group has treated 1,500 acres of Juniper. The most important result of our work has been the multiple species benefit related to our restoration projects.

3. Design and Implementation

When considering the design and implementation of this project, what lessons did you learn that might help other grantees implement similar work?

When coordinating groups with vast resource concerns or needs, it is useful to put together a core group (steering committee) to discuss details and approaches. Large groups tend to lose focus. Our strategy to bring various treatments to the table in a presentable manner, directed the effectiveness of our meetings and discussions. Also, all of our “field trips” related to project planning were open invitations to all partners so that we were sure to consider ALL pertinent resources, not just Sage Grouse.

However, one element of our design implementation that we are working to improve is to better design projects to encompass all aspects of the habitat. Although the Initiatives key objective is to remove juniper from the landscape, many funding sources require a more intimate tie to riparian areas, rivers and a specific habitat component of a specific species. Our diverse partnership has been the key to beginning to work through this issue. As a result, the Buffalo-Skedaddle group is partnering with the Susan River Watershed Group and others to review our design, project approach and implementation.

4. Indirect Impact

Please describe any indirect benefits of the project such as information that has been developed as a result of the project is being used by several other organizations to improve decision-making, or a conservation easement funded by this grant that encouraged other landowners in the area to have conservation easements on their property.

Indirect or unexpected outcomes include our increased relationship with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and local landowners through the NRCS Sage Grouse

Initiative. Our efforts on public lands were complimentary to the process of signing up local landowners for NRCS programs. The Buffalo-Skedaddle Coordinator participated in meetings and presentations to assist landowners in understanding the gap the group was trying to bridge between public and private lands.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, the Buffalo-Skedaddle Group set out to provide habitat restoration projects that would promote the increased numbers and survival rates of the Greater Sage Grouse; our efforts have also benefitted numerous Sagebrush obligate species in the area. During the time we were working on projects, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the Greater Sage grouse would not be listed as endangered. This specific ruling provided an indirect benefit to our work. By not listing the Sage grouse we can continue to implement projects under less regulation and review than would be imposed if the bird were listed. This meets one of the Initiative's Goals: keep the Greater Sage grouse from being listed. We anticipate the number of Sage grouse Initiatives in the west working to improve habitat and bird numbers is moving the species in the right direction.

Lastly, the science is slightly conflicted regarding the water usage of Western Juniper. However, based on the literature available and the knowledge of our partners we are eager to demonstrate (in the future through monitoring) that the seasonal creeks, drainages and seeps will have benefitted in both water quality and quantity in the near future.

5. Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

If you worked in collaboration or cooperation with other organizations or institutions, describe those arrangements and their importance to the project. Also, describe if you encountered conflict in the project and how you dealt with it, or if there was conflict avoided as a result of the project.

Internally within the group, we have experienced varying opinions regarding achieving project implementation and monitoring. As a group, we discuss all options and provide recommendations to the agency managing the land. The Group works very hard to respect the various partners' resource and land management objectives while respecting the objective of the group to improve sage grouse habitat.

The group is in the process of developing an education and outreach component. We recently received a \$10,000 grant award to further educate the community and our next generation about conservation efforts. This project is in collaboration with the Resource Conservation District, the NRCS, BLM, California Department of Fish and Game and others. We will establish education stations along the river and representatives from various agencies and non-profits will work on hands on demonstrations with students (water sampling, soil sampling, weed pull, wildlife identification etc.).

From the public we have received questions as to why we would apply funds to a species that has a high natural predation rate (Ravens, Hawks, Coyotes etc.) and remains to have a hunting season. Our group has carefully and strongly explained that our efforts are intended to improve the numbers so that we can remain to recreate and hunt in the areas where the birds exist and that the work the Initiative undertakes has a multiple species benefit. The multiple species benefit also includes domestic livestock in addition to wildlife by improving the range. The multi-species/multi-user benefit application to restoration has garnered much support for the group.

6. Capacity-Building

SNC is interested in both the capacity of your organization, as well as local and regional capacity. Please describe the overall health of your organization including areas in need of assistance. SNC is interested in the strength and involvement of your board, significant changes to your staff, size and involvement of membership. In addition, describe how your project improved capabilities of partners, or the larger community.

The Capacity of our group is currently moderate. The Group has an extensive participation from technical professionals representing numerous agencies. As a result, the technical capacity of the group is quite strong. However, our landowner involvement has been less than extensive after the completion of the Conservation Plan. To remedy this shortcoming, the Coordinator (volunteer time) is working with the NRCS and RCD in order to couple private landowner opportunities through the NRCS with the public effort that has been generated through the group thus far.

The Coordinator position has been key to communication with the public and landowners. Since the full utilization of this particular grant, the Coordinator has continued to donate volunteer hours and supplies to foster the Initiative. The momentum of the Initiative is not strong enough at this point to survive on a volunteer basis and remains to require a coordinator to hold meetings, plan projects, write grants, manage contracts and implement projects.

The Initiative is continuing to work to improve on the strides that have been made and will continue to work to build the capacity of the group such that we continue to build momentum and partners in order to develop consistent support.

7. Challenges

Did the project face internal or external challenges? How were they addressed? Describe each challenge and any actions that you took to address it. Was there something that SNC did or could have done to assist you? Did you have to change any of your key objectives in response to conditions “on the ground”?

Challenge: *The first major challenge that the group faced with was the SNC budget freeze. The group certainly misunderstood that we could remain working*

on the grant because we had advanced the funds. Because of this, the Project Coordinator scaled back her hours and volunteered hours as well.

Opportunities: *Although the SNC budget freeze created some challenges, it also created the opportunity for the Project Coordinator to donate some time to the Initiative which increased our match portion as well as lengthened the time the Coordinator was under contract. This was an overall benefit to the future of the group. Because we were able to stretch our funds over a longer period of time (2 years), we were able to obtain additional funding. As a result, from a challenge was born a new benefit!*

Challenge: *The second most evident challenge is the nature of the work we need to accomplish to have a positive impact on the sage-grouse and their habitat. Most of the work we have planned to complete in regards to Sage grouse habitat is directly related to the removal of invasive Western Juniper. Although the removal of juniper is shown to improve watershed quality and water quantity in springs, seeps and ephemeral streams, the very nature of the work (“Juniper Removal”) is not generally publicly visible or comprehensive enough (such as river restoration) to acquire adequate grants funds. We certainly see this as a challenge and as a result have forged new relationships with our partners in order to work more comprehensively on watershed level projects.*

Challenge: *Because the habitat we are working to protect is sensitive, it is difficult for the group to use our most precious target, “Leks” as educational pieces. Additionally, the inability to pin-point exact project locations and benefits to granting sources also makes our projects appear to general for funding at times. The most critical locations (Leks) are currently located on private ground. We are working with the NRCS, RCD and others to secure private landowner partnerships and in some cases acquire critical Lek habitat. The locations of Leks remain private due to the sensitivity of the Leks as outlined in the Conservation Strategy. This can present a challenge when trying to rally support for projects through demonstration projects.*

8. Photographs

Below are a number of photos from our meetings, field work and projects directed under the SNC Project Coordinator Grant.



Figure 1 and Figure 2. Buffalo-Skedaddle Sage Grouse Conservation Initiative – Stakeholder Meeting. Eagle Lake Field Office, BLM. Susanville, CA





Figures 3 and 4 depict the Juniper reduction accomplished through an additional Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant. Work was conducted in early spring 2010 at Cold Springs Mountain outside Madeline, CA.





Figures 5 and 6 depict the pre-treatment site of a riparian area, which is Unit 7 of the Dodge Reservoir project.





Figure 7. (above) Buffalo-Skedaddle Project crews flagging the treatment and fence line for Unit 7. Figure 8, Juniper removed from Unit 7 (below)





Figure 9. Unit 7 Dodge Reservoir Meadow cleared of Juniper.

Figure 10 (below) is a photo of the work underway within Unit 1 of the Dodge Reservoir. Juniper on ridges is being hand cut, mechanical treatments will follow in more accessible areas.



9. Post Grant Plans

What are the post-grant plans for the project if it does not conclude with the grant? Include a description of the following (if applicable): (1) Changes in operations or scope; (2) Replication or use of findings; (3) Names of other organizations you expect to involve; (4) Plans to support the project financially, and; (5) Communication plans?

The Buffalo-Skedaddle Landscape Restoration and Conservation Initiative will continue on at the conclusion of this grant. We will continue to expand our partnership and our treatment approach to include a greater array of habitat elements. This will allow the group to continue building relationships with the BLM, USFS, CDFG, NRCS, the Susan River Watershed group and others. We continue to identify partners in order to leverage funds and resources in order to build capacity.

The recent award of Intermountain West Joint Venture funds will allow us to increase the communication, education and outreach regarding the need to preserve and restore natural resources in Northeastern California.

The group continues to seek out project funding for juniper reduction and will seek funding to keep employing the project coordinator previously funded under this grant.

10. Post Grant Contact

Who can be contacted a few years from now to follow up on the project? Please provide name and contact information.

Tina Mudd
Project Coordinator
(775) 722-8339

or

Tim Burke
Alturas BLM
(530)

SNC-approved Performance Measures:

1. Number of People Reached

Meeting notes and sign in sheets for presentations indicate that approximately 45 people were reached through the project. Because this number is not as impressive as the Group had intended, we have secured education and outreach funds for 2010-2011. The Group plans to partner with similar resource groups to put on an education day for students and create literature on their efforts.

2. Dollar Value of Resources Leveraged for the Sierra Nevada

Funding Source:	SNC	Federal	Other
Coordinator Position	\$48,000		
Cold Springs/Norte Project	\$58,000		
BLM ARRA Funds		\$303,000	
BLM HLI Funds		\$100,000	
IMWJV			\$10,000
In-Kind Match			\$36,000
Totals	\$106,000	\$403,000	\$46,000

The above referenced funds leveraged include federal partner funds, private initiative funds as well as time donated by members for meetings, travel, site visits, grant writing and review and project support.

3. Number and Type of Jobs Created

This project created the coordinator position which employed one project coordinator part time for 24 months.

4. Number of New, Improved, or Preserved Economic Activities

The group anticipates that the habitat improvement will have a positive effect on the recreation, ranching and natural resource industries in Northeastern California. By not listing the Greater Sage grouse, activities that may be reduced or eliminated that generate an economic benefit will continue to exist in harmony with our habitat improvement projects.

Not only are we working to improve habitat which will support local industry such as recreation and ranching, we are employing crews to provide the juniper reduction work, thus further improving the local economic input.

5. Number of Special Significance Sites Protected or Preserved

The two juniper reduction project sites were surveyed for cultural and botanical resources. The project Coordinator was able to change the material for which the riparian area in the Dodge Unit 7 project will be fenced (from wood to t-posts and wire) in order extend the acreage we could fence in protecting cultural resources identified by the survey crews. Additionally, in Unit 1 we were also able to identify a few significant cultural sites prior to treatment. These areas were flagged and will be avoided during treatment.



Figure 11. *Green flags were used to identify cultural sites. The project coordinator walked the project site with the contractor to make certain there was a clear understanding about where activity should not take place.*

6. Acre Feet of Water Supply Conserved or Enhanced

The Buffalo-Skedaddle Group has begun the first of their habitat improvement projects this year. Surveys of the area indicate that western Juniper has invaded numerous riparian areas within the project sites. Dodge Reservoirs Unit 7 has a significant meadow for which we are working to protect. In future years, we intend to monitor the effects of the juniper removal efforts. We anticipate a return of a healthy mosaic of riparian area vegetation as well as a healthy plant community in the uplands adjacent to drainage and riparian areas where juniper removal has taken place.

At this point in time, we do not yet have measureable data to report.

7. Acres of Land Improved or Restored

As previously mentioned throughout the report, the Initiative has treated (or is in the process of treating) 1500 acres of western Juniper. The removal of juniper is anticipated to increase Sage grouse habitat as well as the habitat for other sagebrush dependant species.

A secondary benefit to the juniper treatments is the reduction of fuels. The Dodge reservoir project is adjacent to the Dodge Reservoir which is a popular recreation area. By reducing

the fuel source and working to improve a native plant community adjacent to the site, the likelihood of catastrophic fire is reduced.

8. Percent of Pre-Project and Planning Efforts Resulting in Project Implementation

The influx of SNC funding into the Buffalo-Skedaddle Initiative allowed the group to move from the Conservation Strategy planning phase to implementation. The addition of a project coordinator provided the organization and momentum to actually apply the Conservation Strategy. The Buffalo-Skedaddle Initiative is now a shining example of moving from planning to implementation.

9. Measurable Changes in Knowledge or Behavior

The measureable changes in knowledge behavior can be seen in the amount of interest presented by local landowners in response to the NRCS sage grouse habitat enhancement program. Local landowners have been introduced for the program and are in the process of negotiating agreements with the NRCS.

Although the transfer of knowledge to the local ranching community has been beneficial, the Initiative has identified education and outreach resulting changes in knowledge and behavior as one of our major goals in the upcoming year. We as an organization were not completely satisfied with our efforts in this area and are working to correct it this year.