



STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 6

Report To: Open Space Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: February 28, 2022

Staff Contact: Lyndsey Boyer, Open Space Manager, lboyer@carson.org
Georgia Vasey, Senior Natural Resource Specialist, gvasey@carson.org

Agenda Title: For Possible Action: Discussion and possible action regarding the annual monitoring report for the Horsecreek Ranch Conservation Easement for 2021.

Staff Summary: The Horsecreek Ranch conservation easement requires annual monitoring reports. This item is for the Committee to review and possibly approve the annual monitoring report for 2021.

Agenda Action: Formal Action/Motion

Time Requested: 15 minutes

Proposed Motion

I move to approve the annual monitoring report as presented.

Board's Strategic Goal

Quality of Life

Previous Action

N/A

Background/Issues & Analysis

The Horsecreek Ranch conservation easement was purchased by Carson City in 2009 to protect the property from development. The conservation easement requires annual monitoring to ensure that the property is being maintained and continues to be in good condition. The initial assessment condition photos were taken in 2009 and each year staff has taken new photos at the same locations for comparison. The 2021 monitoring visit was conducted on October 21, 2021. The areas that require continued monitoring are the lower drainage area, the cattle loafing area, the channel headcut as well as a new lateral irrigation ditch.

In 2020, the property was sold by Mr. Michael Fagen to Mr. Frank Hochuli, and is being managed by Mr. Jeffrey Cosker. Mr. Hochuli had made plans last year to build a home, garage, and watchman's quarter on the property, but has since updated his plans and will wait for at least two more years. Plans are moving forward with NV Energy to run electrical lines in conjunction with the neighboring property, Schultz Ranch. The lines will be aboveground on the Schultz property, then run underground within the Horsecreek Ranch property. The proposed and ongoing developments are located on the portion of the property that is outside the conservation easement and therefore not subject to the conditions and restrictions outlined in the conservation easement. However, future residential developments should still be evaluated when ready to confirm they will not impact adjacent parcels or the conservation value of the property.

ATTACHMENTS

Exhibit A: 2021 Horsecreek Ranch Conservation Easement Monitoring Report

Applicable Statute, Code, Policy, Rule or Regulation

N/A

Financial Information

Is there a fiscal impact? Yes No

If yes, account name/number:

Is it currently budgeted? Yes No

Explanation of Fiscal Impact:

Alternatives

Provide comments or edits to the monitoring report prior to approval.

Board Action Taken:

Motion: _____

1) _____

2) _____

Aye/Nay

(Vote Recorded By)

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

Date: October 21, 2021

Start time: 8:15 a.m. depart from office

End time: 2:00 p.m. return to office

Monitor(s): Lyndsey Boyer & Georgia Vasey (Carson City)

Persons Attending Inspection (landowner or others): Jeffrey Cosker

Current Landowner(s): Frank Hochuli

Mailing Address: 2075 Long Hollow Dr, Reno, NV 89521

Easement Address: APNs 007-051-82, 007-051-83, and 007-051-84. Located approximately 2.5 miles west of the paved terminus of Kings Canyon Road.

Easement size: 175.33 acres

Parcel size: 3 parcels, 201 acres total

On-site land use(s): Agricultural in the meadow, open sagebrush and forest in the plan.

Surrounding land uses(s): On west, north, and east, the lands are under public ownership by Carson City Open Space and the U.S. Forest Service. The land use consists of undeveloped, dispersed recreation. On the south, the lands are under private ownership and the land use continues as agricultural.

Conservation Easement, Exhibit C, Prohibited Uses and Practices

1. Impairment of Protected Values

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

2. Commercial or Industrial Use

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

3. Construction

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

4. Subdivision

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

5. Motorized Vehicles

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

6. Tree Cutting

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

7. Dumping

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

8. Soil Degradation

Minor changes. The landowner is in compliance.

Near the southeast corner, one specific area is being monitored for landscape change. This low drainage area of the meadow appears to be vegetated and stable, though a few isolated mounds or hummocks may be the result of cattle trampling. A qualitative assessment with the photo comparisons may be deceptive due to the time of year each photo was taken – either during the growing season or at the end of the season after grasses were grazed and/or senesced. However, monitoring completed in 2021 just followed a rain event and illustrates that the erosion is slightly increasing in the hummocks area. Additionally, the new headcut observed in 2017 on the creek northeast of the cabins was monitored in 2021 and appears to be revegetating naturally, although certain pockets showed signs of scouring with new soil exposed. This site and associated reach of creek should continue to be monitored in future years to confirm successful revegetation of the headcut, or to document change in size or location, as it could migrate upstream. The previous owner of the property, Mr. Fagen had previously applied for USDA EQIP grants to fund the design and repair plan for the existing headcuts on the property. Access challenges and a lack of available contractors willing to complete the work prevented successful funding awards for this project. In the future, a conservation organization such as the Great Basin Institute or Nevada Division of Forestry could be contracted to complete the work through non-mechanized means, which would mitigate the access and contractor availability challenges. We advise mitigation to be explored and hope a repair design is revisited.

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

Photo Point: The photo of this drainage, located south of the cabins, has been included to document change and vegetation growth. N 39 07' 42.7" W 119 50' 10.2"

2010 Condition, photo taken November 1, 2010 (initial assessment – view west)



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021 (view west)



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

2013 Condition, photo taken July 23, 2013 (initial assessment – view south)



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021 (view south)



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021 (view south)



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

Photo Point: The photo of this headcut, located northeast of the cabins, has been included to document stream channel changes and erosion. N 39 07' 51.0" W 119 50' 11.4"

2018 Condition, photo taken October 8, 2018 (view north)



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021 (view north)



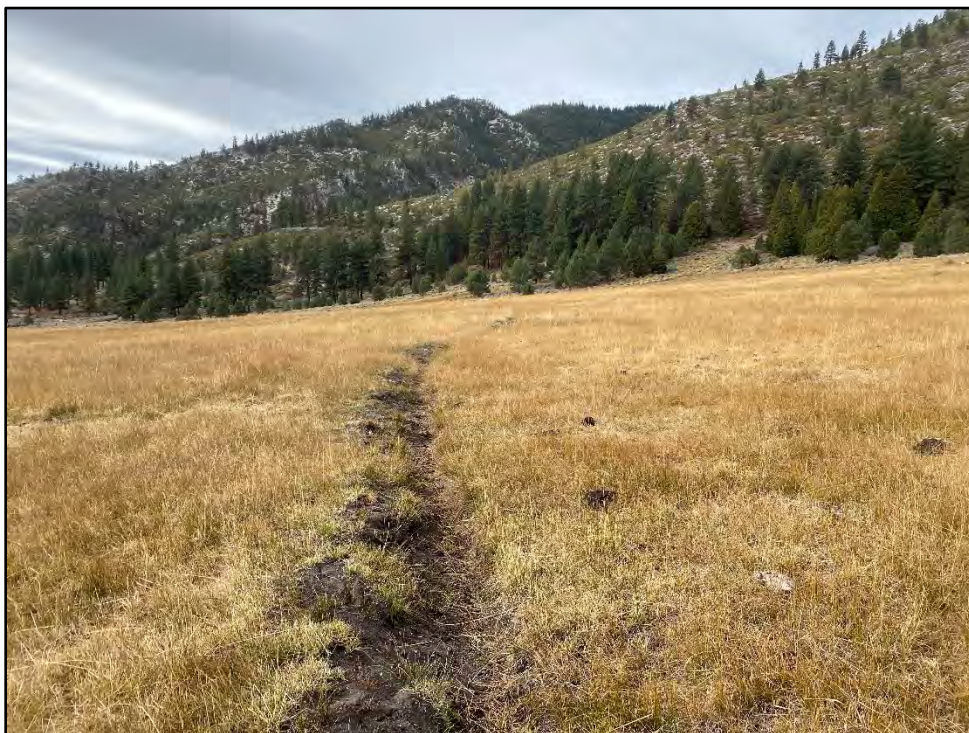
Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

Photo Point: The photo of this lateral irrigation ditch, located in the upper meadow, has been included to document site improvements. N 39° 7' 58.1196"W 119° 50' 14.0172"

2019 Condition, photo taken September 12, 2019 (view west)



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021 (view west)



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

9. Water Quality Degradation

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

It should be noted that specific measurements have never been taken to determine water quality. However, the average amount of surface water from Neal's Flume and two other springs is minimal and most of the water percolates into the ground to recharge the Carson City aquifer and/or reappear as groundwater discharge into Clear Creek. Due to these reasons, contamination from livestock grazing would be negligible.

10. Surface Alteration or Excavation

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

11. Fencing Restrictions

No change. The landowner is in compliance.

Additional Comments:

- Stewardship Account: There are no expenses to report. The account has a current balance of \$47,375.00.
- Mr. Jeffrey Cosker informed us that Mr. Hochuli has stalled his plans to build a home, garage, and watchman's quarters within the portion of the property that is outside the Conservation Easement for at least the next two years. When construction plans are taken off hold, building plans for the proposed dwellings and outbuildings need to be submitted to Open Space Division staff for review and approval by the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) to ensure the proposed construction does not impact or violate tenets of the Conservation Easement. Once approved, the plans must be submitted to the Carson City Planning Division.
- Plans are moving forward with NV Energy to run electrical lines in conjunction with the neighboring property, Schultz Ranch. The lines will be aboveground on the Schultz property, then run underground within the Horsecreek Ranch property. Finalized plans are complete and the installation is expected to occur soon.
- Mr. Hochuli has completed some recent improvements, such as fixing the upper gate. The gate adjacent to Kings Canyon Road still needs maintenance.
- The irrigation ditch known as "Neal's Flume" was not flowing during this field monitoring visit and appears to have been dry due to the recent drought for some time; lateral ditches in

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

the meadow were also not flowing. While the lower portion of the Flume was maintained in spring 2018, upper portions of the Flume remain overgrown. This upper portion of the Flume will be monitored in the future and will be cleared if the vegetation begins to impact water flow and delivery.

- The Pasture Utilization and Condition Assessment was conducted by Carson City staff and included a visual observation of the monitoring plot as described in the Baseline Condition Report (Photo Point 9). A diversity of pasture, wetland associated (*Juncus*), and invasive grasses (cheatgrass) exhibited various utilization levels depending on species. It should be noted that cover of invasive grasses (cheatgrass) has reduced. Overall, grazing at this location appeared patchy and an average stubble height of 1.25” was recorded.
- Bull thistle remains present throughout the meadow. Due to COVID-19, volunteer projects did not happen in 2020 or 2021 at the property. Carson City staff will coordinate with volunteer groups, such as Boy Scouts of America or Muscle Powered, to assist with eradication efforts next year pending on their level of comfort and local restrictions. Mr. Cosker has indicated that he and Mr. Hochuli are committed to working with staff towards continuing the previous eradication efforts. As the time frame for identification and removal (July-August) is short, recruiting volunteers and organizing a program can be challenging. In the future it may be possible to contract with conservation organizations such as the Great Basin Institute or Nevada Division of Forestry crew to complete large scale removal efforts.
- The previous reports recommended the monitoring of the cattle loafing area located just outside the gated entrance to the cabins with the goal to limit further expansion. The following documentation provides photo points and respective measurements. The disturbed area consists primarily of cheatgrass and foxtail barley although sagebrush is successfully re-establishing on both the north and east edge of the disturbed area. The disturbed area has shown an overall reduction in size over the last two monitoring cycles, and this monitoring period showed that the extent of the loafing area north-south has decreased by 1 foot, while the extent east-west has decreased by 25 feet since 2020. Lastly, it is important to note that depending on the timing of monitoring, cheatgrass abundance and cover varies indicating that cattle are likely grazing the cheatgrass. Cows were not present for this field visit.

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

2013 Condition, photo taken July 23, 2013 (initial assessment – view south):
The bare area measures 157' north to south along the sagebrush.



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021:
The bare area measures 156' north to south along the sagebrush.



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

2013 Condition, photo taken July 23, 2013 (initial assessment – view west):
The bare area measures 145' east to west along the gravel road.



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021:
The bare area measures 120' east to west along the gravel road.



Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

- Mr. Cosker mentioned that he has been in touch with the Nevada Division of Forestry who wants to complete fuel reduction on the property. This would include removing dead trees and thinning areas that are overgrown to increase fire resistance. As the Nevada Division of Forestry is stretched thin with staff currently, these plans are currently on hold.
- In addition to monitoring and evaluating the current conditions related to the terms of the conservation easement, staff believes that it is important to document external factors that could potentially affect the future condition of the property. Specifically, the endemic localized infestation of non-native insects around the alpine forests. About one mile above Horsecreek Ranch, the white satin moth has caused significant defoliation to the aspen trees around Spooner Summit and bark beetles have caused significant damage to the conifers between Spooner Summit and Glenbrook. During this field visit, defoliation of the nearby aspen grove was not observed. Continued monitoring for this insect will be completed at each annual sit visit.

Summary:

The results of the 2021 audit of the Horsecreek Ranch Conservation Easement by Carson City demonstrate that the property generally continues to be in good condition and the landowner is in full compliance with both the letter and the spirit of the Easement. The report identifies three recommendations for active measures and likely coordination between Carson City and the landowner:

- 1) Continue to work to identify a mitigation strategy and repair plan for existing headcuts to be implemented in 2022.
- 2) Continued removal of bull thistle and potential forest thinning if possible.
- 3) Gate improvements at Kings Canyon Rd. The gate appears to be rotted and needs maintenance.

Landowner comments:

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

The landowner is cooperative about addressing, over time and in consideration of available resources, additional improvements to the conditions on the property in a joint effort with Carson City and other local agencies.

Written by: Georgia Vasey 1/3/2022
Georgia Vasey Date

Reviewed by: Lyndsey Boyer 1/3/2022
Lyndsey Boyer Date

Landowner: Frank Hochuli 1/3/2022
Frank Hochuli Date

Carson City Open Space – Conservation Easement Monitoring

Please indicate the number of the following attachments to this report. Be sure to date and sign all materials and provide a description or map showing where on-site photos and illustrations were taken:

Aerial photos

Ground photos (digital or other)

- 14 ground photos – Within the Report
- 33 ground photos – Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation (7C is missing)
- Digital photos taken, copied into a written report

Maps and illustrations

Other:

Date Inspection Report Sent To Landowner: 7/23/2021

Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 1A (view northeast): A photo point located at the edge of the shrub dominated granitic fan and the irrigated meadow. This would be used to monitor shrub invasion into the meadow area indicating irrigation problems.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009:
(GPS coordinate: N39° 07' 54.912" W119° 50' 11.4")



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 1B (view northwest): A photo point located at the edge of the shrub dominated granitic fan and the irrigated meadow. This would be used to monitor shrub invasion into the meadow area indicating irrigation problems. Note: This photo point is adjacent to the new headcut.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009:
(GPS coordinate, different the PP#1A: N39° 07' 51.384" W119° 50' 11.04")



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 2 (view south): A photo point located in bottom of the active stable drainage channel to the southeast of the house to monitor side slope stability.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009:
(GPS coordinate updated in 2010: N39 07' 54.9" W119 50' 11.3")



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Photo Point 3 (view south): A photo point located immediately east of the house in the active channel where rip-rap has been placed for stabilization.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 4A (view north): A photo point located at the most northern active headcut after required stabilization to monitor effectiveness.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 4B (detail): A photo point located at the most northern active headcut after required stabilization to monitor effectiveness.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 4C (detail): A photo point located at the most northern active headcut after required stabilization to monitor effectiveness.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



Photo Point 5 (view east): A photo point on the hillside conveyance ditch at a location where a previous washout has occurred to monitor ditch maintenance.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Photo Point 6A (view north): A photo point from the Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a west to east perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 6B (view center): A photo point from the Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a west to east perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Photo Point 6C (view south): A photo point from the Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a west to east perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



Photo Point 7A (view southeast): A photo point from Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a north to south perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Photo Point 7B (view south): A photo point from Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a north to south perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009

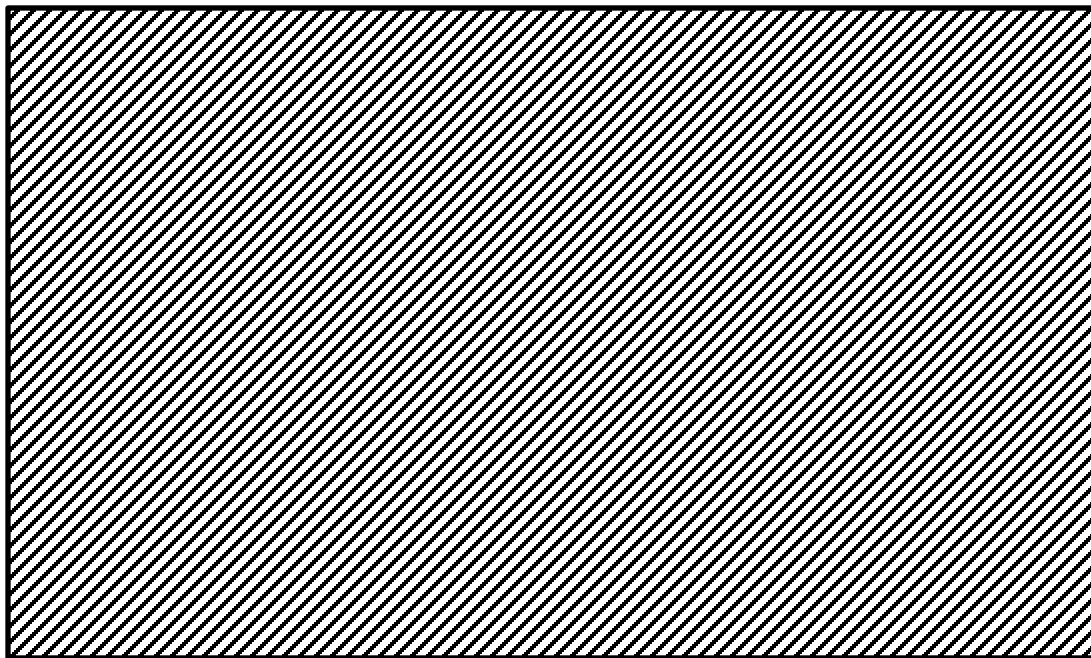


Photo Point 7C (view southwest): A photo point from Kings Canyon Road that would provide panoramic views of the ranch from a north to south perspective.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, missing due to weather



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 8A (view northwest): A photo point overlooking the meadow from the east to the west located next to the property corner along the new road.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 8B (view west): A photo point overlooking the meadow from the east to the west located next to the property corner along the new road.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2020 Condition, photo taken October 9, 2020



Baseline Report Repeat Photo Documentation

Photo Point 9: A permanently marked 100' x 100' area to monitor pasture condition. This annual inventory will be used to monitor not only pasture condition but irrigation efficiency, vegetative response to drought and appropriate livestock utilization.

2009 Baseline Condition, photo taken February 4, 2009



2021 Condition, photo taken October 21, 2021



Horsecreek Ranch Monitoring Map

