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Executive Summary

1. Executive Summary

The Great Basin Institute proposes to have 175 AmeriCorps members who will perform environmental stewardship, natural resource monitoring, evaluation, and public outreach, while engaging in workforce development throughout the state. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving at-risk ecosystems, enhanced scientific understanding of species conservation, and promoted adaptive management practices. In addition, AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 250 volunteers who will be engaged in restoration efforts and public outreach initiatives. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area environmental stewardship. The CNCS investment of \$567,438 will be matched with \$1.1 million dollars in public funding and \$350,000 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

B. Program Design 1. Problem/Needs. Since 1999, our University-founded AmeriCorps program has addressed the correlative nexus of needs related to our environment, public education on natural resources priorities, and the economic impacts of conservation policy. Today, these focal areas are nested within what is considered the most challenging conservation issue in our state's history--the federal listing of the Greater sage-grouse as an endangered species. Often compared to the "Spotted Owl" of our time, this conservation priority uniquely illustrates the critical intervention needs confronting our state and, as such, provides a succinct, compelling argument for AmeriCorps investment in our region. Moreover, the complexity and urgency of this conservation crisis suggests an increased demand for the services of the Nevada Conservation Corps, a program now integral to statewide conservation planning, the monitoring and assessment of natural resources, as well as the implementation of restoration actions and the evaluation of such efforts.

The sage-grouse controversy couldn't have come at a worse time. Nevada continues to suffer from the lingering effects of the housing and bank crisis. Beyond the incremental recovery of tourism and real estate sectors, Nevada relies on our vast public lands to support mining, ranching, agriculture, and the energy industry for economic development. However, the potential listing of the species presents formidable challenges for continued industry growth-- much of the sage-brush range already is being drilled, explored, or has pending permits and leases for renewable energy, gas, mining and ranching. Land use industry activities dot Nevada's sage grouse range. However, under an agreement between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and environmental groups, the agency has until the end of

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September 2015 to propose rules governing the bird's habitat or to decide to change its mind, a deadline that weighs heavily on our state's economic, political, and public land management leadership.

The fiscal implications are most significant. Estimates of the total economic impact depend on which conservation plans the government chooses. Plans calling for the strictest conservation measures could cost our region up to 31,000 jobs, up to \$5.6 billion in annual economic activity and more than \$262 million in lost state and local revenue every year, according to a widely cited study conducted by lawyer Lowell Baier that is accepted by interests on both sides of the debate. If the greater sage grouse is listed as threatened, our region could be accountable for as much as \$1 billion in conservation costs. Adding to that burden, Nevada funds land programs through user fees, rather than out of general funds; declaring a species threatened makes it harder to generate those fees. "If the hunters can't hunt, if the miners can't mine, if you don't have that capital, then you lose," said Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. A billion-dollar tab to save greater sage grouse habitat, he added, "is almost insurmountable."

A critical step toward balancing economic development with conservation priorities requires a science-based assessment of range conditions to anticipate and model environmental impacts of land use policy, especially as these actions affect this sensitive species. Sagebrush communities in the Great Basin are highly threatened, with half of the original area already lost to cheatgrass invasion and juniper encroachment. These landscape adaptations have increased fire risk, conditions only exacerbated by the influence of climate change and the persistence of drought (Drought in the Western and Midwestern United States cost approximately \$20 billion in 2012). As a result, preliminary assessments indicate a marked reduction of available water for wildlife habitat, and, on a larger scale, increased fragmentation of corridor linkages that support species range and productivity. While important progress has been made in terms of understanding the scale and scope of this conservation crisis, management efforts to reset the balance of vegetation in the Great Basin and surrounding areas have been hampered by lack of information. Managers need more information about the effectiveness of different types of restoration practice like prescribed forest thinning and herbicide application. They need feedback on how the overall ecosystem would react to such treatments. They need research conducted over multiple sites, yielding data that recorded change over time which could be applied to local environmental circumstances.

In summary, our underfunded government agencies struggle to provide successful conservation intervention programs to address these compelling environmental and constituency consensus

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challenges. The steady, and at times overwhelming, increased demand for NCC services attests to our successes, while underscoring the ongoing need for a Corps program in Nevada to aid in the recovery of this species. Our program's focus is now largely centered on demonstrating successful conservation actions, thereby supporting and building stakeholder consensus, and fostering an environment in which agencies, private industry, and the general public may agree upon viable strategies that reconcile the competing demands of environmental stewardship and economic development. The Nevada Conservation Corps will support our environmental community by meeting such identified needs through the deployment of technically proficient restoration teams to enhance sage grouse habitat, mitigate fire threats, reduce the spread of invasive species, and limit motorized encroachments while our trained monitoring and assessment teams capture critical data on the effectiveness and condition of range health. In doing so, our program will also provide valuable training and workforce development opportunities for Corps members who seek careers in natural resource management.

2. Theory of Change and Logic Model Chart. As our proposed model reflects, AmeriCorps members will engage in meaningful workforce development while meeting national performance targets related to environmental stewardship. The theory of change that underwrites our service efforts is derived from applied research from the science of forestry, wildlife biology, and rangeland ecology. Our logic model demonstrates the leveraging of human, fiscal, and agency resources to perform conservation actions aimed to generate quantifiable outcomes tiered to the findings and recommendations rendered by the best available science. The Corps' primary forms of service interventions are predicated on substantial planning, research analysis, and peer-reviewed investigations that indicate a robust, evidence-based approach.

In 2010, a foundational conservation document, the Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF), was published to aid interagency scientists, policy analysts, and industry stakeholders in an effort to proactively implement conservation in priority landscapes and to provide the greatest benefit to sage-grouse populations. This framework provides a science-based approach that will allow our partners and our Corps to integrate conservation actions at a project level that makes sense across Nevada landscapes. Specifically, critical natural resource challenges related to sage grouse species recovery will be addressed through crew-based services that reduce forest fire threat through fuels reduction and habitat restoration. In addition to the services, crews will also address the need for the treatment and abatement of noxious weeds, as well as post-fire re-seeding and native plant re-introduction. Travel management implementation measures, including the designation, restoration, and closure of illegal

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routes, will also support sage-grouse conservation objectives. Hand crews will learn the necessary skills, techniques, and prescription methods to effectively support these "boots-on-the-ground" implementation strategies. Quantifiable indicators of successful intervention activities include post-restoration forest density, invasive grass frequency, perennial grass density or frequency, and sagebrush density and size class (HAF). Additionally, to support agency decision-making and capture such indicators, our Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring teams will evaluate and characterize range health conditions and provide baseline data to determine restoration efficacy. These monitoring teams will also attend public workshops, present at regional conservation conferences, and support geospatial data analysis that offers both the scientific community and the general public credible data on the status of our public land health and condition. What follows, then, is a brief overview of our conservation initiatives and the science that supports agency-directed methods and the probability of achieving our intended outcomes.

Interventions: Forest Fuels Reduction & Habitat Enhancement.

To help reduce fuels and fire hazards and to create defensible space in the wildland-urban interface, regional land managers have conducted thinning-piling-burning treatments that have effectively demonstrated the value and need of addressing forest conditions through varied fuels reduction strategies. In efforts to reduce high surface fuel loads and potential wildfire severity, a variety of fuel treatments have been applied, evaluated, and assessed for viability and positive conservation outcomes. Studies of common fuels reduction management practices have offered researchers opportunities to quantitatively measure their efficacy in wildfires. Using the availability of pre-wildfire data, research data offers the necessary information to assess the effects of different types of fuel treatments. Such research considers tree mortality and tree damage in the context of wildfire severity and is evaluated in units, with thin-only treatments, thinning followed by prescribed burning treatments, and no treatment. Comparative field trials have provided resource managers with the definitive evidence and specific scientific information needed to determine which fuel treatment methods will be the most successful at reducing fuels and mitigating wildfire severity on species habitat.

There also exists a rich body of evidence that supports the success of extensive fuel treatments in riparian areas, key habitat for sage-grouse reproduction. Research indicates fuel treatments favorably affect fire behavior, vegetation, water, and overall diversity within the riparian areas. By using a before-and-after approach and comparing riparian zones buffered from typical fuel treatments to

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those unbuffered from treatments, researchers determined the effects and effectiveness of fuel treatments in riparian areas, providing land managers with information and guidance necessary to inform future range conservation decisions. Corps members will reduce fuels through varied prescriptions, thereby improving forest health and lessening fire risk.

Interventions: Native Plant Re-vegetation & Exotic Plant Abatement. As the number, size, and severity of wildfires escalate across the western U.S., so does the need for post-fire rehabilitative efforts. With the increase in post-fire restoration, researchers examined and quantified the effectiveness and ecological effects of these treatments. Studies included an evidence-based review of post-fire seeding literature and an assessment of Forest Service Burned Area Reports to examine seeding trends and the probability of successful restoration actions. Forty papers and 67 Burned Area Reports dated between 1970 and 2006 revealed an increased use of native species and annual cereal grains/hybrids during seeding treatments over time, with native species dominating seed mixes, and reveal marked improvements to rangeland ecosystem recovery. Results from related studies also suggest that fall herbicide application can extend the restoration maintenance interval even further through reduction of brome grass density. Corps members will arrest exotic plant species succession and re-vegetate Sage-grouse habitat using treatment methods that include broadcast seeding, weed abatement, and re-vegetation with bare root plant stock, resulting in healthy ecosystem resilience and improved watershed functionality.

Interventions: Trail construction, restoration, re-designation, and maintenance. New conservation prescriptions in land use and resource management plans have been introduced in order to conserve sage-grouse. Part of these new conservation terms and conditions on activities permitted in sage grouse habitat prohibit noise levels associated with any anthropogenic activity to exceed 10dBA above natural ambient noise levels at the periphery of sage grouse mating, foraging, nesting, and brood-rearing sites during each season of use by the species. Also, imposed limits on surface disturbance to less than 3 percent per section of priority habitat are an established benchmark based on wildlife conservation studies.

As effective means to enforce such regulations, the closure and re-designation of motorized trail systems is now considered necessary to support species recovery and protection. The restriction of access to the proximity of key habitat effectively supports conservation goals and objectives related to watershed protection and erosion control limits. Corps members will support the signing, decommissioning, and restoration closures of illegal trails and travel routes to obtain the desired outcome of increased protection of Sage-grouse habitat and the enforcement of conservation land use

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policies.

Interventions: Natural Resource Assessments, Inventories, and Monitoring. The Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring Strategy is a high-level document developed by the BLM with input from academia, the Agricultural Research Service, and the United States Geological Survey. An internal review confirmed the strategy addresses the BLM's multiple-use and sustainable yield mission and an external peer review verified the AIM Strategy is built on sound science. The rigor within the document is intentional and will ensure the generation of defensible data to inform BLM managers and the public about key ecological processes for maintaining sustainable ecosystems. The AIM Strategy outlines a cross-program vision for data collection, analysis, use and reporting in the BLM. Moving forward, collection of monitoring data will follow a structured framework and include: (1) use of core quantitative indicators and consistent methods; (2) implementation of a statistically-valid, scalable sampling framework; (3) application and integration of remote sensing technologies, e.g. vegetation/ landcover maps; (4) implementation of electronic field-data collectors and enterprise data management; and (5) capture of legacy data in a digital format (BLM Technical Note 440, Attachment 2).

The AIM Strategy demonstratively benefits all levels of the BLM, and collaborating agencies, by establishing a framework for collection of monitoring data that is consistent and compatible across scales, programs, and administrative boundaries. Implementation of the AIM Strategy provides defensible, quantitative data to inform decisions and allows data to be collected once and used many times for many purposes. Corps members will be trained in the AIM protocols and collect landscape-level data across the state, resulting in enhanced science-based land use policy decision-making and informed adaptive management strategies.

3. Evidence Base. The NCC will achieve targets through the proven strategies that are supported by institutional research that incorporates conceptual and statistical models for natural resource management. Our proposed conservation actions are based upon a strong body of evidence derived from best available applied environmental research. Resource management plans, environmental impact statements, and interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed science are the basis for the methods used for our monitoring and restoration actions. The findings and recommendations of the science of adaptive ecosystem management provide causal conclusions from which our discrete projects are designed, implemented, and evaluated.

Two recent and complementary documents are enclosed to substantiate the credibility and evidence

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basis for our programmatic activities. The 2010 Habitat Assessment Framework is a culmination of over three decades of ecological research and analysis and is the primary science document that directs agency actions regarding the required methods for restoration and anticipated outcomes of our conservation measures. The second document, Secretarial Order No. 3336, issued on January 5, 2015, is a concise briefing on the policies and strategy mandates set forth by the Department of Interior with respect to sage-grouse conservation. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell released the five-page Order to assert the critical policies for preventing and suppressing rangeland fires and for restoring landscapes that do burn. While announcing the Order, Jewell emphasized that "targeted action is urgently needed to conserve habitat for the greater sage-grouse and other wildlife in the Great Basin, as well as to maintain ranching and recreation economies that depend on sagebrush landscapes," while adding that "the secretarial order further demonstrates our strong commitment to work with our federal, state, tribal and community partners to reduce the likelihood and severity of rangeland fire, stem the spread of invasive species, and restore the health and resilience of sagebrush ecosystems." These two documents suggest that not only a rich body of evidence exists for our conservation measures, but also the agencies are now pressing forward with urgent mandates from the highest levels of national conservation leadership.

4. Notice Priority. As an accredited 21st Century Service Corps, our program directly supports the CNCS priorities for engaging youth for the purpose of protecting, restoring and enhancing America's great outdoors. The Nevada Conservation Corps' mission, goals and objectives closely align with the Corporation's intent to realize high quality, cost effective environmental projects on public lands. Our well established agreements with federal, state, county and municipal land managers allow for the NCC to further workforce development opportunities for our next generation of resource managers, advancing public engagement with public lands.

Our service initiatives also align with the 2015 national funding priorities for environmental stewardship, specifically promoting the improvement of at-risk ecosystems through the assessment, restoration, and preservation of natural resources and species habitat. Our proposed service interventions also positively influence the correlating areas of disaster response (wildfire & flooding prevention) and economic opportunity (allowing continued private industry growth through environmental compliance). Our Corps' efforts toward building capacity within national service well support the intent of congress to maximize the impact of investment for the greatest public benefit.

5. Member Training . Our plan for member development, training, and supervision achieves the desired outcomes of the NCC by ensuring members possess the skills and motivation to perform

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needed services. The NCC has developed a weeklong pre-service orientation program for team members and interns during which members are introduced to their service location, the services they will perform, the AmeriCorps service family, prohibited activities, the benefits of National Service, citizenship training, the NCC's support structure, as well as environmental history. Conservation team members receive certification in first aid, as well as training in chainsaw operation, trail construction, or arid lands restoration, and "Leave No Trace" ethics, earning certifications from the Red Cross, and the US Department of Agriculture. Monitoring and evaluation interns also receive training in first aid, as well as specialized training facilitated by their host site supervisor(s) specific to monitoring and assessment protocols. Additionally, members of the resource and species monitoring program will go through extensive technical training that will certify them in federal protocols and practices, as well as safety and job hazard analysis considerations.

We will also continue to implement our Leadership Academy for professional development. Topics will include conflict management, advanced wilderness first aid, team building, project quality-assurance, reporting protocols, professional communication, advanced restoration techniques and training. Much of this training will be provided by partner agencies, who are asked to give guest lectures on the ways in which civic obligation can be met through careers in federal, state, and county public environmental agencies. This training also equips members with the skills to complete the conservation work identified in our performance measurements.

All NCC field staff supervisors take part in an orientation session where they are trained in Great Basin Institute and AmeriCorps policies; many are former members who relate well to incoming members with less experience. Our focus on member development enables AmeriCorps participants, over the course of 2-3 years, to move from a team member position to a crew leader position and, finally, to a staff supervisor position. Special accommodations for those with disabilities will be arranged and managed professionally through guidance with the volunteer's family and select support services.

6. Supervision. The continuous communication between conservation team members, service interns, and NCC program staff ensures that the members will receive adequate support and guidance throughout their term of service. Our conservation team members and monitoring interns serve throughout Nevada. Each conservation team is managed by a GBI-trained field staff supervisor. This allows the NCC to maintain consistent policies and programmatic functions while working with different partners, and at different sites. Service sites are selected based on the needs of our project partners. In selecting service sites, the NCC seeks projects that are innovative and sustainable by

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design, that reflect strong leadership, and that benefit communities. Project partners are selected based on their commitment to our program and to the AmeriCorps experience. To further enhance our supervisory efforts, partners agree to provide leadership to members and to enhance member experience through education and training that reinforces regulatory compliance. All partners are educated about national service and are provided with detailed policies regarding the treatment of our members. All NCC service sites are monitored through a feedback loop that includes written evaluations of the service performed by members, in addition to verbal communication with NCC's staff supervisors. Our conservation team members have an organizational representative present at every service site. Moreover, each field supervisor receives training from GBI to make certain the common elements of the program are reflected at each site.

7. Member Experience. Our strategy for superior member experience begins with our search for the appropriate service candidates. In terms of member recruitment, the NCC strives to recruit a wide variety of applicants from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. We will advertise AmeriCorps member positions over the web at such sites as AmeriCorps, Great Basin Institute, Eco Jobs, Coolworks, Craigslist, Idealist, North American Association for Environmental Education, University of Nevada, Reno, and Las Vegas, University of Montana, National Recreation and Park Association, Western Nevada Community College, Truckee Meadows Community College, the Peace Corps Hotline, and Colorado State University. We also recruit members through community presentations, posters, and word-of-mouth in the regions where we operate. We will select applicants based on their past experience, skill base, and desire to perform environmental and/or community service. Applicants will be screened in a two-tier interviewing process. For our monitoring teams, we will look for people with one of two skill sets: college students and graduates with environmental or educational backgrounds, and/or experienced applicants who have taught or worked for agencies or environmental nonprofit organizations in the past. For seasonal, crew-based service positions we will recruit high school and college students or recent graduates, emphasizing diverse and underserved populations.

The rigorous training for both crew-based services and our monitoring teams offers members the opportunity to become skilled in the most prominent and current conservation practices, techniques, and methods. Crews learn the theory and concepts for treatment methods of invasive species, the technical aspects of forestry, and the restoration methods to promote land health resiliency. Our monitoring teams become proficient in rigorous, science-based methodologies used for range health assessment. The extensive training for backcountry service situates them well to favorably compete

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for employment in federal, state, and county environmental agencies.

Our commitment to promoting an enduring ethic of service and civic responsibility is demonstrated through the ongoing training, member development, and formal instruction. During member orientation, an established connection between the members' AmeriCorps experience and a life ethic of service is realized through citizenship discussions and presentations on the mission of AmeriCorps and other national service programs. In addition, structured readings, discussions, and lectures that incorporate both environmental topics and the significance of civic responsibility are provided through each season of service. Finally, we host an NCC celebration at the completion of the program year, during which we administer an exit evaluation, provide a slide show and film that encapsulates the experiences and accomplishments of members, while disseminating information on the AmeriCorps Alumni Association, and our own alumni network.

8. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification. Over the past fifteen years, the NCC brand has been prominently associated with AmeriCorps through combining logos on uniforms, hard hats, vehicles, stationary, host site facilities, publications, and press releases. Members and partners are briefed during service orientations on the AmeriCorps service family, and the integration of services within the communities. Our community-based partnerships promote the recognition and acknowledgement of national service, informing the public of the benefits and needs met by programs funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service. In doing so, AmeriCorps is known well by our continued presence in both urban and rural locations through ongoing AmeriCorps literacy outreach efforts, especially as we strategically plan with agencies the role and contribution of AmeriCorps in anticipated service initiatives. Moreover, our continued presence during national and regional volunteer events foregrounds the efficacy of AmeriCorps as an integral partner in environmental stewardship and community-based volunteerism.

Organizational Capability

3. Organizational Capability

1. Organization Background and Staffing

The Great Basin Institute is an interdisciplinary field studies organization that promotes environmental research, education, and conservation throughout the West. A public 501 (c)(3) non-profit, the institute advances ecological literacy and habitat restoration through educational outreach and direct service programs. GBI offers accredited courses and workshops in the environmental arts and sciences, providing a collaborative outreach network for the University and Community College system of Nevada. The Nevada Conservation Corps, a program of GBI, is currently administering its

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15th continuous AmeriCorps program year. Each competitive grant has secured incremental increases in partner match. Over the past 15 years, the NCC has established a track record of providing exceptional service to federal, state, and county natural resource managers and environmental nonprofits, raising over 35 million dollars for Nevada youth, environmental causes, and service-learning education. The proposed interventions for the 2015 AmeriCorps program are the result of substantive programmatic involvement of key stakeholders in our service region, relationships made robust through ongoing long term success stories.

The Great Basin Institute receives direction from its Board of Directors, eight PhD faculty from the University of Nevada, Reno, representing a range of environmental departments and disciplines. Jerry Keir, Executive Director of the Great Basin Institute, is the founder of the Nevada Conservation Corps. Jerry has served as a University AmeriCorps Service-Learning Coordinator, a Promise Fellow, and as the founding NCC Program Director. He has sixteen years of experience coordinating service-learning activities at the University and K-12 level, and substantive administrative experience working for nonprofit, university based centers, overseeing in excess of seventy four million dollars in grants, contracts, and scholarships for Nevada students and public lands. He will dedicate approximately 35% of his time to administering the NCC. Terry Christopher (B.S. Biology, Texas A&M University) is an Associate Director at GBI and manages GBI's Las Vegas Field Station. Terry has over 16 years' experience working on projects dedicated to the endangered desert tortoise and continues to serve as project coordinator for the US Fish and Wildlife Service desert tortoise line distance sampling project. Terry will be dedicating 35% of his time to the program. Nick Brancato (B.S. Environmental Geology, Northland College), served on a NCC service crew, rose to supervisor, and then began coordinating the crew operations before assuming his current leadership role as Director. His years with GBI and the crew program have provided him with ample experience leading crews, logistics, data collection and administrative management. He will dedicate 100% of his time to the program. Additional staffing includes positions that support crews (field supervisors), develop projects (crew coordinators), ensure compliance (program manager), and provide outreach and recruitment (human resources). Finally, indirect support from the institute includes a well-trained professional administrative staff that successfully manages a budget of 9 million dollars annually consistently without findings.

2. Compliance and Accountability

NCC Compliance Excellence. Since the inception of the institute, our independent A1-33 single audits have been without substantive findings. GBI's ability to track and maintain complete member files, conduct background checks, screen for criminal history, inspect service logs, provide site visit

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documentation, meet performance targets, advance sustainable operations, and generate substantive cash and in-kind contributions all demonstrate our ongoing commitment to managerial excellence. Should the NCC receive funds again, we expect to fully maintain this tradition of professionalism and dedication to national service regulatory and compliance statutes.

As a best practice, the NCC regulates, monitors, and evaluates progress toward objectives as well as compliance in the field and within partnering agencies. The NCC has a dedicated, full-time Human Resources/Compliance Officer who provides structured oversight of site supervisors, agency partners, and stakeholders who complete weekly project evaluations. Regular site visits and phone conferences also provide continued reinforcement of policy, provisions, and prohibited activities. AmeriCorps members also complete an evaluation of their experience on a weekly basis. This feedback is used to continually improve member experience, and to ensure that partners are satisfied with the service members provide. Mid-term and end-of-term member and staff performance reviews will also be used to inform our internal self-assessment process. All these measures provide sufficient communicative pathways to prevent, detect, and respond to any compliance issues that may arise. GBI addresses non-duplication, non-displacement, and non-supplementation requirements to ensure that placing a member at a site will not interfere with policies. This is noted in the agreements and information regarding these requirements is included within our AmeriCorps Host Site Manual.

3. Past Performance

The institute has supported volunteerism and community building since its inception as a service-based University field studies program. The Nevada Conservation Corps was founded, in part, to provide more structured approaches to mobilize students and citizens to volunteer across our service region. From 2011-14, 1,171 volunteers provided 12,388 hours of community service. The diverse groups of volunteers span the state and include K-12 students, university students, corporations, nonprofit organizations, families, and at-risk youth. Corps members play a significant role in volunteer recruitment and support, training and mentoring volunteers during events and programs.

The Nevada Conservation Corps has over a decade of a proven track record in defining and meeting community-based performance measures. During the three previous grant years (2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-2014), our program averaged 5,975 acres (target 4,400) improved through stewardship actions, and 167 miles (target 150) of trail maintained or constructed. The last two program years (2012-13 and 2013-14), our program surpassed goals of students served (target: 600) and students demonstrating increased environmental awareness (target: 450), averaging over 1800 student served during the reporting period.

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Member Enrollment. NCC member enrollment has been exemplary. During the 2011-2012 program year we enrolled 100% of our member slots; in 2012-2013, we enrolled 102%. In 2013-2014, year to date, we have enrolled 100% of our member slots including refill slots. During the 2013-2014 year, 41 of 42 quarter time slots were filled, leaving one slot unfilled. This issue was identified during the reporting process and corrective action was taken to ensure more rigorous tracking of member placement.

Member Retention. NCC member retention rates for the past three years remain consistently strong. In 2011-12, our retention rate was at 93.7%. In 2012-2013, our retention rate reached 96.6%, and the past grant year averaged 89.7%, bringing our three year rate to an exceptional average of 93.3%. Variation in retention rates is due primarily to members exiting the program for employment opportunities and the NCC continues to develop incentives to complete their term of service to obtain additional job opportunities within the institute through our Research Associate Program and our professional forestry initiatives.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

D. Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

1. Cost Effectiveness

The NCC has developed a wide range of partnerships that enable the program to move toward sustainability and greater cost effectiveness. A majority of the service provided to a project site or partner is based on grants and cooperative agreements. In 1999, we began with 3 partnerships. Today, we retain over one hundred partnerships. Our matching funds sources include a diverse portfolio of federal and non-federal agreements. The NCC maintains active agreements with every federal natural resource management agency in our state. Federal, state, county, and nonprofit environmental agencies have provided substantial funds to collaborate on a diversity of environmental service projects. Our cost per MSY is set at \$8,556, down from \$9,301 from the most recent grant year, and is well below the maximum allowed. With 66.31 MSY, the total budget request of CNCS is \$567,348. As a fixed grant program, these funds will sufficiently support living allowances for the 175 members that participate in the program. CNCS funds will account for approximately 30-35% of NCC program's total operating budget. The remaining \$1.1 million will be generated by service agreements with an additional \$350,000 matching funds will be raised through private funding.

NCC's cash match and in-kind contributions reflect a steady increase in broad-based financial support and demonstrate the viability of NCC's programmatic design and goals. The University and Community College System of Nevada will provide ongoing support for our program with an in-kind

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investment on behalf of the University of Nevada, Reno, providing our program with desks, phone lines, Xerox copiers, Internet access, computers, printers, equipment storage, and parking facilities. We are also provided with access to educational resources and materials through our numerous conservation partnerships at the federal, state, and county level.

2. Budget Adequacy

The budget for the fixed-cost grant proposal is based on the product of the total number of MSY (66.31), and the cost per MSY (\$8,556). This calculation results in a total budget request of \$567,348. The cost per MSY is calculated by determining the costs associated with supporting the members through stipends, training and development, and personal protective equipment. Additionally, all matching funds via cash match and in-kind are within CNCS guidelines.

Since inception, the NCC has successfully managed over \$35 million in funding. Non-federal sources of cash match is derived from existing statewide conservation bonds, recreational trails program funds, Lake Tahoe's Environmental Improvement Program, as well as foundation support from the National Park Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, National Science Foundation, NV Energy Foundation, the Redfield Foundation, and the Goggio Foundation. The NCC continues to foster collaborations with other CNCS programs, including the Corps Network's EAP program to supply resources supporting our project goals. As GBI continued to work toward expanding its capacity for developing partnerships, fundraising, and generating ongoing community volunteer support, the services we provide become more sustainable beyond federal funding sources.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

E. Evaluation Plan

The overarching theory of change guiding NCC's proposed program activities is that enhancing and restoring the sage grouse habitat will lead to recovery of the species, removing the need to list the sage grouse on the endangered species list. This would be positive for the state of Nevada, not only from an environmental perspective, but also from an economic perspective, as the conservation measures for an endangered species would be extremely costly and could negatively impact jobs and other economic factors in the region. NCC's proposed conservation activities to restore sage grouse habitat are evidence-based, as described in the program narrative.

The main anticipated outcomes of the NCC program activities are:

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- * Enhanced sage grouse habitat;
- * Reduction of fire threats;
- * Increase in food supplies and shelter for native animal species;
- * Reduction of the spread of invasive species and increased proliferation of native plants
- * Limitation of motorized encroachments
- * Development of publications on monitoring protocols and results and recommendations from science-based assessment of range conditions
- * Increased understanding of landscape-scale change and consequences
- * Enhanced career prospects for members

Several evaluation questions are proposed to guide the evaluation. NCC staff and the evaluator will meet early in year 1 to further refine and develop the evaluation questions and evaluation plan outlined below.

General Evaluation Questions

How well did NCC meet the needs of the clients?

Was fire danger reduced?

Was sage grouse habitat enhanced?

Were nonnative plant species reduced and native plants increased?

Were signs and trail closures and routes effective in reducing noise in sage grouse habitat?

Was data collected in accordance with the AIM Strategy useful for policy decision-making and informed adaptive management strategies?

Do members possess the skills and motivation to perform needed services?

Proposed Evaluation Design

NCC's main outcomes related to environmental/conservation efforts will be evaluated through a non-experimental, observational design in year 1 that triangulates several sources of evaluation data.

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Progress toward short-term outcomes will be monitored through program staff reports and documentation of acres of land treated; miles of trails constructed, restored, and signed; and number of plots/amount of acreage monitored. Additionally, partner surveys will be used to verify satisfactory completion of NCC's environmental activities at the target levels. A partner survey has already been in use for several years and will be revised as needed. A sample of crew supervisor and member work tour surveys will be another source of data confirming the type and quality of work completed. These surveys also have been in use for several years and will be revised to evaluate this grant cycle's program outcomes. Another key source of outcome data will be the natural resource assessments, inventories and monitoring conducted by a group of corps members. Corps members trained in the Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring Strategy (AIM) protocols will collect baseline landscape-level data across the state in year 1. Members will characterize range health conditions and provide baseline data to determine restoration efficacy. The baseline data will be used to build an evidence base for the program and to evaluate program effectiveness. After year 1 AIM data is available, NCC and the evaluator will work together to determine the feasibility of designing a quasi-experimental study of NCC environmental outcomes for years 2 and 3, in which landscape-level data related to NCC's environmental interventions would be compared in land areas served by NCC and those not served by NCC.

Member training and development will be evaluated using a pretest-posttest design. Member entry and exit surveys will be collected to evaluate their skills, civic engagement, motivations, and career aspirations. Options to further strengthen this design, perhaps with a member follow-up survey, will be explored with NCC staff and the evaluator during year 1.

Evaluator Qualifications

Should NCC be awarded funding, the Center for Program Evaluation (CPE) at the University of Nevada, Reno will conduct the external evaluation. CPE has been providing high quality, comprehensive professional evaluation services to a variety of organizations at the local, state, regional, and national level since 1999. CPE's mission is to provide an alternative to traditional evaluation services by working in partnership with those who strive to improve the quality of life in their communities. CPE uses an approach called partnership evaluation, which represents a conscious shift away from evaluator as "expert" and acknowledges the effectiveness of the evaluation is based on the combined expertise of all key stakeholders, including program providers, agency representatives,

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staff, and participants. CPE has experience working with numerous local, state, and national evaluation projects in three primary areas of specialization: health and wellness; education and youth development; and community and family services. CPE's Director, Director Dr. Elizabeth Christiansen, is well versed in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, as well as a broad spectrum of analysis and reporting strategies. Dr. Christiansen has conducted many program evaluations, including both process and outcome evaluations, during her 17 years' experience as an evaluator.

CPE has worked with NCC to evaluate their program for the past six years. The evaluation plan included a variety of formative and summative evaluation strategies to assess implementation strategies, outputs, and outcomes relevant to the goal of the Nevada Conservation Corp's AmeriCorps and Volunteer Program to accomplish crucial conservation initiatives while engaging young people in environmental education, community, and conservation activities. CPE developed coordinated instruments to collect evaluation data from all relevant sources (i.e., perceptions of volunteers, supervisors, interns, and partners) to triangulate with programmatic outputs (i.e., conservation activities and accomplishments) in order to monitor the program's progress toward their goals. Over the years, CPE has evaluated numerous other programs including service-learning initiatives, school district professional development, community health worker programs, family resource centers, parenting education, youth development, employment rehabilitation, substance abuse, and many University of Nevada Cooperative Extension programs.

The proposed evaluation budget is \$11, 148.00 per year, including 5% facilities and administration costs (\$504.67), \$10,045.25 salaries and fringe for CPE director and graduate assistant, \$549.90 for graduate assistant tuition, and \$48.18 for printing and supplies for analysis and reports.

Request for Approval of an Alternative Evaluation Approach

The Nevada Conservation Corps requests approval of an alternative evaluation approach due to the structure of the program as an environmental/conservation program. Data is not yet available to allow for a comparison of habitats in NCC served and non-served land. The proposed evaluation approaches described in the evaluation plan are the most rigorous options at the point in time in the NCC program, with the constraints described above. For the evaluation of the environmental objectives, we will monitor progress toward short-term outcomes through the reports of acres of land treated; miles of trails constructed, restored, and signed; and number of plots/amount of acreage

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monitored. Additionally, partner surveys will be used to verify satisfactory completion of NCC's environmental activities at the target levels. A sample of crew supervisor and member work tour surveys will be another source of data confirming the type and quality of work completed. In year 1, corps members trained in the Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring Strategy (AIM) protocols will collect baseline landscape-level data across the state. Members will characterize range health conditions and provide baseline data to determine restoration efficacy. The baseline data can be used to build an evidence base for the program and to evaluate program effectiveness in the future. After year 1 AIM data is available, NCC and the evaluator will work together to determine the feasibility of designing a quasi-experimental study of NCC environmental outcomes for years 2 and 3, in which landscape-level data related to NCC's environmental interventions would be compared in land areas served by NCC and those not served by NCC.

Center for Program Evaluation Budget

Personnel:

Base salary Monthly FTE Months Amount

Professional:

Elizabeth Christiansen, Director \$64,815.24 0.08 12 \$5,185.22

Fringe Benefits for Professional \$1,672.23

Total Professional \$6,857.45

Graduate Assistant

Graduate Assistant \$ 39,600.00 0.070 12 \$2,772.00

Fringe Benefits for GA @ 15% \$415.80

Total Graduate Assistant \$3,187.80

TOTAL Personnel \$10,045.25

GA Tuition

Tuition for prorated for FTE on project 3927.84 0.07 12 \$549.90

Operating

Printing and supplies for analysis and reports \$48.18

Total Operating \$48.18

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Total Direct Costs \$10,643.33

Indirect Costs @ 5.0% \$504.67

TOTAL: \$11,148.00

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

RE: Great Basin Institute, Great Basin Institute, 15ES170154

Dear CNCS Grant Review Panel:

I am writing regarding in response to your application clarification request for our AmeriCorps State and National FY 2015 grant. The purpose of this letter is to respond to clarification on aspects of our application. The information provided in this response should assist the Corporation in making final decisions. Below is a summary response of the issues that needed to be addressed during this clarification period.

Clarification Items

This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$567,348, 66.31 Member Service Years (MSYs), 175 slots, at 8555.99 cost per MSY.

A. Programmatic clarification items:

Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled 'Clarification Summary'

1. Please clarify the roles and activities of leveraged volunteers, including how they will be recruited and how they will be aware of, and adhere to prohibited activities.

* Volunteers will be recruited to honor national service days, specifically Make a Difference Day, MLK Day, Public Lands Day, and National Service Week. Volunteers will be solicited from state-wide volunteer organizations, including, but not limited to, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Friends of Red Rocks, Friends of Ash Meadows, Friends of the Black Rock Desert, Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, the Students Association of the University of Nevada, Reno and Las

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Vegas, the Community College of Southern Nevada, and select University faculty and students. Prohibited activities will be articulated on volunteer sign in sheets and monitored throughout the service event. Institute and Corps staff, as well as agency partners, will ensure compliance by an appropriate ratio of leadership supervision to volunteer.

2. Please clarify if the monitoring and evaluation "interns" are AmeriCorps members.

* Monitoring and evaluation interns are AmeriCorps volunteers and will provide our Corps program with a strong educational and leadership option, as well as offer substantive training and service opportunities for Corps members.

3. Please clarify how members will be placed at the host sites and a more rigorous tracking of member placement.

* Members will be placed at host sites on the basis of their prior experience in support of the specific roles and responsibilities of the respective service assignments. Site of services are selected on the basis of the quality of long-term partnerships at agency districts and with those program leads whose expertise and quality of mentorship suggest successful experiences for Corps members. By placing members within agencies whose mission and specific conservation objectives align with the Corps' expectations, as well as our grant performance measures, the NCC will accomplish specific metrics for success. MOA site agreements will clearly identify the terms and conditions of the placement of AmeriCorps members and regular site visits, close review of timesheets, and quarterly conference calls will ensure full compliance to AmeriCorps regulations.

4. Please clarify how the applicant will hold itself, subgrantees, and service site locations accountable if instances of risk or noncompliance are identified.

* Should any indication of increased risk or noncompliance be identified, a documentation of such evidence would be prepared and corrective action would be articulated and empirical evidence of full compliance of such corrective action must be provided on a monthly basis for the duration of the term of service. Further risk or noncompliance would immediately necessitate a termination of a given partnership, or an aspect of service that would be necessarily deemed untenable by AmeriCorps terms

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and conditions.

B. Budget Clarification

Please respond to the clarification items in the 'Budget Narrative' section of the application unless otherwise indicated

1. If the application is being considered for an amount less than the request (funding, MSY, and/or slots), please revise the Executive Summary, budget, and performance measures as necessary to reflect the amount for which the application is under consideration.

* N/A

2. Funding is extremely competitive and limited this year. Having a low Cost Per Member Service year (MSY) is a competitive advantage. Applicants submitting with a low cost per MSY will receive higher priority for funding. Please consider decreasing the application's proposed cost per MSY by revising the CNCS share of the program budget, or provide a compelling explanation for why the cost/MSY cannot be decreased. CNCS will review both the individual program cost per MSY and the aggregate cost per MSY after the clarification period and may elect to make further decreases in cost per MSY and/or may be only able to partially fund applicants.

* The NCC has consistently lowered cost per MSY and this year's cost per MSY is lower than our previous competitive grant submission, and the lowest since inception in 1999.

3. Fixed amount applicants should enter the total dollar amount of funds that are used to run the program, other than CNCS share, in the "Other Revenue Funds" field of the Funding/Demographics section of the application. Please update the Other Revenue field and match fields of the application.

* This has been updated in eGrants.

C. Performance Measure Clarification

Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants or in the 'Clarification Summary' field, as appropriate.

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1. Remove the applicant-determined performance measure containing output 18788 and outcome 18789. The program is not required to have a performance measure for every activity.

* Item has been removed from Performance Measures.

2. Please create one performance measure containing all interventions for EN4 and EN4.1. Explain how the program will ensure that land treated multiple times is counted only once.

* The three separate acreage performance measurements have been rolled into one performance Measure that contains the three different interventions. All treatment areas are documented using maps provided by the project partner, or GPS data recorded on site using hand-held GPS units and converted into maps. This allows for a record of initial treatment of an area, to ensure the acreage data is only recorded once should that area be designated for multiple treatments. GPS data is reviewed by both NCC staff and project partners prior to the drafting of progress reports. If any acreage data from multiple treatments is found to overlap from the GPS data and site maps, only the initial treatment data is recorded.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

1. What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What is your program's plan, if any, for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community?

* GBI does not allocate a specific percentage of slots for the recruitment of members with disabilities however, has a history of providing reasonable accommodation for any members of the disability community. All position descriptions include inclusive language to encourage members of the disability community to apply for participation in the NCC AmeriCorps program.

2. In order to increase the number of individuals with disabilities serving as AmeriCorps members, CNCS is offering applicants the opportunity to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities. The additional MSYs would be funded at the clarification cost per MSY level. Applicants must describe their intent to recruit, engage and retain additional members with disabilities and provide a detailed outreach plan for how these members will be recruited and

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supported (e.g. established recruitment partners or strategies.) In addition, programs receiving these additional member positions will be required to report specific details on the success of the recruitment, supervision and retention of AmeriCorps members with disabilities in semi-annual progress reports. If you would like to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities, please describe your intent as requested above. Also indicate how many MSYs your program would like to request, the number of slots by slot type, and where the additional members will serve. Add these additional MSYs to your budget. Also adjust your performance measure targets, MSY allocations, and executive summary to reflect these additional members.

* GBI will not be seeking additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

Applicants may request No-Cost MSYs. These additional No-Cost MSYs are national service positions in which no grant funds will be awarded. In other words, grantees could receive additional AmeriCorps positions but no additional grant funds. Programs will be responsible for using their own or other resources to pay program costs, member support costs and other operating expenses. Keep in mind that full-time AmeriCorps program costs include expenditures for the AmeriCorps living allowance, health care and criminal history checks. Programs are not required to pay living allowances or cover health care for less-than-full-time members. If you wish to request no-cost MSYs, please respond to the following and add the additional slots to your budget and executive summary, and adjust your performance measure targets and MSY allocations.

* The Nevada Conservation Corps is a member of the Corps Network and currently utilizes their existing Education Award Program to address any additional need for slots. As such, we do not seek any additional no-cost MSYs at this time.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics