

# QUARTERLY REPORT

## Q1 2026

January 1, 2026 - March 31, 2026



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Candidate Conservation Agreements  
for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken and the  
Dunes Sagebrush Lizard in New Mexico

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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### The Candidate Conservation Agreements

This report describes the activities conducted in the first quarter of 2026 for the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*; hereafter LPC) and Dunes Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*; hereafter DSL). The Center for Environmental Health Monitoring and Management (CEHMM) administers a CCA for federal lands and minerals and a CCAA for non-federal lands and minerals. The two agreements, collectively referred to as the CCA/A, allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and CEHMM to work in cooperation and in consultation with landowners and industry to support conservation measures for the LPC and the DSL. The purpose of the CCA/A is to:

- Develop, coordinate, and implement conservation actions to reduce and/or eliminate known threats to the LPC and the DSL in New Mexico on federal, state, and private surfaces and minerals
- Support ongoing efforts to re-establish and maintain viable populations of LPC and DSL in currently occupied and suitable habitats
- Encourage the development and protection of suitable LPC and DSL habitats by giving incentives to Participating Cooperators to implement specific conservation measures

Under the CCA, federal lessees, operators, or permittees, who joined by voluntarily signing a Certificate of Participation (CP), receive a high degree of certainty that additional restrictions are not to be placed on their otherwise legal activities with the federal listing of both species. The companion CCAA provides incentives for voluntary conservation of the LPC and the DSL on non-federal lands and mineral ownership. By signing a Certificate of Inclusion (CI) under the CCAA, the lessee, owner, operator, or permittee voluntarily committed to implement specific conservation measures for the species on non-federal lands and mineral ownership. Under the CCAA, private land and mineral owners or lessees receive assurances that additional restrictions cannot be placed on their otherwise legal activities on enrolled acreage. In both cases, enrollment in the CCA or CCAA is voluntary. CEHMM is the federal permit holder for these

agreements and is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and reporting on projects completed with CCA/A funds.

CEHMM is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation based in Carlsbad and Milnesand, New Mexico. CEHMM's participation allows for a federally approved, independently audited financial management system to provide funding for management and administration.

The following quarterly report details projects funded and completed with CCA/A funds. The report also details the daily implementation of the agreements including activities such as siting energy development outside DSL habitat, conducting presence/absence surveys to monitor the species, and evaluating participant conservation commitment. For more details on the CCA/A programs, visit our website at [www.cehmm.org](http://www.cehmm.org).

### Benefits of Candidate Conservation Agreement Programs

- Voluntary enrollment
- Measurable on-the-ground conservation
- Landscape-based approach
- Allow landowners and industry to continue work on the ground

### Species Status Updates

On May 20, 2024, the FWS published its final ruling for the listing of the DSL as federally endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1531, et seq.). On June 20, 2024, the ruling went into effect, and the DSL is now considered endangered throughout its entire range of west Texas and southeast New Mexico.

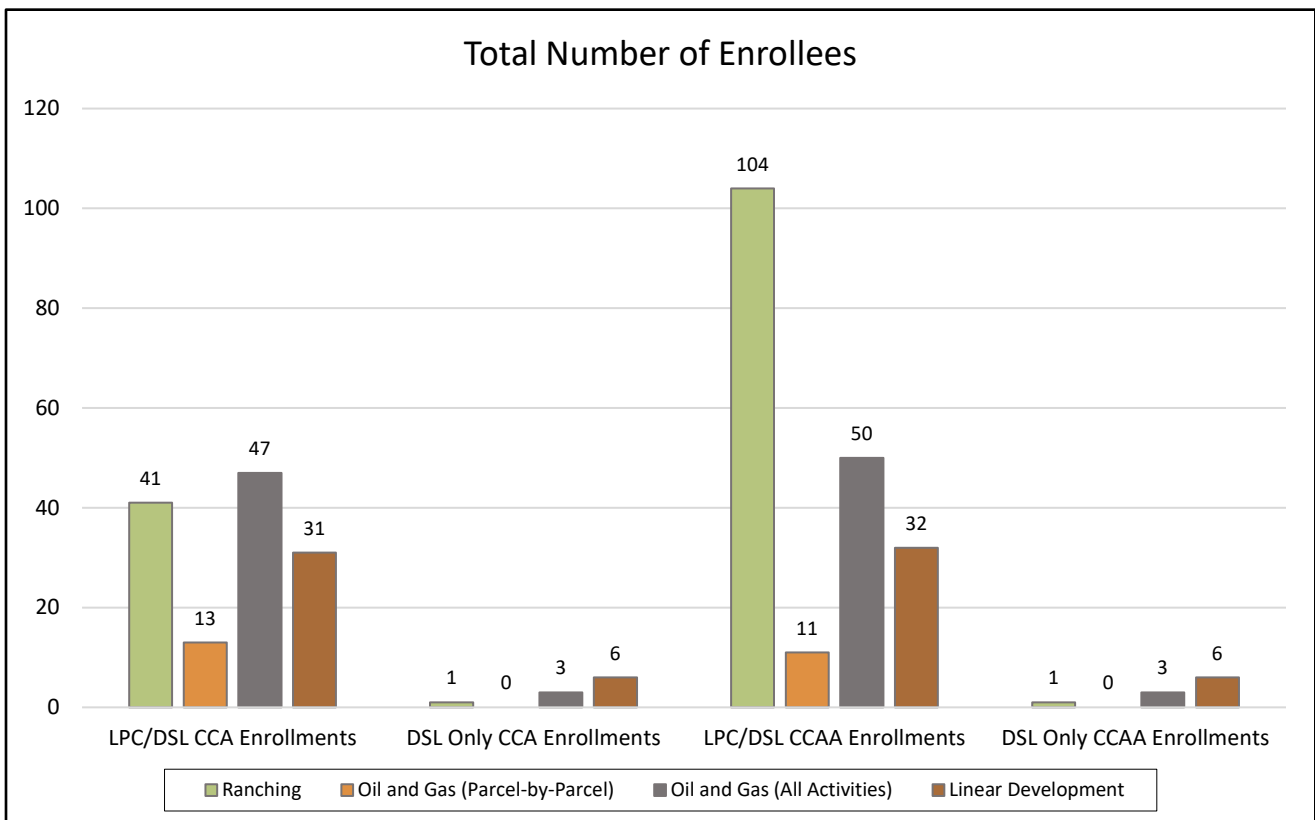
On November 25, 2022, the LPC was listed under the Endangered Species Act and effectively closed CCA/A program enrollment for that species. On August 12, 2025, a Texas federal court granted a motion to vacate the proposed rule listing the LPC under the Endangered Species Act and remand it to the FWS for further consideration. Under this finding it was determined that distinct northern and southern LPC population segments were invalid. As a result, the LPC is currently delisted and subject to re-evaluation. The USFWS finalized the delisting on February 26, 2026. This removed any regulatory protections under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and initiated the process for a new Species Status Assessment (SSA) for the LPC as of February 2026. CEHMM is in close communication with our regulatory partners and does not anticipate any changes to the current participants' operations. We will keep participants informed on all future updates. **This decision has effectively reopened enrollment into the CCA/A programs for LPC coverage.** Although LPC coverage can be pursued through the reopened CCA/A enrollment, DSL CCA/A enrollment remains closed due to the species' current endangered species listing status.

## Habitat Conservation Plan Updates in Q1 of 2026

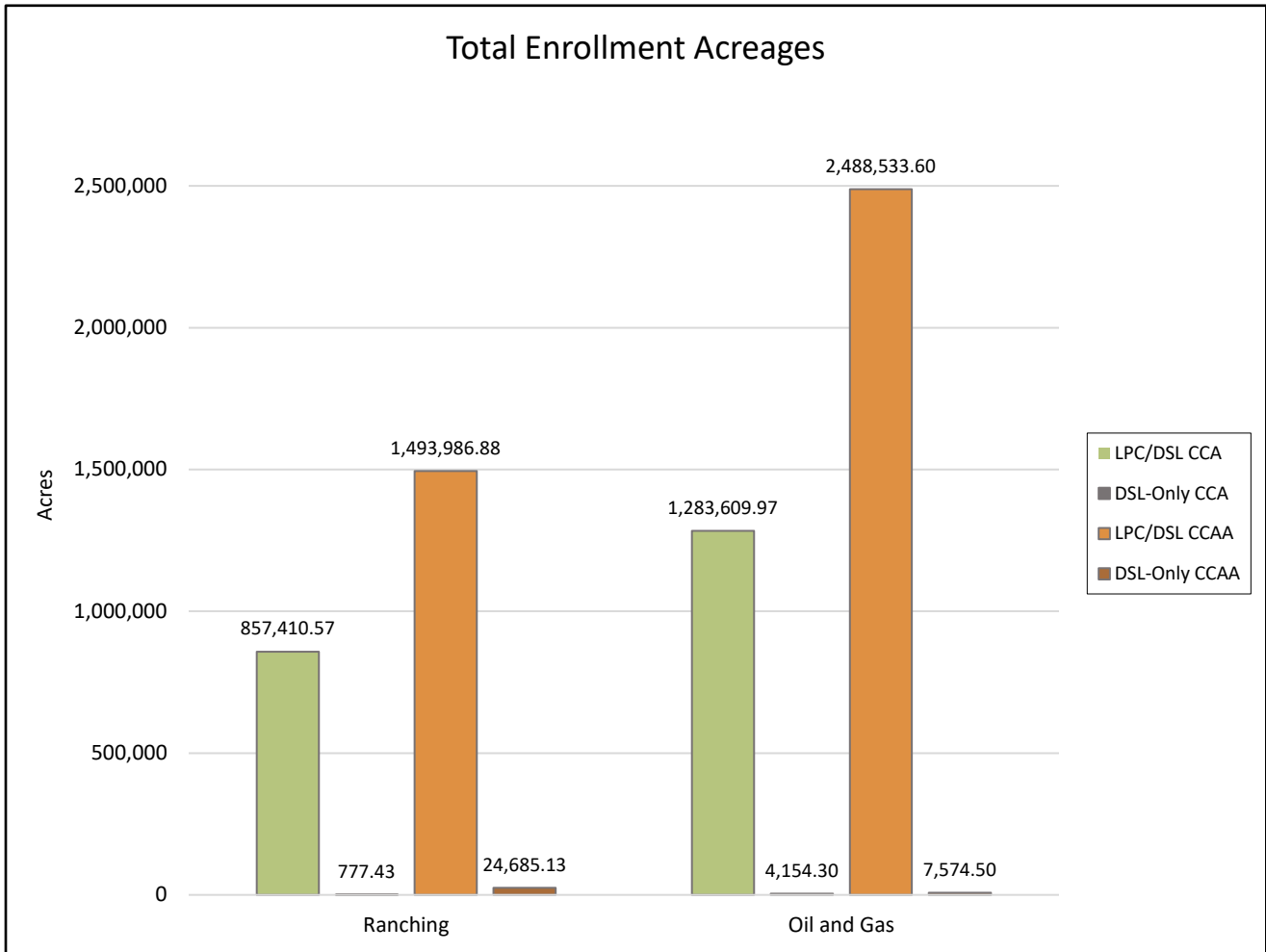
While the CCA/As have been successful, they are approaching their 20-year expiration date in 2028. With guidance from our partners at the FWS and BLM, CEHMM is currently exploring the development and implementation of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with associated Incidental Take Permit. This type of program is more appropriate for working with listed species and will allow for updates to elements that have changed in the past 20 years (e.g., the addition of covered activities). These updates may include expanded coverage for renewable energy and transmission and allow for the purchase and management of conservation lands to offset take. To develop the plan, FWS has offered to extend the incidental take permit of our current CCA/A agreements until an HCP can be established.

## Enrollment Numbers

The total number of enrollees in the LPC and DSL CCA/A programs can be found in Figure 1. Currently, there are 2,376,860.01 acres enrolled by ranching participants in the program (Figure 2). To date, industry participants have enrolled 3,783,872.37 acres in the CCA/A program (Figure 2). CEHMM is continuously updating enrolled acreage through the All-Activities method of enrollment, as participants can add or remove their covered acres at any time.



**Figure 1.** Current program enrollment totals for LPC/DSL and DSL only CCAs, and LPC/DSL and DSL-only CCAAs for ranching, industry, and linear development. Industry enrollment is divided by parcel-by-parcel and all-activities enrollment types.



**Figure 2.** Current enrollment acreages for LPC/DSL and DSL-only CCAs and CCAAs for ranching and oil and gas enrollment types.



## Habitat Conservation Fund

CEHMM establishes a Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) for each oil and gas operator that executes a CP or CI. The contribution amount is determined by the number of acres enrolled within their CP or CI agreements. Once land-disturbing activities are identified and permitted in the operator's certificate, conservation fees are debited from their HCF. Approximately 29% of the funds received are allocated for overhead expenses. The remaining balance is used exclusively in support of the CCA/A programs. Supported activities include, but are not limited to, planning and implementation, on-sites, grazing programs, projects authorized by the ranking team, research, enrollments and amendments, project monitoring, education and outreach, and support services (e.g., vehicle and equipment procurement and maintenance).



## Habitat Restoration Projects Completed in Q1 of 2026

### Coombes Rogers Water

**Completed:** February 2026

**Units:** 2 troughs; 3 water storage tanks; 5.25 miles of water pipeline

**Description:** Installed 2 water troughs, 3 water storage tanks, and 5.25 miles of water pipeline.

### Watts Fence

**Completed:** March 2026

**Budget:** \$70,936.83

**Units:** 1.5 miles of fence

**Description:** Remove approximately 1.5 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

## Habitat Restoration Projects Funded and Awaiting Completion

### Running N DSM

**Approved & Funded:** March 2022

**Budget:** \$148,777.39

**Units:** 5,800 acres

**Description:** Remove approximately 5,800 acres of DSM.

### Bogle Fence Proposal

**Approved and Funded:** August 2023

**Budget:** \$375,410.28

**Units:** 9 miles of fence

**Description:** Remove approximately 5.5 miles of dilapidated interior fencing and 3.5 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

**Berry Hand Mesquite Treatment**

**Approved and Funded:** September 2024

**Budget:** \$24,047.94

**Units:** 55 acres

**Description:** Hand treat approximately 55 acres of mesquite.

**D2 Shop**

**Approved and Funded:** September 2024

**Budget:** \$140,000.00

**Units:** 1 shop

**Description:** Install a shop on the Milnesand property to house all the equipment and tools needed for daily operations in District 2.

**Derrick Water**

**Approved and Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$106,873.01

**Units:** 2.7 miles of pipeline; 1 water tank

**Description:** Install 2.7 miles of pipeline and 1 water tank.

**Running N Kenna Fence**

**Approved and Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$263,274.58

**Units:** 6.9 miles of fence

**Description:** Remove approximately 6.9 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

**TNC Fence**

**Approved and Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$623,199.25

**Units:** 19.2 miles of fence

**Description:** Remove approximately 19.2 miles of dilapidated boundary fencing and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

**Weaver DSM**

**Approved and Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$124,206.10

**Units:** 2,370 acres

**Description:** Remove approximately 2,370 acres of DSM.

## **Stockton Fence**

**Approved and Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$119,886.80

**Units:** 5 miles of fence

**Description:** Remove approximately 1.5 miles of boundary fence and 3.5 miles of interior fence and replace it with wildlife-friendly fencing.

## **Research Project Updates in Q1 of 2026**

### **Dunes Sagebrush Lizard Population Monitoring**

**Approved & Funded:** June 2018; October 2023

**Budget:** \$60,434.01

**Description:** The objective of this project is to implement a long-term monitoring study to assess DSL population dynamics across their range in New Mexico. Population monitoring began in 2018 and has continued through additional funding to track population parameters across multiple DSL populations. Additionally, research linking weather and microclimate to model population persistence of DSL will be conducted at established monitoring sites. This information will be used to create dynamic models by combining these data with habitat, microhabitat, and climate data to predict thermal microclimates throughout the entire range of the DSL. As of March 2026, weather stations have been deployed across the population monitoring grids and are collecting data for upcoming monitoring efforts to take place in April 2026.

### **Linking Weather and Microclimate to Model Population Persistence of the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard – Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc.**

**Approved & Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$163,621.50

**Description:** The goal of this project is to describe the thermal environment experienced by the DSL across both space and time. We propose a series of data collection and modeling approaches to describe small-scale variation in thermal environments experienced by the DSL, which we can extrapolate to the entire range via remote sensing and satellite imagery. Further, this project will represent the first step towards predictive models that will aid in future efforts to preserve and restore dunes that maximize fitness of the DSL and understand how this species will respond to climate change. In future work, we will combine the outcomes of this project with physiological measurements to fully characterize the energy budget of this species. We propose two specific objectives for the current work: 1) quantify microclimates at four sites with high spatial and temporal resolution, and 2) create dynamic models to combine these data with habitat, microhabitat, and climate data to predict thermal microclimates throughout the entire range of the DSL. As of March 2026, weather stations have been deployed across the population monitoring grids and are collecting data for upcoming monitoring efforts to take place in April 2026.

### **Orphan Well Reclamation Protocol**

**Approved & Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$100,000

**Description:** This research aims to 1) develop a methodological avenue for selecting viable remediation/reclamation sites based on localized and landscape-level factors, 2) perform reclamation and species-specific habitat improvement at selected sites post-remediation, and 3) evaluate the success of reclamation by establishing a post-reclamation monitoring program that utilizes tracking metrics designed to measure the responses of site rehabilitation for each species at different spatial and temporal scales. This method will provide a definitive protocol for well reclamation/restoration initiatives and will help determine the success rate. As of March 2026, this project is ongoing and CEHMM is currently working with the New Mexico Oil Conservation Department (NMOCD) staff to review potential reclamation sites.

### **Passive Acoustic Monitoring of Lesser Prairie-Chickens**

**Approved & Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$177,667.01

**Description:** The objective of this study is to assess the utility of acoustic recording units (ARUs) as a novel method for monitoring LPC populations and quantifying parameters that can be used to evaluate LPC habitat restoration efforts. This proposal aims to develop protocols for using ARUs as a method to survey for LPC; investigate the cost-effectiveness of LPC survey methodologies by comparing detectability metrics of ARUs and standardized ground-based survey methodologies; and explore the potential of ARUs to target future restoration efforts. We propose a multi-faceted experiment that includes: 1) the deployment of up to 40 ARUs as well as simultaneous ground-based surveys, across ~70,948 acres of historic and currently occupied LPC habitat, and 2) analyses of LPC detection probabilities and density estimates collected from passive acoustic monitoring and ground-based surveys (i.e., count data). Our primary goal is to advance methodological strategies for monitoring LPC populations on state, federal, and private lands in New Mexico (BLM 2008). Our secondary goal is to develop a noninvasive, cost-effective framework for targeting future restoration efforts. As of March 2026, we have collected more than three weeks of audio data from our monitors and have begun preliminary analyses of LPC detections.

### **Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to Quantify and Evaluate DSL Habitat**

**Approved & Funded:** August 2025

**Budget:** \$24,068.00

**Description:** This project will use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs; drones) to quantify the physical and thermal structures of DSL habitat, providing a more detailed understanding of the species' habitat tolerances. This data will inform conservation decisions and help refine definitions of habitat quality. The project will be conducted over one year, across three sampling periods during peak DSL activity. Resulting data will be used to generate 3-D models of DSL

structural and thermal habitat, providing a framework quantifying DSL habitat suitability. These efforts will also support calibration of operating temperature models deployed at population sites, with fieldwork anticipated to take place in April and May of 2026.



## MONITORING

### Vegetation Monitoring

In the first quarter of 2026, CEHMM staff began preparing the grazing exclosures that will be monitored in the upcoming year. In total, CEHMM staff prepared 136 grazing exclosures on 25 ranches this quarter. Of the 136 exclosures, 53 were newly added, 80 were still located in suitable areas, and 3 exclosures were relocated. The relocated exclosures were moved to new areas of the ranch to ensure even representation of all soil types.

Preparing the grazing exclosures involves relocating them at least six feet from their previous locations to new, representative areas within the same pasture. This process helps to avoid forage weight bias that may occur when exclosures are left in the same location for four years. Once grazing exclosures are moved to novel sites, the grass inside is clipped to ensure that data collection is representative of the current growing season. In 2026, CEHMM staff plan to complete grazing monitoring for 136 grazing exclosures within 25 enrolled ranches.

### LPC Monitoring

Lek surveys are completed annually from February through May on enrolled ranches. The surveys consist of visiting historic and active leks to determine the current LPC count for each existing lek. Surveys are initiated 30 minutes prior to sunrise and conclude at 9:00 a.m. If wind speeds exceed 15 miles per hour, surveys are stopped and continued the following day. This is because high wind speeds inhibit surveyors from hearing LPCs, thus increasing the possibility of detecting false negative observations.

During LPC surveys (including road surveys and lek surveys), the following data is collected: survey area (i.e., ranch name), presence of LPCs, direction of LPCs, time, temperature, wind speed, cloud cover, noise sources, noise levels, and other wildlife observed or heard. During roadside surveys, surveyors stand outside of the vehicle and listen for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, all environmental data is collected. When the 10 minutes have expired, the surveyor returns to their vehicle, drives 1 mile down the road, and repeats the process. When LPCs are heard on a roadside survey, a bearing is taken in the direction of the LPC; then another bearing is taken at

the next stop. This allows the approximate location of the LPC to be triangulated. The surveyors then walk to the lek to flush the individuals. A count is taken and the lek coordinates are recorded.

In March 2026, CEHMM staff completed a total of 53 surveys across 30 enrolled ranches. During these surveys, approximately 327 LPC individuals were observed across 42 leks. Surveys will continue through May 2026, and updated numbers will be included in the second quarterly report.

## DSL Monitoring

DSL visual encounter surveys (VES) are standardized and used to locate DSL in areas where there are no historic DSL vouchers. In March 2026, D1 CEHMM staff began training for VES and conducted 8 surveys across 8 sites in the Sand Ranch and Square Lake areas.

## INDUSTRY MEASURES

### Mitigation of Impacts to Habitat

Oil and gas development and associated infrastructure can pose a serious threat to many species, especially highly specialized species like the DSL, which depend on dynamic sand dune habitats, and the LPC, which relies on open grassland ecosystems uninterrupted by vertical structures. Due to the severe loss of these habitats in the wake of development, enrollees have agreed to implement certain conservation measures to offset further decline. This includes no surface occupancy within 30 meters of suitable or occupied DSL habitat, as well as no new powerlines within one mile of a historic LPC lek, and two miles from an active LPC lek (where LPC have been found within the past 5 years). There are two main types of evaluations (i.e., field consultations and desktop reviews/analyses) conducted by CEHMM staff to ensure infrastructure does not fall within the designated 30-meter buffer. Field consultations include on-site visits with enrolled companies to appropriately relocate proposed developments that occur in or near suitable or occupied habitat to help ensure that DSL dune habitats and LPC leks are avoided. Desktop reviews/analyses consist of CEHMM staff utilizing a variety of spatial data (e.g. aerial imagery, soil layers, species distribution models, and habitat suitability models) to 1) delineate suitable habitat, 2) reroute linear infrastructure, and/or 3) relocate pads or similar surface disturbances. The number of wells and rights-of-way (ROW) moved out of DSL habitat in Q1 of 2026 is shown in Table 1. It is important to note that not all the consultations depicted in the table below were located within suitable DSL habitat.

**Table 1.** Initial development reviews and relocated developments in Q1 of 2026 across evaluation type categories including desktop block reviews, linear development consultations, pad/other surface consultations, and the total number of relocated developments. Note that desktop block reviews often may require additional evaluation including desktop consultations and/or field consultations.

|                                       | Desktop<br>Block<br>Reviews | Linear<br>Development<br>Consultations | Pad / Other<br>Surface<br>Consultations | Field<br>Evaluated | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|--------------------|--------------|
| Initial Development Reviews           | 8                           | 34                                     | 26                                      | 27                 | <b>68</b>    |
| Developments Relocated Out of Habitat | –                           | 18                                     | 8                                       | 21                 | <b>26</b>    |



## EDUCATION & OUTREACH

### 2026 Joint Annual Meeting of the Arizona and New Mexico Chapters of The Wildlife Society

In February 2026, CEHMM staff attended and presented professional posters at the Joint Annual Meeting of The Wildlife Society in Sedona, AZ. These posters highlighted ongoing and planned research (see Project Updates section) that is being conducted in-house at CEHMM.

### Carlsbad High School Natural Resources Management Class

In March 2026, CEHMM staff provided an educational presentation to the natural resources management class at Carlsbad High School in Carlsbad, NM. Students learned about environmental assessment procedures for rights-of-way. During these classes, staff shared examples of natural resource concerns that oil and gas producers and linear development companies must evaluate before construction begins. CEHMM staff also presented case studies demonstrating how this knowledge relates to real-world scenarios CEHMM has assessed.

### 2026 Annual New Mexico Ornithological Society Meeting

In March 2026, CEHMM staff had the opportunity to attend the annual 2026 New Mexico Ornithological Society Meeting in Albuquerque, NM. This meeting consisted of a wide variety of talks and presentations concerning the study and conservation of New Mexico's avifauna. The meeting also provided opportunities to network and learn from other scientists studying New Mexico bird species.

# Executive Director Signature

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Emily K. Wirth, Executive Director

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions, please contact Connor Adams at (575) 885-3700  
or Kyle Dillard at (575) 675-2324.