

Office of the President
March 4, 2004

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY:

ITEM FOR ACTION

For Meeting of March 18, 2004

DESIGNATION OF REAL PROPERTY, NEVADA COUNTY, SAGEHEN CREEK FIELD STATION, NATURAL RESERVE SYSTEM

The President recommends that upon review and consideration of the proposed designation of a program as described below, the Committee on Educational Policy recommend to The Regents that The Regents designate the Sagehen Creek Field Station (Sagehen) as a component of the University's systemwide Natural Reserve System (NRS), with no change in the day-to-day management of Sagehen by the Berkeley campus.

BACKGROUND

Sagehen is located on the east slope of the northern Sierra Nevada, approximately 7.8 miles north of Truckee, California. In 1951, the University entered into a long-term cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service for the University's non-exclusive use of certain Tahoe National Forest lands within the 8000-acre Sagehen Creek basin for research, teaching, and related activities. Thereafter, the Forest Service issued a number of Special Use Permits that allowed the University to construct modest cabins and supporting infrastructure on the site. The Berkeley campus has managed 445.5 acres and 1.5 miles along Sagehen Creek since 1951, and currently, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research administers Sagehen with additional support from the Berkeley Natural History Museums and the California Biodiversity Center.

In the spring of 2003, the Berkeley campus requested the inclusion of Sagehen Creek Field Station within the NRS. Membership in the NRS would enhance Sagehen's ability to develop additional links with faculty, students, and other investigators throughout the UC system and beyond. Furthermore, the Berkeley campus would benefit by making this field station a part of a systemwide unit that provides guidance on broad policy issues, extensive support in reserve administration, data management, and publications. Inclusion of Sagehen within the NRS will not result in increased costs because administrative and fiscal responsibility will remain with the Berkeley campus, consistent with the administrative structure of the NRS.

In accordance with NRS guidelines, the Universitywide NRS Advisory Committee appointed a multi-campus Review Committee to analyze the site and program. Last fall, the Review Committee unanimously recommended such inclusion, concluding that Sagehen would add to the suite of NRS reserves a site with high biological and physiographic diversity:

Sagehen is embedded in a mosaic of vegetation communities that includes coniferous forest, montane chaparral, sagebrush steppe, wet and dry meadows, and spring-fed fens. The forest varies in age and composition, but it is dominated by Jeffrey pine, lodgepole

pine, and white fir. This high habitat diversity is due to the topographic and hydrologic complexity of the basin, combined with a strong east-west precipitation gradient. No existing NRS reserve contains this particular constellation of habitats—the most similar in habitat composition is Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserve—and few exhibit such sharp habitat gradients. Not surprisingly, the habitat diversity at Sagehen is matched by a diverse biota, including 500+ species of vascular plants, 212 species of vertebrates, and 340 families of insects (species counts are not available for insects, but the total is likely to exceed 4,000). The species richness of plants and vertebrates is higher than that of most NRS reserves for which this information is available.

Sagehen has been the focus of substantial research and teaching activity in the environmental sciences, providing valuable opportunities on a watershed-wide scale. The field station is assuming an increasingly prominent role as a regional center for analysis and integration of environmental and other GIS data. Sagehen is also the hub of a larger regional network of UC field facilities and reserves, the Central Sierra Field Research Stations (CSFRS), which includes Sagehen Creek Field Station, Central Sierra Snow Laboratory, the Chickering American River Reserve, and the North Fork Association lands (the latter two are NRS sites).

The proposed designation, which solely involves an internal administrative change that does not involve a name change, is not defined as a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act.