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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## NEWS RELEASE

### **Legislative Committee on Public Lands (NRS 218E.510)**

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### **LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS RECOMMENDS LEGISLATION FOR 2011 SESSION**

Senator Dean A. Rhoads (R-Tuscarora), Chair of the Legislative Committee on Public Lands, announced that the Committee has completed its work for the 2009-2010 Interim and is recommending 10 legislative measures to the 2011 Legislature. The final meeting of the Committee was held on July 30, 2010, in Ely, Nevada, during which the Committee approved a total of 35 recommendations for legislative or Committee action covering a wide spectrum of issues ranging from water rights to rangeland policies to federal land management planning. Many of the approved recommendations had been suggested to the Committee by regional or State organizations, local governments, and interested citizens.

The first recommendation approved by the Committee was to send letters to Nevada's Congressional Delegation, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Governor, opposing the recently announced agreement between the El Paso Corporation and the Western Watersheds Project (WWP) that created a \$15 million mitigation fund in exchange for WWP withdrawing its objections to El Paso's Ruby Pipeline project in northern Nevada. The Committee's letters will also express its disappointment that the public and the livestock industry were not consulted during the negotiation of the agreement with WWP. Finally, the Committee will urge Nevada's Congressional Delegation and the Governor to oppose any federal legislation that would allow the permanent retirement of grazing permits on public lands. Appearing at

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the meeting to testify on the El Paso agreement with WWP and express their anger and concerns were the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, Western Legacy Alliance, and several county commissioners.

According to Senator Rhoads, **"In my 26 years as Chair of the Public Lands Committee, the agreement between El Paso and WWP is the most alarming situation that has presented itself to the Committee. Although the El Paso representatives repeatedly assured the Committee that the company had no intent to modify the Taylor Grazing Act in any way and that the agreement with WWP would not allow the money to be used for litigation or operating expenses, El Paso could not produce the agreement with WWP due to confidentiality. Until we can see the agreement for ourselves, the Committee cannot be sure that it is getting the straight story."**

Continuing on, Rhoads noted that, **"El Paso also assured the Committee that it has not and would not lobby Congress to amend the Taylor Grazing Act to permit the permanent retirement of grazing permits. However, El Paso admitted that at least a percentage of the money could be used for lobbying and El Paso also admitted that, if the law was changed, the money might also be used to retire grazing rights. Clearly, the Committee and the public must remain vigilant to protect continued access to public lands."**

The Nevada Cattlemen's Association, county commissioners, Western Legacy Alliance, and national organizations will be meeting with El Paso to see what can be done to prevent an assault on ranchers by WWP. **"The Public Lands Committee is planning a trip to Washington, D.C., in the fall and one of the trip's goals will be to meet with key officials and others about the El Paso situation and to preserve the intent of the Taylor Grazing Act. The Committee will also be working on preventing any such future agreements from happening without public input,"** said Rhoads. He explained that Committee members would be paying their own way on the trip and no public funds would be used.

Other Committee recommendations included bills to: (1) require a water rights permit for a pit lake or gravel pond used for evaporation; and (2) lower the water rights application fee for agricultural users. Resolutions were approved to: (1) urge Congress to enact legislation that would require the sharing of revenue generated on public lands with State and local governments; (2) encourage all levels of government to be proactive in protecting sage grouse habitat to avoid its listing as an endangered species; and (3) a resolution directed at the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) management of wild horses and opposing any expansion of herd management areas.

On the subject of recent restrictions on grazing permits, the Committee will be sending a letter to the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the BLM asking them to reconsider hot season grazing deferments and to work with grazing permittees on finding other ways to protect sensitive habitats or areas. The Committee also took action to support a number of local initiatives and pending federal legislation aimed at helping Nevada residents or the interests of Nevadans. The complete summary of the Committee's recommendations is online at: <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Interim/75th2009/Committee/StatCom/Lands/?ID=19>.

The Legislative Committee on Public Lands was created in 1983 to review and comment on federal land management policies and practices and is also responsible for receiving reports from the regional and local water entities and monitoring water law and policies in the State.

The members of the Committee are: Senator Terry Care (D-Las Vegas); Senator John J. Lee (D-Las Vegas); Senator David R. Parks (D-Las Vegas); Senator Dean A. Rhoads (R-Tuscarora); Assemblyman Paul Aizley (D-Las Vegas); Assemblyman David P. Bobzien (D-Reno); Assemblyman John C. Carpenter (R-Elko); Assemblyman Jerry D. Claborn (D-Las Vegas); and Clark County Commissioner Tom Collins. Alternate members are: Senator Mike McGinness (R-Fallon); Senator Michael A. Schneider (D-Las Vegas); Assemblyman Pete Goicoechea (R-Eureka); and Assemblywoman Ellen B. Spiegel (D-Henderson).

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