

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING NATIONAL FOREST ACTIVITIES  
ELY RANGER DISTRICT  
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOR THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS  
March 7, 2008  
Caliente, Nevada**

**Pat Irwin  
District Ranger  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest**

**Introduction.** Good morning, Chairman Rhoads and committee members. My name is Pat Irwin, and I am the District Ranger for the Ely Ranger District. Thank you for providing this speaking opportunity.

Today I will brief you on the following six National Forest activities on the Ely Ranger District:

- The progress of the range analysis,
- Our Travel Management analysis,
- Wilderness Plans,
- A mining update,
- An oil and gas update, and
- Our restoration and fuels reduction program.

But first, let me describe the Ely Ranger District, and how we lie in relation to our three counties. Most of the District is in White Pine County, with about 750,000 acres. Farther south, the District has about 250,000 acres in Nye County, in the

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Document consists of 6 pages.  
Entire Exhibit Provided  
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Grant and Quinn Canyon Ranges. Finally, we have about 30,000 acres in Lincoln County, in the south end of the Quinn Canyon Range.

## **Range**

In 1995, a rider to the Rescission Act required the Forest Service to complete an environmental analysis of all grazing on National Forests. In lieu of the completion of the analysis, grazing is permitted, but only under the previous terms and conditions.

The Forest has completed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents for two areas:

- The Martin Basin Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision, on the Santa Rosa Ranger District in Winnemucca; and,
- The Great Basin South, which covers half of the Bridgeport Ranger District.

Both of these decisions were appealed and remanded back to the Forest Service. We are working to complete the environmental analysis on all the grazing on the Ranger Districts. Ely has completed a draft EIS, but it is not yet published. This first EIS covers the White Pine Range and the Grant and Quinn Canyon Ranges. The second EIS, scheduled for 2009, will cover the rest of the District, which includes Ward Mountain, the Schell Creek Range, and the Mt. Moriah unit.

## **Travel Management**

I realize that Genny Wilson, then Acting District Ranger for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, explained the National Forest Travel Rule to this committee in Las Vegas last December. Since that time, the Santa Rosa Ranger District completed their analysis, and will be publishing their Motor Vehicle Use Map shortly.

The Ely District is still preparing our environmental analysis. Our proposed action adds 251 motorized miles to our existing system of 625 miles. This essentially closes about 700 miles of user-created routes. We have been talking to the public about this project for nearly three years now, we are hopeful that we have added the most popular routes to our proposal, and we are closing those that cause the most environmental damage.

## **Wilderness Plans**

The Ely Ranger District now has 456,500 acres of Wilderness, after the passage of the White Pine County Land, Recreation, and Development Act of 2006.

Based on a total acreage of about one million acres, nearly half of the District is now Wilderness. The 2006 legislation added five new Wilderness Areas.

We are now starting a District-wide Wilderness Plan, which will determine appropriate locations for trails and trailheads, maximum group sizes, outfitter guide policies, and vegetation treatments. We already have authority to conduct Wildland Fire Use in all of the Wilderness Areas.

## **Mining Update**

The District has experienced a significant increase in interest in minerals exploration. I have five quick examples for you:

1) First, and the largest project, is the Taylor Mine on the south end of the Schell Creek Range. This mine and mill were abandoned in 1991, with few reclamation funds. Today, Anglo Nevada Minerals, a subsidiary of Fury Explorations, wants to expand the old mine, refurbish the old mill, and start mining for silver.

2) Not far from the old Taylor Mill, Molycor Gold Corporation proposes to drill 27 exploration holes near Taylor Peak and Cooper Wash to explore for gold.

3) At the old Hamilton Mine at the north end of the White Pine Range, Augusta Resource Corporation drilled four exploration holes near the Monte Cristo road to explore for molybdenum.

4) Just a few miles south of the Hamilton Mine, Maestro Ventures proposes to drill 36 exploration holes near Green Springs to explore for gold.

5) Lastly, in Nye County, Portage Minerals wants to drill ten holes to discover gold deposits in Troy Canyon.

## **Oil and Gas Update**

On August 28, 2007, the Forest Supervisor signed the Record of Decision for the White Pine and Grant-Quinn Oil and Gas Leasing Project. We received three appeals on this decision, but prevailed on the appeals. There are now 255,603 acres of National Forest available for oil and gas leasing. This was a long time in the making, but we are proud to have completed this analysis, and now have these lands available for leasing.

## **My final topic is restoration and fuels reduction projects.**

Last fall, we completed a 3,700-acre prescribed burn near Currant Summit on the south end of the White Pine Range in Nye County. We also have a number of large projects in progress. All are wholly or partially funded by Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) funds.

- 1) The smallest one is in the southern end of the White Pine Range, in White Pine County. We are planning a 5,000-acre wildlife burn to restore sagebrush habitat, by removing the pinyon and juniper trees. This project is funded by Round 8 funds.
  
- 2) The second project is in the north Schell Creek Range. We have already started on this proposal, we hope to complete much of the NEPA in 2008, and we have requested funds in Round 9 to complete the NEPA and implement the treatments. In the north Schells, we have already

completed a watershed assessment, determining the vegetation communities at risk, and have developed our proposed action. We completed this work in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. We studied the entire area of about 70,000 acres, and plan to treat 20,000 acres.

- 3) The third area is Ward Mountain. As many of you know, in the 1970s catastrophic fires devastated this area, which contains the watershed for the water supply in Ely. We have proposed a large study in Round 9, encompassing 120,000 acres, including National Forest, BLM, and Ely Shoshone lands.

Thank you, Chairman Rhoads, and committee members, for this opportunity to address management activities on the Ely Ranger District. I will now gladly address any questions you may have concerning my testimony.

**- END OF TESTIMONY -**