

Madam Chair Swank, Members of the Committee:

I am Robert McDougal, Chairman of the Pershing County Commission.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts as to the issues of our county and the impacts of public land ownership and control of public lands therein.

First and foremost, we do not view public lands issues in Nevada as partisan. These are Nevada issues, and should be near the top of the list of all our elected officials, especially in Carson City. I say this because public lands inhibit so much economic activity and economic progress, especially in the rural counties, which are by extension so vital to the wellbeing of the state as a whole.

Individual counties cannot reach their full economic potential due to the existence of public lands. The Federal Government, through BLM and Forest Service control approximately 75% of lands in Pershing County. That fact means there are millions of acres which cannot be taxed by local jurisdictions and cannot be used for economic benefit. And, Federal land management as to wild horse populations and range fires has shown that management from afar may be lacking in effectiveness.

Some background as to Pershing County:

1. Pershing County has a natural Resources Plan and Natural Resources Advisory Committee patterned after Eureka County, which is active, and has the crucial backing of the Governor.
2. Pershing County's priority is to have:
  - a. Management of public lands in a manner which best meets the needs of the residents and business interests of Pershing County.
  - b. Periodic adjustments to management to conform to changing needs and conditions which are easy and expeditious to implement.
  - c. Harmonious and diverse use of public lands which take into account the long-term needs of the County for both renewable and non-renewable resources, including but not limited to recreation, livestock grazing, minerals, watershed, wildlife, fish, and the natural scenic, scientific and historic areas of Pershing County.
  - d. Harmonious and continuous use of public lands for recreation, mining, and agriculture.
3. Agriculture is a high priority for Pershing County. Farming and ranching are a strong and active industry. The ranching component provides a range of benefits to the wildlands of the County. The farming component provides considerable employment.
  - a. Wildland grazing reduces the threat of wild fires. Because of poor wildland grazing rules in recent years, frequency and severity of wild fires has increased.
  - b. Good grazing practices actually improve habitats for native species such as mule deer, mountain sheep and others. Agriculture augments the environment and wildlife.

- c. Grazers are the eyes and ears on the ground. They see and can respond to range issues quickly. Their business sustainability depends on good land practices, not a rule book published in Washington DC.
  - d. Local controls allow Pershing County to rapidly and with common sense respond and adapt to changing conditions. Increases or decreases to grazing activity and repairs and maintenance to infrastructure can be decided and acted upon quickly.
4. Mining is a high priority to Pershing County. Currently, federal regulations and red tape make permitting cumbersome and time consuming. At this moment, the "Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act" has passed in the House of Representatives and is being considered in the Senate. This act will (among other things) allow existing mining interests in Pershing County to purchase the lands they operate on, and thus come completely under the jurisdiction of the State of Nevada for their operation, future expansion, and reclamation. Nevada is the leader in mining law and regulation and offers the benefit of being close to the operators and the people of Pershing County.
  5. "Burning Man" is a high priority to Pershing County, but for all the wrong reasons. This event occurs completely within Pershing County, but because it is on Federally managed lands we are prohibited from collecting any taxes or fees of any kind. Because of its geographic location, virtually all the economic activity (and sales taxes) associated with the event occurs in Washoe and Lyon Counties. Pershing County receives, through a lawsuit settlement, a small amount of money from Burning Man ostensibly to cover law enforcement and court costs. While the event stretches over a long week, our costs continue throughout the year. Pershing County continues to support the State enacting an event tax for any events of this kind throughout the state, with a reasonable portion of the receipts going to the county where the event occurs.
  6. Pershing County entirely supports the Taylor Grazing Act and its sister acts in NRS 568 and 569, and the County concurs with the current legislative policy in relation to public lands.
  7. NRS 321.00051 provides that: The Legislature hereby declares that the public policy of this State is to continue to seek the acquisition of lands retained by the Federal Government within the borders of this State.

Pershing County is approximately the size of Rhode Island but has a population of about 6000 people. As such, we have a small tax base but the responsibility to provide emergency services over thousands of square miles. With the economic expansion happening in Washoe, Storey and Lyon counties, more indigent and poor are moving to Lovelock, putting a greater stress on social services.

Our ranchers are the stewards of the land. It is their livelihood. BLM regulation and mismanagement are pushing many to the economic brink. Ranchers spend their own money to build watering systems for their cattle, which benefit native species especially in drought times, but overpopulation of wild horses push them out. Wild horses, in the populations currently present are damaging the entire desert ecosystem, including riparian areas, native grasses, etc.

Currently the Navy is making plans for the expansion of the NAS Fallon. This expansion as currently envisioned would remove some private land in Pershing County from the tax rolls, but more importantly, close the reasonable access to an expanding iron mine which straddles the Pershing and Churchill county line. Tens of millions of dollars have already been invested in this mine and the prospect for expanded employment, mine tax revenues, etc. could be devastated. I ask that the State take an active role in urging the Navy to adjust their plans to accommodate the economic betterment of the County.

In summation, we in Pershing County need to have better management, control and economic access to current Federally managed lands, and we encourage this committee and the entire Legislature to impress upon the Federal Government that the best use and management of our lands must occur closer to home

I thank the committee for this opportunity to provide our County's perspective.