

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
AUSTIN-TONOPAH RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

**June 29, 2018
Pioche, Nevada**

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to present before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Lance Brown and I am the District Ranger for the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District. I have returned to the District as Ranger in September 2017, but have worked here previously from 2002-2006 in a different capacity. I am entering my 5th year as a District Ranger, with Austin-Tonopah Rd being my second duty station as a Ranger.

My testimony today will update the committee regarding management activities on the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District. I would like to focus my presentation on some key priority program areas.

BACKGROUND

The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District is located in central Nevada, contains approximately 2.1 million acres, the largest District in the lower 48 states. The majority of the District lies within Nye County, with Lander County and Eureka County also included within administrative areas. There are 10 permanent employees, and we typically have 5-10 seasonal employees annually.

NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE PRIORITIES

- 1) Uplifting and empowering our employees through a respectful, safe working environment.
- 2) Being good neighbors and providing excellent customer service.

- 3) Promoting shared stewardship by increasing partnerships and volunteerism.
- 4) Improving the condition of forests and grasslands.
- 5) Enhancing recreation opportunities, improving access, and sustaining infrastructure

AUSTIN-TONOPAH RANGER DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Vegetation and Fuels

- Pinyon-Juniper treatments to restore habitats for sage grouse, mule deer and other wildlife species.
- Reduction of fuels near and adjacent to urban interface areas, private lands and infrastructure.
- This work has been funded by appropriated dollars, Secure Rural Schools Act (RAC), Nevada Department of Wildlife funding, and other sources.
- Initiating a landscape view of opportunities within variable fuel types across the District. A focus will be urban interface and pinyon-juniper.
- Partners include Nevada Department of Wildlife, Great Basin Institute, Nevada Division of Forestry, Tonopah Conservation District, private landowners, and others.

Developed Recreation and Trails

- The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has focused on reconstructing and improving our developed recreation facilities and trails to improve recreation opportunities for the public.
- We are focused on working with partners for highlighting recreational trail marking and mapping.
- We are also prioritizing improving our campgrounds to provide facilities with lower long-term maintenance costs.
- For trails, we are actively working with a variety of public groups to improve and upgrade our non-motorized trail system (Friends of Nevada Wilderness), and our Austin mountain bike trail system (Austin Chamber of Commerce and Great Basin Institute).

Minerals and Geothermal

- Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has a highly active mineral exploration program - at any given time there may 5-15 ongoing Plans of Operations.
- Geothermal parcel leases will become available in fall 2018 in the north Toiyabe Range, greater Austin, NV area. Ongoing geothermal plants, administered by BLM, have been highly productive and contributed value to the local economy.

Range Management

- The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has 34 active allotments, 9 vacant allotments, and 4 closed allotments per the Forest Plan. We are currently staffed with one Rangeland Management Specialist covering permit administration on the District.
- Vacant allotments require analysis and decision under NEPA prior to re-issuance of a term grazing permit. Several vacant allotments have been used on a temporary permit basis for permittees that have resource/management concerns on their permitted allotment.
- Significant interest is present for permitting the vacant allotments under a term grazing permit.
- Staffing, funding, and higher priorities on the Humboldt-Toiyabe NF have precluded the Austin-Tonopah RD from moving forward with NEPA on vacant allotments.

Wild Horses and Burros

- Austin-Tonopah RD has 10 of the 34 active Wild Horse and Burro Territories (WHT) in the Forest Service System.
- Currently, the management plan decision for the Hickison Wild Burro Territory in the North Toiyabe Mountain Range is out for public review. The review and objection process began on June 6, 2018, for 45 days.
- The District is seeking support and funding to move to the next wild horse territory planning effort to set an appropriate management level.
- While it's not on the Austin-Tonopah District, I would like to share that the Forest Service conducted a successful emergency gather in May near Cold Creek, Nev.

in the Spring Mountains Wild Horse Territory. Working with a BLM gather contractor to set up a low stress “bait trap”, we removed 148 starving horses from the range. Most were transported to the BLM Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Corral to be prepared for adoption. Nineteen animals were humanely euthanized due to a hopeless prognosis for improvement. Three foals were fostered locally. Due to initial poor body condition, mid-August is the first date that animals will be available for adoption, but the Ridgecrest facility reports the condition of the horses is improving. The BLM and Forest Service are working to develop a management plan for the jointly managed Wheeler Pass Herd Management Area / Spring Mountains Wild Horse Territory.

Wildlife Management

- Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has partnered under a Conservation Agreement and Strategy to manage the Toiyabe sub-population of the Columbia spotted frog. Active management by improving habitats and watershed stability combined with yearly population monitoring continues to be successful. Partners include Nevada Division of Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, and Bureau of Land Management.
- We are partnering to restore Lahontan cutthroat trout in up to 23.1 miles of stream in the upper Reese River and Stewart Creek in the Arc Dome Wilderness. NDOW is the proponent, working with USFWS and the Forest Service, proposing chemical treatments to remove non-native trout. Post-treatment will consist of restocking the stream systems with Lahontan cutthroat trout. Planning is currently underway and we anticipate implementation during the summer of 2019.

CONCLUSION

This concludes my prepared comments. Thank you, Madame Chairwoman and committee members, for this opportunity to speak. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have about management of the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District.

END OF TESTIMONY

