

***Updates Regarding Public Lands Activities and Impacts in Elko County.**

You asked that we in Elko County submit ideas regarding actions the Legislature could take to help communities better function within the confines of public lands.

First, I will refer to some of the challenges we face in Elko County. Most of those challenges are ones we have in common with the other Nevada Counties when it comes to functioning within the confines of public lands.

The economy in Elko County is driven primarily by mining, recreation and livestock production.

***MINING**

Virtually all of the land used for exploration for nonfuel minerals in Elko County is either federally managed public or private lands so interspersed with federally managed public lands that its utilization for mineral exploration is effectively controlled by the federal government land policies. As a result, it can be concluded that all of the 2,359,000 acres of land in Elko County used for exploration in the county are effectively controlled by the federal government.

Mine permitting in the U.S. takes, on average, 7-10 years compared to other developed countries who are putting mines into production within 3-4 years (Without compromising environmental standards). The National Mining Assoc. reports that nearly 50% of a project's value can be lost due to permitting delays. As an investor, foreign mining operations offer a far more timely return on investment. Federal regulations are overshadowing the appeal of Nevada's diverse and robust mineral portfolio.

***RECREATION**

George F. Leaming, PhD, of Western Economic Analysis Center, was contracted by Elko County to provide an economic analysis on the impact of recreation in Elko County. Dr. Leaming wrote, “the federal land use policies will have severe negative impacts on the economic future of the county”. His 2010 report states that in 2008, approximately 20% of Elko County’s economy was recreation based. Dr. Leaming wrote, outdoor recreation is the biggest user of public lands accounting for 20% of our local economy and recreation relies heavily on full access to public lands.

There are direct and indirect economic impacts to Elko County in the recreation industry when public lands uses are lost because of management decisions for “Greater Sage Grouse Habitat management, WSA’s, road less or wilderness”, if they impact access. The recreation industry of the area provides a huge part of our economic infrastructure, not only due to direct proceeds in Elko County, but indirectly due to the annual tourist population.

The Leaming Report states that 2/3rds of the tourism base of Elko County Economy came from outdoor recreation primarily on public lands. In Elko County outdoor recreation generates an average of \$165 million annually in outdoor recreational uses through commercial retail sales, services, lodging and personal income.

***GRAZING**

Elko County typifies a true “Cow County” with vast plush grazing lands surrounded by rugged mountains. There are approximately 397 ranches and farms in Elko County. Most are dependent upon federal lands for grazing. There are 135,554 cattle and 19,627 sheep in the county. Elko County ranked first in the State of Nevada for cattle and calves, sheep and lambs and horse production in the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The county also ranked fourth in the nation in

number of beef cows tabulated in the 1997 Census of Agriculture. Federal lands are an essential component for most of the county's ranches. Grazing authorized on the federal lands has been reduced over many years.

Since 1980 Nevada ranchers have witnessed a 50% reduction of AUMs (grazing permits) while the sheep industry has struggled to stay afloat with a 95% reduction. Catastrophic wildland fires are directly attributed to the decrease of livestock grazing. Recently under interim management the BLM proposed to remove a total of 1,875 square miles (1.2 Million Acres) from livestock production in Elko County to protect Greater Sage-Grouse populations and habitat. As per the USDA agricultural census, the agricultural productivity to be lost, totals nearly \$31 million per year.

Two of the challenges that Elko County deals with are wildfire and overpopulated of wildhorses.

Recent record-setting wildfires are not only destroying wildlife habitat, they kill off the animals themselves. It is estimated that between 2002-2011 nearly 41 million acres were burned in 11 western states while spewing over 4 billion pounds of carcinogenic pollutants into the air. Why? Because for nearly 30 years of various federal policies and procedure have been adopted that restrict wildland firefighters from doing their job effectively.

The biggest changes in plant communities and range condition have come about since the 1970's, after the Federal Land management agencies began reducing permits and removing livestock from the range. It was then that we began experiencing the uncontrollable catastrophic fires that have been raging throughout the west in recent years.

Every year, we lose more critical wildlife habitat to wildfire. When reserved or no grazing has been implemented wildfires burn first and hottest. Subsequently Federal Land management agencies require that such areas be removed from grazing for three full growing seasons. Therefore more cheat grass growth for more wildfires destroying more wildlife habitat and

endangering the economic viability of ranching operations.

Mismanagement under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 has led to a WH&B population that is more than double what the land can healthily support. According to the BLM, the Western range can support a WH&B population of nearly 27,000. In 2015, the WH&B population was approximately 58,000, up 18% from the previous year. In 2016, the number continued to soar reaching 67,000 (up another 15%). In 2017 the BLM estimated a population of 83,000 WH&Bs. At this rate WH&B herds will double every 4 to 5 years where they will continue to destroy sensitive wildlife habitats, devour rangeland feed, and severely upset ecological balance.

Federal land management decisions and practices impact all these major industries in Elko County. It should be noted however, that within the new administration in Washington, we have seen at least by the leaders in the Federal agencies, an attempt to work with the counties in a way we have not seen in a long time.

Still the challenges of living with decisions that impact how we are able to use our natural resources, by those who are over 2,000 miles away and may have never been in the State of Nevada, are considerable.

One example of some of the relief we have seen is the lifting of some of the severe restrictions that were placed on us because of the sage grouse. When Fish and Wildlife decided that the listing of the bird was not warranted, the BLM proceeded with the management plan for sage grouse that in some ways created more challenges for us, than if it had been listed. As an example of the cost to Elko County, in 2012. The so-called China Mountain Wind Energy Project in northeastern Elko County was canceled because the BLM plan for managing the sage grouse. The cost to Elko County is estimated to have been \$500,000,000 in construction and \$11,200,000 In tax revenues.

Granted some of the rules that caused the project to be canceled have recently been softened, but the economic benefit to Elko County was lost and we must be aware that nearly all of those rules and regulations are not the product of congressional action, but have been promulgated by the administration in power and that can change with an election.

The restriction of access coupled with failed federal management policies are severely hindering Nevada's ability to compete on a national and global scale.

Travel Management Plans by the Forest Service and BLM that have been completed, or are planned, have had an impact on mining, recreations and grazing. It was the Travel Management Plan by the Forest Service in Elko County that brought about AB 227 and the creation of the Task Force commissioned by the legislature to study the implications of transferring certain public lands in Nevada from the Federal government to the state. The resolution from the task force created by AB 227 was approved by all 17 counties in Nevada and submitted in resolution form to the State Legislature. That resolution was then represented in SJR1, passed by both houses in the legislature and signed by the Governor. Congressman Amodei then introduced it in Congress as HR 1484 and there were three congressional hearings held on the bill.

Finally, all of our challenges are not caused by the vast amount of public land in our County. Several years ago we had number of oil companies that carried out fairly extensive exploration in the county and were very positive about what they had found. Having found some extensive oil and gas resources it was a disappointment for the economy of the county when they shut down. Several weeks ago I asked one of my connections at Noble Energy if the prices had come back enough that they may return to Elko County. He told me it is not the price of oil and gas that is keeping them away, but the inclination among the majority in our present legislature to oppose fracking and that fracking is necessary for extraction in Elko County.

Still, while living with issues that are more to do with politics than fact, it is surviving in the confines of the public lands that is the biggest challenge for Elko

County. It is because of that, that our County Commissioners voted two week ago to approved a resolution continuing to support the Nevada Land Management Task Force Resolution by the Nevada Interim Legislative Committee on Public Lands which encourages certain public lands to be transferred to the State of Nevada.

It is generally believed in Elko County that it is better that decisions concerning our natural resources are made by those closest to the people dependent on those resources.

We respectfully request that as efforts are made to transfer certain lands and management in Nevada from Washington to the State of Nevada, those efforts be carefully considered by the Legislature and acted upon in a way that gives more control to the people of Nevada over their natural resources.