

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES  
ON THE  
SPRING MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA  
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOR THE  
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for providing this speaking engagement. My name is Tim Short, and I am the District Ranger for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. Today I will provide a brief background on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area and then address five important efforts currently underway. These five efforts include:

- Visitor Management and Law Enforcement
- Emergency Warning System
- Las Vegas Ski and Snowboard Resort
- Fire and Fuels Management
- Motorized Travel Route Designation

**BACKGROUND**

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is responsible for overseeing the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area contains approximately 316,000 acres, spread from Mt. Potosi in the south, to Mt. Stirling in the north. The majority of National Forest System lands are within Clark County, with the exception of approximately 28,000 acres in Nye County.

Elevations range from approximately 4,000 feet to nearly 12,000 feet at Mt. Charleston Peak. Within this elevation range are seven life zones ranging from the desert to alpine. A life zone is an ecological community found within certain elevations. Spring Mountains National Recreation Area is home to 23 plant and animal species found no where else in the world.

The Spring Mountain National Recreation Area has two offices. One is located in Las Vegas and other is in Pahrump. There is also a field station in Kyle and Lee

Canyons. Currently there are approximately 55 employees working on this District.

On the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, there are three wildernesses that include a total of approximately 80,000 acres. They are the Mt. Charleston, La Madre and Rainbow Wildernesses. There also is one wilderness study area located in Mt. Stirling.

The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area contains some of the most beautiful and diverse land in Nevada. These lands provide numerous recreational opportunities such as scenic driving, hiking, picnicking, camping, climbing, bicycling, hunting, off highway vehicle use, and winter snow play, including skiing.

We permit private entities under a special use permits to operate 10 developed campgrounds and picnic areas, a ski area, two organizational camps, two communication sites, and other special uses such as utility corridors.

I will now go into more detail about management activities on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.

### **VISITOR MANAGEMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Managing a spectacular National Recreation Area only 30 minutes from the Las Vegas strip is both exciting and challenging. More than 1.9 million people visit the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area each year. Approximately 90 percent travel Highway 157, which is Kyle Canyon Road. On weekends and holidays, Kyle and Lee Canyons are extremely congested. On New Years weekend in 2004, more than 6,600 cars crowded State Highway 157 in Kyle Canyon.

Kyle and Lee Canyons are popular places where Southern Nevadans go in the summertime to escape the heat. In the wintertime, which is the busiest time of year, they go to play in the snow. Icy roads, limited parking, and areas for snow play create difficult conditions for visitors and present safety challenges for our employees.

The heavy use creates significant visitor information and law enforcement demands. Fortunately, through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area was able to hire four full-time and one part-time Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers.

With regards to law enforcement, we have a unique partnership with the other Federal Agency Law Enforcement Officers in Southern Nevada. Through this partnership they've established cross designation, which allows them to enforce other agencies' regulations. They are also in the process of developing a

fine/collateral schedule that is consistent for the various offenses regardless of the agency, and is similar to those of other local law enforcement agencies such as Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

The Federal Agency Law Enforcement Officers frequently work together as a joint task force patrol on busy weekends, in problems areas, or whenever there is the need for a large amount of officer presence. In addition, Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers have a good working relationship with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and other local emergency management personnel. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and Nevada Highway Patrol are key cooperators with the Forest Service. They have been indispensable in helping manage the heavy visitor use on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.

In addition to our primary Law Enforcement Officers, three field employees were also hired through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act. They spend much of their time informing the public about appropriate uses and the need to protect this special place. Often the Fire Prevention Specialist also assists in law enforcement activities.

Planning efforts funded through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act are currently underway to improve transportation, parking, and recreational opportunities on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. A recent Federal Transportation Study identified short-and-long-term measures to help alleviate traffic congestion issues. These measures range from improved signage and road engineering to mass transportation such as shuttle buses. The Middle Kyle Complex project is also identifying ways to help reduce recreation pressures by providing more recreational and educational opportunities out of the ecologically sensitive area in upper Kyle and Lee Canyons.

### **EMERGENCY WARNING SYSTEM**

Senator Ensign, at the request of the Mt. Charleston Visitor Use Task Force, recently secured a \$500,000 earmark for the Forest Service to create a comprehensive "Early Warning System" for fires and avalanches on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.

The Visitor Use Taskforce is a grass roots group of Mt. Charleston residents. They meet regularly with the various agencies that have jurisdictional responsibilities in the Mt Charleston area to explore solutions for some of the issues.

This system will be especially important if evacuating communities during wildland fires becomes necessary. We are currently working with the Clark County Department of Emergency Management to identify ways to improve emergency communication and notification systems on the Spring Mountains

National Recreation Area. The Clark County Department of Emergency Management will be working with the individual communities within the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area and other agencies to implement identified measures. This effort will improve emergency management services' ability to notify and protect the public during fires, avalanches, or other emergencies.

### **LAS VEGAS SKI AND SNOWBOARD RESORT**

This winter has been extremely dry with relatively little snowfall on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. This significantly contrasts with last winter's near-record snowfall. Last winter, several unprecedented avalanches occurred. One caused a fatality and the other seriously damaged the main ski lift at the Las Vegas Ski and Snowboard Resort.

Immediately following the avalanches, experts worked to identify the contributing factors and developed measures to prevent future avalanches from threatening the ski area. One of those already-implemented measures includes a new weather station, which has significantly improved the ski area's ability to monitor avalanche weather conditions.

In addition, avalanche control tools are being studied, which could improve the resorts ability to control avalanches before they become large and destructive. The ski resort has also replaced the damaged lift and made modifications to prevent damage from potential future avalanches. They are also improving their ability to serve the public through increased snowmaking capacity, improved parking, and renovating deteriorated infrastructure.

The ski area is located within an ecologically diverse area also known as a biodiversity hotspot. As a result, ski area management activities must occur in a manner that protects and conserves these sensitive resources. For example, this area is one of only two core locations in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area that contains the Mt. Charleston Blue Butterfly.

A recent request to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for the listing of the Mt. Charleston Blue Butterfly has heightened the awareness of the butterfly's habitat. The ski area is implementing a monitoring and inventory program that will help protect the butterfly's habitat. They also have other protection efforts underway for other species of concern within the ski area boundary.

### **FIRE AND FUELS MANAGEMENT**

Now I would like to discuss the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area fire organization and firefighting capabilities.

The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area is staffed for "initial attack" efforts. The objective is to quickly respond to fires, and to contain and control

them while they are still small. The actual number of firefighting employees is based on a variety of factors, including the local fire history, fuel types, road access, and so forth.

When needed, we have access to many fire suppression resources that can be brought in from other locations within the Forest Service and from other Federal land management agencies.

In Southern Nevada, we have the opportunity to be part of a much larger fire suppression partnership that includes not only the other Federal land management agencies, but also Nevada Division of Forestry and Clark and Nye County Fire Departments. These are highly trained professional firefighting organizations that provide additional support to the Forest Service during wildland fires.

Las Vegas Metro, Nevada Highway Patrol, and Nevada Department of Transportation are also critical to firefighting efforts regarding road closures, limiting traffic access, evacuation procedures, and ensuring public safety.

The Nevada Fire Safe Council plays another vital role. They work with local residents to create defensible space, which is the reduction of flammable materials from around structures. This defensible space is critical to firefighter and public safety, and greatly assists in protecting homes during wildland fires.

The 2005 fire season was unusual in the number of fires that occurred on Bureau of Land Management lands. This was mostly due to a wet winter and spring rain and snow, resulting in increased vegetation at lower elevations. Last year also brought considerable snow pack to the higher elevations on the National Forest. This resulted in fuel moistures remaining high throughout much of the summer. Therefore, fewer fires occurred on the National Forest in the upper elevations.

Often, the increased vegetation growth lasts for two years, so we could continue to see more fires this year at lower elevations. This year there was a lack of snow and rain in the Spring Mountains, which may result in more fires at higher elevations as well.

Unfortunately, the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area and the Bureau of Land Management may have a very active fire season. Sunday's fire located on Mt. Potosi had the potential of becoming a much larger wildfire. Fortunately, cooler temperatures and higher relative humidity helped our firefighters successfully contain this fire by Wednesday at 400 acres. This early season fire happens to coincide with the state's first official Wildland Fire Prevention Week. It is a good reminder to all of us to continue to maintain our defensible space throughout this potentially volatile fire season.

## **TRAVEL ROUTE DESIGNATION**

The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area completed a designated motorized trail plan in 2004. That effort was the result of significant public involvement with local community groups, agencies, and interested individuals. The plan was developed in response to the growth of unofficial motorized trails, and the need to provide for designated motorized trail system routes. This plan is consistent with the national policy to limit motorized travel to designated roads and trails and to eliminate cross-country travel.

Designating motorized roads and trails will protect important natural and cultural resources from the impacts caused by off-highway-vehicles. Plan implementation has been pending the completion of archaeological surveys and concurrence with the State Historic Preservation Officer of designated routes. Plan implementation will include posting signs of where motorized vehicles can ride, and the development of user maps and kiosks with related information.

## **CONCLUSION**

This concludes my prepared comments. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for providing this speaking opportunity. I will now answer any questions that you may have regarding the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.

**-END OF TESTIMONY-**