

## **Legislative Committee on Public Lands**

**August 24, 2006**

### **Testimony of John Hiatt**

#### **Representing the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition (ENLC)**

Senator Rhoads and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today with regard to the activities of the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition (ENLC). The mission of the Coalition is to work to restore or maintain ecosystem health on a landscape scale in the Great Basin, working collaboratively with all interested parties. Our area of focus is the Ely BLM District, which consists of Lincoln, White Pine and part of Nye County, an area of about twelve million acres.

Founded in the year 2000, the Coalition is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and serves as the private partner in a joint public/private partnership with the Federal land management agencies in the Ely District. The Coalition has a diverse membership of organizations, companies and individuals. Our working partners range from The Nature Conservancy to the Nevada Cattlemen's Association to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to the Red Rock Audubon Society to individual ranchers such as Gracian Uhalde and Hank Vogler. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation played a key role in getting this organization up and running by serving as our fiscal agent and mentor for the first years.

Our funding comes from grants, gifts and performance of contract work for the BLM and U.S. Forest Service. We also serve as the fiscal agent for the Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) and several smaller CWMA's in the region.

The Nevada Congressional Delegation, especially Senator Reid, has been very helpful in facilitating our work and steering funds our way. In particular, Senator Reid arranged for two Department of Energy grants to the Coalition (part of the Fuel for Schools program). These grants are funding much of our work in Gleason Creek and Smith Valley, two areas just outside of Ely that are part of the Steptoe Valley Watershed. The Senator has also played a key role in smoothing out some of the Federal regulatory bumps that we have encountered.

This is the Coalition's seventh year but it is only in the last two years that we've started to make real progress. At present we have six permanent and about twenty seasonal employees working on a variety of projects. We will soon move to a new larger office space here in Ely. It takes some time for people to believe that a new organization will survive and be successful. There is a significant learning curve involved in obtaining funding, lining up viable partners and identifying those projects which have a high

<p><b>EXHIBIT E - LANDS</b> <b>Document consists of 3 pages.</b> <b>Entire Exhibit Provided</b> <b>Meeting Date: 08-24-06</b></p>
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probability of success. A new organization can't afford many failures. We want to thank all those who have placed their faith in the Coalition and have worked with us to make things happen.

As we move forward we see several areas where the Nevada Legislature could play a role. First, use your bully pulpit to help all our citizens recognize that the ecological forces affecting the land in this State are not bound by ownership boundaries or artificial dividing lines. Also, help people to understand that the landscape we live in is dynamic and changing. The past century has seen dramatic change and the next century will see even more dramatic changes. The combination of new introduced plants, animals, insects, pathogenic microorganisms and changes in climate regime will greatly accelerate the rate of change. To successfully adapt to the landscapes of the future and steer the changes in a direction we find acceptable we must all work together. Federal, state and private lands are all subject to forces of change such as fire, invasive weeds, insects, etc.

We suggest that the Legislature support the White Pine County Public Lands Bill recently introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Reid and Ensign. This is the most bipartisan, balanced public lands bill that we've seen and among other things provides a means whereby White Pine County land becomes eligible to share in money available for conservation initiatives funded by BLM land sales in Clark County.

Invasive non-native plants are arguably the single greatest threat to the health of Nevada's rangelands and wildlife. The State Wildlife Management Areas, which are mostly former agricultural lands, are some of the most heavily weed infested lands in the State. The Department of Wildlife needs appropriated funds to deal with the problem of invasive plants. The longer the work is delayed the more expensive it will be and the problem may eventually be beyond control. It is imperative that we not repeat the cheatgrass experience and allow other, even more damaging perennial weeds to dominate Nevada. The State Park system faces some of the same problems and also needs appropriated funds to stem the invasion.

We also suggest that the State might want to consider ENLC as a model for how a collaborative partnership between the Federal land management agencies, private land owners and other parties can work to effect restoration. Other parts of the State might benefit from our experience. We would be happy to share our experience and knowledge.

Another area where the State could play a key role would be in the area of native seed production. There is a tremendous need for seeds of native grasses, forbs and shrubs to re-establish native vegetation in areas damaged by fire or undergoing restoration. The University of Nevada, Reno College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Biotechnology could provide a very valuable service if it had the funding and direction to work with farmers to develop the proper techniques and cultivars for native seed production. There is also a tremendous need for research in this area.

The following project summary gives a flavor of the on-the –ground projects ENLC is working on or following at the present time:

- Department of Energy(DOE) - Gleason Creek Project - mowing sage brush and thinning PJ out of sage brush - 800 acres.
- Additional removal of PJ from sage brush stands in Gleason Creek - 240 acres.
- Experimental herbicide (Spike) treatments of sagebrush on private land (20 acres total) completed fall 2005 - now monitoring results.
- Sagebrush treatment, seeding with native vegetation and fencing completed on private lands in Baker - goal to improve sage grouse habitat - into second year of monitoring.
- Smith Valley - 2nd DOE project - mowing and thinning of PJ completed on 150 acres. Starting the mechanical treatments of Pinyon –Juniper this month (chaining, feller buncher, Fecon shredder).
- Completed fencing of an aspen stand near Ivapah Reservoir - to protect the spring head and the aspen stand.
- Six cooperative weed management areas within White Pine County continue to monitor, inventory and treat invasive species - from perennial pepperweed to tamarisk and leafy spurge.
- Volunteers continue to remove conifers from aspen stands in Box Canyon.
- Data Collection and Monitoring:
  1. Completed 40% of the cover data collection in Meadow Valley Wash - will resume in early 2007.
  2. Monitoring the restoration and regeneration on the 2004 and 2005 fires in Southern Lincoln County (approximately 800,000 acres).
- Collecting road inventory and cultural data in South Spring Valley and planning the cover data collections as part of a watershed assessment.
- Surveying and inventorying springs for the Forest Service on the Snake and Schell ranges.