

**TESTIMONY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE  
SOUTHERN NEVADA PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT  
SPRING MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA  
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOR THE  
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS  
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Mesquite, Nevada**

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Good morning. Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for providing this speaking opportunity. My name is Stephanie Phillips and I am the Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Today I will address implementing the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act from the USDA Forest Service perspective.

We are very fortunate to have access to Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) funding. The revenue generated through the sales of BLM lands has surpassed everyone's expectations. Our challenge is to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity and use the funding wisely to address immediate issues on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, and to leave a lasting legacy for future generations. Ten, twenty, thirty years from now, we want visitors to the Spring Mountains and Forest Service employees to reflect positively on how we spent the funding and acknowledge that we made sound decisions.

SNPLMA identifies four funding categories available to the federal land management agencies in Southern Nevada. The Forest Service has received funding and implemented projects in each of these categories. I will now discuss each category and highlight a few of our accomplishments.

My focus will be on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA), which is located mostly in Clark County. The NRA is currently the only Forest Service unit in Nevada that has access to SNPLMA funding, with the exception that federal agencies can use land acquisition funding throughout Nevada.

**Acquisition of Environmentally Sensitive Lands:** The federal land management agencies can use SNPLMA funding for acquisitions of environmentally sensitive lands throughout the state of Nevada. To date, the Forest Service has approval of \$215 million for land acquisitions. Of the 49

cases approved for the Forest Service, 22 are located within the Spring Mountains NRA. We have been very fortunate to acquire several tracts of land within the Spring Mountains NRA that will help us better manage recreation and sensitive species habitat. The Nel property, which was an abandoned golf course, is an example of a land acquisition that we will use to enhance recreation. It is the heart of the Middle Kyle Canyon project, a SNPLMA funded recreation and visitor services complex, currently in the planning phase.

Other notable land acquisitions include Horseshutem Springs and the Torino Ranch both on the west side of the NRA.

**Capital Improvement Projects:** SNPLMA funding for Capital Improvement projects has been very beneficial for the Forest Service. With this funding, we can construct much needed new facilities to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, and reconstruct our aging existing facilities. To date the Forest Service has received \$89.3 million for capital improvement projects on the Spring Mountains NRA. We have completed 10 of the 30 approved projects. The other 20 projects are underway, either in the planning or construction stages.

The Middle Kyle Canyon Complex is a major new construction project designed to attract visitors away from the Upper Kyle and Lee Canyons where most of the sensitive species occur. Most of the private residences within the NRA are located in the upper canyons, and traffic congestion often occurs on busy weekends. We estimate that 80% of the current 1.9 million visitors to the Spring Mountains annually, recreate in this area. The proposal for this project includes a full range of recreational activities such as camping, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails. We are also investigating the feasibility of a large scale parking area and shuttle service to the upper canyon recreation sites.

Our goal is for the Middle Kyle Complex to be sustainable – to withstand the test of time. Achieving economic sustainability is proving to be a challenge. While SNPLMA provides for construction funding, it does not provide for operations and maintenance. Therefore, we will be looking at a mix of fees, partnerships, and concessionaire management to help cover the operations and maintenance costs of the Middle Kyle Complex.

In February 2006, the Secretary for the Department of the Interior approved funding for Round 6. This approval included over \$40 million for the Forest Service to renovate the existing campground and picnic facilities in Kyle and Lee Canyons. These seven facilities, constructed in the 1960's, are showing their age. In addition, they currently do not provide the types of facilities that today's more urban user desires. Therefore, the renovation may include showers, modern restroom facilities, electricity, and facilities for large recreational camping vehicles (RV's) .

**Conservation Initiatives:** The SNPLMA Conservation Initiatives funding became available to the Federal agencies in 2003. This category, more so than the others, has allowed the federal land management agencies in Clark County to work together in partnership across agency boundaries. The public does not recognize agency boundaries, and neither do the natural resources (such as water, air, and wildlife). So it just makes sense for us to work together to achieve mutual goals. Both the public and the resources will benefit.

This category also provides the opportunity for us to engage in partnerships with state and local entities. The partnership with UNLV and their Public Lands Institute is critical to our success in carrying out conservation initiative programs.

The Southern Nevada interagency partnership (comprised of BLM, National Park Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service) has made a difference. Conservation Initiative funding has been used to hire additional law enforcement officers for each of the four federal agencies. These officers work together across agency boundaries to protect resources and provide for public safety. As a result, much needed law enforcement presence on the ground has increased for all four agencies.

Our interagency volunteer efforts have received national recognition. Working together as opposed to competing for volunteers, we have increased the volunteer capacity for all four agencies. This means more volunteers assist in trail maintenance, litter pick up, and restoration work.

Conservation initiative funding and the interagency anti-litter & desert dumping program have had a significant impact on addressing the NRA's litter problem. A few short years ago, the media blasted the Forest Service for the huge amounts of trash on the NRA. Today there is much less trash due to the funding and working together to stop desert dumping.

In addition to the interagency projects, we have received funding for several Conservation Initiatives projects that occur only on National Forest lands. Most notably, we have received over \$7.0 million dollars for fuels reduction treatments on the Spring Mountains NRA. Our priority is to protect lives and private property from wildfire; therefore, our focus is on treating the fuels in the wildland – urban interface. We will use this funding to create fuel breaks around the private property and Forest Service facilities within the NRA. This will be accomplished by removing most of the live and dead vegetation within a 300-foot strip around the private property. While this treatment will not completely stop a fire, it will slow the fire down to where firefighters can protect the structures.

To be successful, the fuel reduction efforts must also occur on the private lands. Therefore, both the Nevada Division of Forestry and the Nevada Fire Safe

Council are important partners. They have been extremely beneficial in working with the private landowners to reduce fuels on the private lands.

Another significant Conservation Initiative project underway is the West Side Master Plan. This project will set the stage for future recreation development on the "Pahrump side" of the Spring Mountains NRA. The master plan takes a holistic view of the west side, assessing what recreational activities currently occur and then projecting into the future the types and locations of recreation facilities that should be developed to accommodate future recreational demands and to protect resources.

We will be requesting SNPLMA capital improvement funding in Round 7 to construct the proposed facilities. The Master Plan is proposing a range of recreation facilities including campgrounds, picnic areas, trails, and RV camping.

We estimate that Pahrump will double its population within the next 10 years. This is our opportunity to be pro-active and provide for facilities in advance of the population growth.

**Multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan:** The last category of SNPLMA funding that I will address is the Multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). This category is administered by Clark County, and provides funding for mitigation of impact to species from growth in the Las Vegas valley. Most of the mitigation occurs on federal lands, including the Spring Mountains NRA.

The NRA is especially important due to the 57 sensitive species found here, of which 23 occur only on the Spring Mountains.

Most of the projects funded by the MSHCP are inventory and monitoring projects, which allow us to gain a better understanding of the 57 species and how they respond to various natural and human impacts.

A major project funded in this category is the Spring Mountains Landscape Assessment. This effort takes a holistic look at the relationship between the 57 sensitive species and humans. The results of this assessment will be a prioritized list of recommendations that will enhance our ability to maintain species viability and provide for recreation and other human uses.

**Closing Remarks:** This has been a brief summary of Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act program for the Forest Service. We believe that we have come a long way since the first round of projects funded in 2000. We are beginning to see accomplishments on the ground.

Like many of the other Southern Nevada agencies, we have had to build capacity to carry out the projects. We currently manage several large-scale, multi-million dollar projects. No other Forest Service unit in the country has a comparable

workload. We have hired additional personnel; but we mostly rely on contractors to accomplish the work. We are becoming much smarter at managing contracts.

Throughout the development and implementation of these projects, we have actively engaged the public. Our goal is to build recreation facilities that the public will use for many years. To do this, the public must be engaged each step of the way.

Lastly, we will continue to explore opportunities for funding operations and maintenance of new facilities

Questions?