

**TESTIMONY ON
FOREST PLAN REVISION, TRAVEL MANAGEMENT,
AND ROADLESS AREA MANAGEMENT
ON THE
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for setting aside agenda time for this presentation before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Michael Hampton, I have worked in land and resource stewardship with the U.S. Forest Service for the past 28 years, my current position is Planning Staff Officer on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, I work in our Forest Supervisor's office in Sparks.

Today I would like to address two important Forest-wide efforts, Forest Plan Revision and Travel Management, and their relationship to roadless area management. I will take a few moments to acquaint you with the processes before providing updates. I'll begin with the Forest Plan Revision.

Forest Plan Revision Progress and Upcoming Forest Plan Revision Workshops

The simplest explanation of our Forest Plans is that they provide important guidance on all the uses on our National Forest. Similar to County or City Master Plans, National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans are to be updated every 10-to-15 years. The current Forest Plans for the Toiyabe and

**EXHIBIT U - LANDS
Document consists of 6 pages.
Entire Exhibit Provided
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Humboldt National Forests were approved in 1986, when the Forests were managed as separate administrative units. These two separate Forest Plans have a number of differences. The two forests were combined into one administrative unit in 1995. One of our objectives in Forest Plan Revision process is to develop one strategic Plan, which will be an umbrella document for consistent management direction for both the Humboldt & Toiyabe National Forests.

In accordance with the 2005 Forest Planning Rule, which provides direction to the Forest Service for amendments and revision of existing Forest Plans, the Humboldt Toiyabe is following an inclusive, collaborative approach involving the public, state, local, and tribal governments. Since last August, we have held seven community workshops and seven County Commission briefings on our Forest Plan Revision effort. On February 16th, a briefing was provided to the Lyon County Commission.

At our upcoming April and May community workshops, we will further engage the public in dialogue about the products we've developed since we met with folks last fall. Inventoried Roadless Area evaluation process and results are one of those products we'll soon have available for discussion. We will also discuss our progress on a number of required steps in the Forest Plan Revision process, including: an eligibility determination on Wild & Scenic Rivers, and identification of special areas which will be managed to enhance or protect unique scenic, geologic, historic, paleontologic, botanic and biologic features. We also intend to have draft descriptions of Desired Conditions, the resource conditions and goals, established in the Forest Plan, available for public review.

The Forest Plan Revision products are posted to our Forest website, as soon as they are available. We also provide the public reports and information through direct mailings or at our Forest offices as requested. A third round of public input

will occur before the draft Revised Forest Plan is released for formal public comment, which is scheduled by the summer of 2007.

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's 6.3 million acres are spread across ten ranger districts in the state of Nevada. Forest Service policy requires evaluation of all inventoried roadless areas during Forest Plan Revision. Nearly half of the Humboldt Toiyabe lands are Inventoried Roadless areas. This evaluation involves determination of which areas should be managed to retain their roadless character, and which areas are appropriate for road development or motorized use.

Roadless areas are defined as areas within the National Forest that are greater than 5,000 acres in size, or smaller but adjacent to existing Wilderness areas, do not contain Forest Service roads, and are generally undeveloped. Roadless inventory criteria are listed in Forest Service Manual 1923.03.

FOREST SERVICE ROUTE DESIGNATION

In addition to the evaluation of existing Inventoried Roadless Areas, the Forest Plan Revision effort will identify suitable land uses. These two aspects of the revised Forest Plan will be consistent with and coordinated with Travel Management efforts by the Ranger District. The Travel Management process addresses designation of travel routes for various types of motorized and non-motorized use. These two efforts are related and provide many opportunities for dialogue with the public on the management of their National Forest.

As you are aware, the issue of *where* and *when* the public can use motorized vehicles on National Forests remains somewhat contentious and controversial. Nationwide, off road motorized vehicle use has increased from around 5 million riders in 1972 to over 36 million riders currently. Given this dramatic increase in

motorized use, the Forest Service is challenged to balance this legitimate use with the other values and uses of National Forest System lands.

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is undertaking a travel management effort because the Chief of the Forest has identified managing recreation and motorized recreation as one of *the* top issues facing our agency today. In November of 2005, the Forest Service established a rule that limits motorized travel to designated roads and trails.

The overall intent of route designation is to:

- Stop indiscriminate motorized use; and
- Redirect motorized use to sustainable roads and trails.

HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE'S ROUTE DESIGNATION PROCESS

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest currently contains over 6,000 miles of Forest Service designated roads. We currently estimate that there are at least that many additional miles of roads and motorized trails that have been created by public use. Some of these routes are redundant and can have negative impacts to streams and wildlife habitat. Forest managers and employees are reviewing these travel routes with the public and designating those routes that appropriately should be included in the Forest's managed road and trail system. Upon completion of this open and public process, only designated routes will be open for public use.

Staff members from the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area near Las Vegas are currently refining their 2004 Motorized Trail Plan, which is also essentially a designated route system. District rangers in Winnemucca, Austin, Tonopah, and Ely have begun the process of identifying roads and trails that should remain open to motorized vehicles. Each of these districts have held open public workshops gathering information toward the goal of development of

a specific Proposed Action to be presented back to the public as soon as available, most likely early this summer.

Each of our rangers across the state of Nevada has been and will continue meeting with the public to develop Route Designation proposals for their respective Districts. The District proposals will eventually be combined into a specific proposal for the state that we will analyze under the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA.

It's extremely critical to note that the proposal will be just that--a proposal—to start the NEPA process. Nevada's elected federal, state, and local officials, tribal, industry and special interest representatives, and the public will be notified about opportunities to formally review and comment on the Route Designation proposal. We sincerely hope that all of our adjoining Forest communities continue their conversations with their district rangers before, during and after this Route Designation process. We also realize that it will be important to coordinate with the BLM in their route designation planning.

And finally, our Carson and Bridgeport Ranger Districts are on a slightly different timeline because they are following a process consistent with other National Forests in California. Carson Ranger District held an open house on route designation this past Tuesday. Public open house sessions are scheduled for and Bridgeport in April and May. These districts are working toward a Proposed Action back to the public this coming fall.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, I've been able to provide the Committee a better understanding of efforts on the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest both in forest-wide strategic planning, the Forest Plan Revision effort, and the ranger district scale Route Designation effort, and the connections between them. Thank you again for providing this speaking opportunity. I would be glad to answer any questions

that you may have about my presentation. Please feel free to contact me or any Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest District Ranger for further updates.

-END OF TESTIMONY-