

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
MOUNTAIN CITY, JARBIDGE, AND RUBY MOUNTAINS
RANGER DISTRICTS
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 opportunity to speak before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Dan Dallas; I am the District Ranger for the Mountain City Ranger District on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Paul Flanagan, the District Ranger for the Ruby Mountains and Jarbridge Districts is unavailable today, so I will be covering topics from both Districts today before the Committee. Today I will update the committee on management actions currently being implemented on the districts in the northeastern part of the state. I will also outline some of the higher priority issues that the districts are currently facing. Specifically, I will speak on the following topics:

- **Comments on Travel Management Planning progress in Elko County**
- **The Status of the South Canyon Road Issue**
- **The Status of the repair of the washed out bridges in the Jarbridge area**
- **Minerals Exploration Activities**
- **Future Developed Recreation Issues**
- **Update on grazing conflicts and cooperative efforts with the County**

regarding their resolution

- **Rangeland management planning efforts on the Districts in Elko County**

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING EFFORTS IN ELKO COUNTY

I note that a significant portion of your agenda is dedicated to OHV issues on public lands, including an in-depth report on our Forest's efforts in this regard from Acting Forest Supervisor Ed Monnig. I did want to briefly report on our efforts specific to Elko County, as I'm sure that Chairman Rhoades may have heard some comments from his constituents regarding this effort. I'm happy to report that the initial concerns he may have heard have been addressed and we are engaged now in a positive manner with the public in Elko County.

We began public involvement efforts in northeastern Nevada in July with a news release and a presentation at the Public Land Use Advisory Commission (PLUAC) meeting. We explained that the Forest Service is undertaking a process to inventory existing trails and then identify a system of routes for motorized recreation that offers variety and utility, while protecting environmentally sensitive areas. We invited the public to provide input that would help us identify an appropriate system of OHV trails and areas.

Despite the constant reminder that this planning activity was NOT about closing roads, it was about identifying roads, the perception still persists. A brief summarization of what we are currently engaged in regarding this effort is asking the public to help us identify any "blank spots" or roads and trails we might not have identified on our maps. After a period of controversy about what this effort is really about, I'm now able to report that

through the understanding and efforts of some local leaders in the OHV community such as Mike Martsolf from the Bangin' Bones Club and PLUAC, Steve Loepky from the Gold Country ATV Club, Mike Riordan, local rancher and Department of Wildlife Commissioner, and others, we have turned a significant corner and are receiving valuable input and assistance from the local public. Recognizing we are just now getting the type of input we were hoping for at the beginning of this process, we have extended the deadline we initially set for receiving public input on our maps. Currently there are public meetings being arranged in the Smith Creek, Wildhorse, Mountain City, and Tuscarora areas and there will be additional opportunities for public comment as the more formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process begins late this year. For information for the committee, we are keeping the Wells and the Elko office open late one day a week for walk-ins who might want to look at the maps and discuss the process. We also have made someone available on an appointment basis for anyone who requested it. The maps and comment forms were also available on a self-serve basis during normal office hours.

THE STATUS OF THE SOUTH CANYON ROAD ISSUE

The South Canyon EIS and Record of Decision was signed on May 31st, 2005. Following the decision, the Forest received two administrative appeals, one from the Shovel Brigade and one from the Great Old Broads for Wilderness. Following the administrative appeal review process, the Regional Forester affirmed the decision for both appeals finding that the activities documented in the Final EIS and decision were in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policy.

Currently the Forest and the Bureau of Land Management are preparing to implement aspects of the Decision in federal fiscal year 2006 which started on October 1st. To facilitate the implementation of these decisions, Senator Harry Reid has secured 3 million dollars in the 2006 budget. This money will be used to implement the South Canyon Road decision, make repairs to the bridges along the Jarbidge River, implement water projects described in the road management plan decision, and implement the road management plan for the road leading from the Idaho border to the beginning of the South Canyon Road.

THE STATUS OF THE REPAIR OF THE WASHED OUT BRIDGES IN THE JARBIDGE AREA

The first implementation item associated with the Jarbidge Road has become the replacement of two bridges washed out during high water in May of 2005. I'm pleased to report that with extensive coordination and cooperation with Elko County, the contract for these bridge replacements has been awarded and work will commence at the site starting tomorrow (Thursday, October 6th) in Jarbidge canyon. One possible delay is that some of the materials under construction for the project actually lag behind the ability of the contractor to do the preparation work, so there could be a short period of time when the contractor is forced to shut down construction until the materials to move forward are available. Our understanding is this date will be November 1st, so the County and the Forest Service are still pressing ahead with our mutual plans to have these bridges in place and completed before winter. The cooperation between the County and the Forest Service has been extraordinary on this effort.

MINERALS EXPLORATION

As you know, the price of gold continues to remain higher than it has been for at least a decade, now approaching the \$500/oz. mark. The tremendous increase in exploration proposals I reported on to this committee last year continues. The 3 to 4-fold increase in workload these proposals bring continue to be a challenge for our staff in the Elko and Wells offices. I reported last year to you the efforts we were making with the mining companies to streamline and make the process as simple and efficient as possible. In general these cooperative efforts have paid off and we have for the most part been successful in meeting intended timeframes.

The Mt City district has approved four new plans of operation. Three others are proceeding under the requirements of a categorical exclusion. Environmental Assessments are underway for two others.

At the Jerritt Canyon operation, the new Steel Underground Portal has been constructed. Mining at this portal is now underway. Also, a complete review and update of the Jerritt Canyon bond was accomplished in July 2005.

We will continue to work with mining concerns and the public to meet the regulatory and desired timelines of the mining companies match as closely as possible.

FUTURE DEVELOPED RECREATION ISSUES

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to make this Committee aware of a future cloud regarding our continued ability to fund developed recreation sites in northeast Nevada. This is not an issue either Paul Flanagan or me take lightly or enjoy, but it is simply a budget reality we must deal with in these times of lean federal budgets when other priorities such as funding war efforts and rebuilding the Gulf Coast take priority.

The bottom line is we are slowly falling further and further behind in our ability to fund the maintenance of developed recreation facilities. This situation is not unique to us here. It is a nationwide problem. For instance this year I ordered the water to be shut off at Big Bend Campground on the Mountain City Ranger District. I did this, not to deprive the camping public of traditional services as has been alleged by some, but for a simple business reason. The water system takes upwards of 10 thousand dollars per year to maintain because of sampling and maintenance requirements for public water facilities, while the campground itself only generates approximately 18 hundred dollars of income.

This example provides an example of the growing gap between our maintenance funding levels and our ability to generate income from these sites. In the northern Nevada area, Paul Flanagan and our staff groups have been working to find innovative solutions, such as volunteer groups, to help us offset this growing problem and keep these facilities open at the level of service the public has become used to. Despite these efforts, we anticipate the day when these efforts won't be enough. To plan ahead, we have created a glide path

of budget triggers and priorities where we would systematically begin to shut down services and potentially sites if the budget trends continue. We hope we never have to engage our plan, but we also wanted to be prepared in case it is ever necessary. As I mentioned earlier, I felt like it was my duty to inform this committee of this issue. I hope you never hear about it again, but in the event you should start hearing about it from your constituents, I wanted you to be informed about it should it start to occur.

UPDATE ON GRAZING ISSUES

Last year I reported to this committee that the local Forest Service offices and the County were working cooperatively to address some on-going grazing issues within the County. I wanted to take this opportunity to inform the committee that those issues have been successfully addressed and we very much appreciate the County elected officials involvement in these efforts. We have been able to pull in resources such as the Agriculture Department at Great Basin College into the resolution of these efforts and all involved are pleased with the developments and conflict resolutions in this area.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING EFFORTS ON THE DISTRICTS IN ELKO COUNTY

In 1995 the Range Rescission Act required the Forest Service to complete an Environmental Analysis on all livestock grazing permits. The Forest Service was given approximately 15 years to complete this analysis. As a whole, the agency is behind schedule to complete these analyses. On the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, these Environmental Impact Statements are being developed on a landscape scale, in an attempt to improve efficiency in completing the analyses and to provide for a more holistic analysis of the environment conditions and effects.

The analysis of the Jarbidge Rangeland is underway. The Jarbidge District currently permits almost 10,000 head of cattle and horses, and 15,500 sheep, on 26 allotments. While wildlife and natural resource management direction have evolved over the last ten years or so, livestock management has been slower to change. Thus, this project is designed to bring livestock management practices into alignment with other resource management direction. This Draft Environmental Impact Statement is now being prepared and will be released for public comment in mid-summer. The proposed action is to authorize continued grazing in the project area, but to do so under new grazing management direction, designed to improve rangeland condition and the overall health of the ecologically important vegetation communities in the project area.

Work continues on long-term trend monitoring for the Mt. City District Rangeland EIS, which will be started this winter on a similar timeline as that seen for the Jarbidge EIS mentioned above.

Other highlights include efforts in monitoring being undertaken by grazing permittees. Sixteen permittees attended a utilization workshop on the Mt. City District this spring. The Bull Run allotment on the Mt. City district continues to be a model of self-monitoring success. Overall, cooperative grazing management efforts have improved greatly since my last report to this committee last year.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to highlight once again the level of cooperation and effort that we are seeing among all parties interested in management of National Forest System lands in Elko County. Of note are the County Commissioners and their staff on all issues but in particular the efforts to get the bridges rebuilt in Jarbidge canyon following the flooding

this spring. Also I note the interest and cooperation of leaders in the OHV community locally in assisting us with our OHV planning.

This concludes my prepared comments. Once again, I appreciate the opportunity that the Committee's visit affords us all to highlight local activities. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.