

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING FOREST SERVICE ACTIVITIES
ON THE PAHRUMP SIDE OF THE
SPRING MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
AND
STATUS OF THE TECOPA CHARCOAL KILNS, ANTI-LITTER PROGRAM,
AND
FIRE SUPPRESSION RESOURCES
OF THE
SPRING MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST

FOR THE
SUBCOMMITTEE TO STUDY MEASURES TO PROTECT
AND MAINTAIN THE NATURAL TREASURES OF NEVADA**

**February 10, 2006
Las Vegas, Nevada**

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Deputy Forest Supervisor**

Introduction. Good morning Chairwomen Titus and subcommittee members. My name is Stephanie Phillips, and I am the Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Thank you for providing this speaking opportunity today.

You have asked that I provide a briefing on the following four topics:

- Forest Service activities on the Pahrump side of the Spring Mountains NRA
- The Tecopa Charcoal Kilns
- The Anti-Litter Program and the work that Brian Cicotti is doing, and
- Fire suppression resources

West Side Master Plan. I will begin this presentation with discussion on the West Side Master Plan. This is a very significant recreation development project that will set the stage for future recreation development on the “Pahrump side” of the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. Our intent is to take a holistic view of the West Side and assess the recreational activities that are occurring. We will then be able to strategically project the types and locations of recreation facilities needed to accommodate future demands while protecting natural and cultural resources.

EXHIBIT C-2 Treasures

Document consists of 6 pages.

- ☒ Entire document provided
- ☐ Due to size limitations, pages _____ provided. A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775/684-6827) or e-mail library@lcb.state.nv.us.

Meeting Date 2/10/06

The West Side includes approximately 188,000 acres along the west slope of the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. The project area stretches from Mt. Stirling in the north to Mt. Potosi in the south.

So why is there a need for this planning effort? The need is mostly to address the rapid growth, the changing demographics of Pahrump and the significantly increasing use patterns on the National Forest. The West Side of the Spring Mountains NRA is very different from the East sides' Kyle and Lee Canyons. The West Side still provides a sense of "wildness" and adventure that the local residents of Pahrump value.

More than 100 people attended 12 meetings held on the proposed West Side Master Plan over the last five months repeatedly express their concern for maintaining that "wildness." However, they are also aware of the need for recreation facilities and a change in Forest Service strategies for managing the area. There are virtually no campgrounds or picnic facilities and very few safe and well maintained roads.

However, we know that these conditions will be changing. Pahrump is experiencing rapid growth and plans for new development are expected in the near future. Las Vegas is expanding to the southwest and is moving closer to Pahrump. This growth is and will continue to result in more use on the National Forest.

We have the opportunity to be "proactive" rather than reactive to the growth and increasing pressures on the West Side. The Master Plan is funded through the very beneficial funding opportunities made available through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA). The BLM will soon be requesting proposals for Round 7 when we will submit a request for funding to implement the Master Plan. Our challenge is to determine the best mix of development that addresses future demands, but maintains the West Side's unique qualities and resources.

We are still in the early stages of the process. We are currently assessing options, talking with community leaders, recreational users, and others that have knowledge or information about the area. We will soon "zero-in" on a preferred option. This option will be carried through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which will take approximately 18-months to complete. The first stages of facility construction could occur approximately 6-to-12 months after the National Environmental Policy Act process is completed.

The Tecopa Charcoal Kilns. The Tecopa Kilns, located off Wheeler Well Road, are some of the few historic structures on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. Over the years, the kilns deteriorated due to weather conditions, vandalism, and erosion. Because of their uniqueness to the area, and the brief glimpse of history they provide, we put into motion a plan to restore

one of the kilns. We were able to secure Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act funding for this project.

The restoration work was successfully completed. However, we did not anticipate what happened next. The fill material that was used to stabilize the structure became saturated with rain and snow, causing it to expand. The expansion put pressure on the walls of the kiln, causing it to collapse.

When the kiln collapsed, we carefully evaluated whether or not to attempt another reconstruction. The decision was made to not reconstruct the kiln. Due to the collapse, the kiln structural integrity was lost and many of the original bricks were destroyed.

In order to recreate the original character of the kiln, new bricks would need to be hand chiseled from stone. The cost estimates for this labor intensive project were estimated at over \$500,000. We are still considering ways to interpret the kilns, and tell the story of how they were a part of the local history.

The Anti-Litter Program. You have also asked for information regarding the Pilot Anti-Litter Project on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. The Pilot project is part of a larger “interagency program” to reduce littering and dumping on Federal lands in Southern Nevada. The project is funded by Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

The overall goal of the anti-litter project is similar to many of our projects funded by the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. The goals are to increase the working capacity of the Federal Agencies through volunteers, partnerships, and non-profit organizations, and to eventually be self-sustaining since this funding source may not always be available.

The Pilot Anti-Litter Project was established to develop and implement a strategy or model to reduce littering through the use of volunteers, organizations, and other groups. Once the strategy is tested and proven successful, the project will be transported to other Federal lands in Southern Nevada.

A local Mt. Charleston resident, Brian Cicotti, is currently developing and testing the model in the Spring Mountains. Brian has a passion for litter removal and was a logical choice to take the lead on this project.

Currently, the project is funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act for three years at approximately \$50,000 per year. At the end of the three years, we will evaluate the project’s success. The project has been underway for about one-and-a-half years. The funding goes directly to Brian and is to be used to manage the program, including recruiting and training volunteers, purchasing trash bags, and other associated expenses.

To date, the project has had some successes. Kyle and Lee Canyon areas are certainly much cleaner. There has also been some successful volunteer recruitment.

We want the pilot project to be successful. Therefore, we are working closely with Brian to determine how to best achieve our objectives.

Fire Suppression Resources. Now I will transition to the topic of the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area fire organization and firefighting capabilities.

At the Forest Service district level, such as the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, we are 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.

While we often support one another during wildland fires, there are some differences in responsibilities between the Federal agencies and the State and County agencies.

If a wildland fire is threatening a structure, Forest Service firefighters can defend the space around the structure to keep it from igniting and burning. However, Forest Service firefighters cannot enter a burning structure because they are not trained to do so.

I will take a few moments to talk about two recent fires that occurred in Southern Nevada, which highlight the importance of fuel reduction and effective wildland fire suppression efforts. The Robbers' Fire, which burned in Kyle Canyon in July 2004, had the potential to be very damaging and could have destroyed many homes in Kyle Canyon. However, the initial-attack efforts were extremely effective. In addition, we had access to national resources such as retardant planes, helicopters, and hotshot crews that specialize in complex fires.

The response from local agencies was outstanding. Nevada Highway Patrol and Las Vegas Metro were extremely efficient at notifying Mt Charleston residents of the danger, and regulating traffic into Kyle Canyon.

Following the fire, Nevada Department of Transportation immediately took necessary actions and supported the Forest Service efforts to revegetate the burned area. This effort was done to ensure that the Deer Creek Road would not be damaged by erosion that could occur over the winter due to lack of established vegetation.

While the Robbers' Fire was almost a text book example of successful initial attack and coordination among agencies, it should not lessen the need to carry out fuel reduction projects in Kyle and Lee Canyons. We will continue to work with the Nevada Department of Forestry and the Nevada Fire Safe Council to reduce fuels in and around the Mt. Charleston Communities to ensure public safety.

The Goodsprings Fire burned last summer in the Goodsprings and Mt. Potosi areas. While this fire did not directly threaten public safety and private property, it may have long-term damaging effects to the environment.

The fire mostly burned in Joshua tree habitat. Joshua trees are non-fire adapted species. In other words, fires do not normally burn in this habitat type. Therefore, Joshua trees have not adapted over time. They are not able to naturally regenerate quickly after a fire. It is possible that Joshua trees will be absent from the area for many years. Non-native plants such as cheatgrass could grow in its place. Cheatgrass is prone to fires, which dramatically increases the likelihood of future fires in the area.

I will leave you with a summary of the 2005 fire season and an estimate of what the 2006 fire season may bring. The 2005 fire season was unusual in the number of fires that occurred on BLM lands. This was mostly due to 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. There has also been a lack of snow and rain in the Spring Mountains which may result in more fires at higher elevations as well.

Unfortunately, we may witness a very active fire season in 2006.

Lastly I would like to comment on my statement during your last hearing where I indicated that I was concerned about the ability of the Forest Service to provide operation and maintenance funding for roadside comfort stations. Operations and maintenance is not provided by the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act and I posed the question of whether Nevada Department of Transportation could cover the cost of operations and maintenance. I want to emphasize that I made that comment prior to any discussions at the state level regarding potential partnerships for operations and maintenance. Future funding arrangements for roadside facilities will continue to be a big challenge. The solution lies in as many funding sources and partners as possible. I am sure the Nevada Department of Transportation will continue to work with us in the future as they have in the past and continue to be an important partner.

Thank you again, Chairwomen Titus and subcommittee members, for providing this speaking engagement. If you have any questions, I will be glad to answer them now.

-END OF TESTIMONY-