

**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 and the Acting District Ranger for the Ruby Mountains and Jarbridge Districts. 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:

- 1) The South Canyon Road conflict on the Jarbridge District, and the cooperative efforts being put forth by the county and the Forest Service to help this issue come to successful resolution.
- 2) The cooperative efforts underway with local elected officials to resolve some ongoing grazing conflicts on both the Ruby Mountains and Mountain City Districts.
- 3) Rangeland management planning efforts on the districts in Elko County.
- 4) Increased minerals exploration interest and the associated workload increases.
- 5) Noxious Weeds and Weed Management funding issues
- 6) Land acquisition proposals under the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act

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### **SOUTH CANYON ROAD**

As you probably know, the events immediately following the washout of South Canyon Road in 1995, were rife with anger, frustration, and accusations. But since 2001, the Forest Service and Elko County have been working together, under a settlement agreement signed that year. All parties to the agreement have been fairly successful in moving ahead under the parameters of that agreement. Work on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), an analysis to determine how access can be re-established in the area, has been moving forward too, also under the parameters of the settlement agreement. However, on May 3, 2004, the US District Court, District of Nevada, set aside the settlement agreement, and ordered the parties to the agreement (Forest Service and Elko County) to either begin the process of following the Federal Land Policy and Management Act procedures for conveying an easement across federal lands, or follow the disclaimer procedure for resolving RS 2477 cases.

We are now awaiting word from the Office of General Counsel and the Department of Justice regarding how the parties wish to proceed.

In addition, we have just learned that the Jarbidge River is being identified as critical habitat for the bull trout. We do not expect this to have a major effect on the completion of the EIS, as the bull trout habitat has been a key part of the analysis all along. Road maintenance activities, however, may need to be adjusted.

The final EIS has been completed in draft form, and we are prepared to move forward with formal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, but cannot do anything until the legal questions regarding the settlement agreement have been resolved.

### **GRAZING CONFLICTS**

As you heard earlier, Elko County Commissioners and Assemblyman John Carpenter have been working with Forest Service staff to resolve grazing issues on the Ruby Mountains and Mountain City Districts. I hope all parties involved are beginning to understand that when we put our

positions aside, and work cooperatively to find solutions the issues, we can have some notable successes. You have already heard about some of them. If the commissioners and other elected officials are willing to continue in this process of informal mediation, then I am, too, because so far, it seems to be working.

### **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING EFFORTS**

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.

The Mountain City Rangeland EIS is just beginning. Scoping and data collection will begin this summer.

### **INCREASED INTEREST IN MINERALS EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES**

As you well know, the price of gold has increased over \$100/oz during the last four years. As a result, we have a tremendous increase in exploration proposals. Just since January, we have received 15 exploration project requests. (Another one came in as I was drafting this testimony)

These numbers represent a 3-fold increase over the number we received during the same period last year. So our workload in this area has increased drastically. Some of these proposals are a continuation of existing mining activities, but many of them are new. And as you might suspect, most want to start drilling immediately. We are working with the companies, as best we can, to identify ways to meet their timelines. We are suggesting they use existing roads, for example, to reduce the environmental analysis required of new road construction. Some proposals are complex, involving future proposals that are dependent on initial findings. This complexity is a challenge we are also struggling with, administratively. And we are working with the companies, to identify future needs now, so we can all plan ahead. If, for example, they indicate that they will be hoping to drill new holes next year, we are urging them to start the process now, and not wait until January to begin.

#### **NOXIOUS WEEDS AND WEED MANAGEMENT FUNDING**

As you well know, noxious weeds are one of the largest challenges facing land owners and land managers in the State of Nevada and across the West. These plants can seriously impact rangelands, agricultural operations, wildlife and fisheries habitats, recreational opportunities, and even urban landscapes. Nevada has not lost the war on weeds yet -- but there is currently significant cause for concern. To prevent the escalation of this problem, all agencies, land owners, and land users will need to be actively involved to both recognize the problem and identify and implement solutions.

Here on the districts in Elko County we have the “best and the worst.” The Ruby Mountains District has one of the most serious problems of all of the districts on the national forest, while the Jarbidge District is one of the cleanest districts on the forest.

But we also have lost some of the funding we have received in the past. Last year we were able to hire six seasonal employees to serve on weed crews – this year we could hire only four. This means, of course, that we will not be able to treat as much acreage, and will probably place our emphasis on the Mountain City and Jarbidge Districts, where the problem is more manageable.

On the up side, there is some positive growth in the weed program as a whole in Elko County. Organizational work is underway to establish a county-wide Cooperative Weed Management Area. We cannot say when that will be up and running, but Forest Service staff is cooperating and assisting with these efforts in any way we can.

Work in Elko County represents a cooperative effort put forth by individuals, groups and agencies that in the past have been at odds over many issues affecting public and private lands. But this effort is going to take not only a cooperative effort from everyone involved, but also a financial commitment.

### **LAND ACQUISITIONS THROUGH THE SOUTHERN NEVADA PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT**

While this Act was designed to allow federal lands in Clark County to be sold to accommodate growth in that region of the state, the Act also allows for acquisition of “environmentally sensitive” lands in the rest of state. By definition in the Act, “environmentally sensitive” lands include those that “can enhance recreational opportunities or public access,” and it these kinds of lands in northeastern Nevada that are being proposed for acquisition by the Forest Service.

Some of the citizens and elected officials of Elko County do not want to see any more private lands in the county converted to public ownership – yet most do agree that private land owners have the right to sell their land to whomever they choose – so these proposals have been a source of tremendous angst for county officials and citizens alike. When proposals involving the Forest Service first came to light, the Forest Service felt strongly that Elko County officials should approve agency acquisitions. However, this proved be unworkable, as the county is not in a legal position to approve or disapprove the sale of private property. Now the Forest Service position is that proposals must be presented to Elko County officials, and the county can determine their own course of action.

The following three Forest Service acquisition proposals were approved for funding in Round 4.

**IL Ranch** (Mountain City District); 35,000 acres in many small parcels to be acquired by BLM and Forest Service – supported by Former Senator Richard Bryan, Esq.; Elko County Conservation Assoc.; Coalition for Nevada’s Wildlife; Nevada Wildlife Federation; Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation; Nevada Native Plant Society; Elko County Commission, with conditions.

**Greys Lake** (Humboldt Wilderness Area on the Ruby Mountains District); 640 acres – supported by Trust for Public Land and Friends of Nevada Wilderness.

**Clover Valley Two** (Ruby Mountains District); 3,520 acres - supported by Nevada Division of Wildlife; Trust for Public Lands; Clover Valley Soil Conservation District; Elko County Conservation Assoc.; Elko Band Council; Well City Council.

The IL Ranch proposal is in the appraisal stage. District personnel have been working to provide field information for this government appraisal process. No assistance from the district has been requested on the other two proposals.

This concludes my prepared comments. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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