

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TESTIMONY
SANTA ROSA RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

**April 15, 2016
Winnemucca, Nevada**

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Santa Rosa Ranger District**

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, and committee members, thank you for providing this opportunity to speak before your Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Joseph Garrotto, and I am the Santa Rosa District Ranger on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. You will notice that my oral presentation is a shortened version of this written testimony. The written testimony will update the committee on the District's current projects, programs, and issues, as well as supply additional background and information that was not addressed in the oral testimony:

DISTRICT SUMMARY

The Santa Rosa Ranger District is located in north-central Nevada in Humboldt County. Some fast facts that may interest you include the following:

- The District contains about 290,000 acres, including the 31,000-acre Santa Rosa-Paradise Peak Wilderness Area.
- The District has one developed campground at Lye Creek, and manages a historic worksite in Paradise Valley.
- The Santa Rosa Ranger District currently permits approximately 10,542 head of cattle within 12 grazing allotments.

- The District has fascinating geology. Native Americans sought out the Santa Rosas for its flint and obsidian quarries for making arrowheads. Arrowhead pieces termed lithic scatter are found throughout the District.
- The District has a surprising number of cool water trout streams for an arid desert landscape. Some of these streams contain remnant populations of Lahontan cutthroat trout from the great Lake Lahontan, which covered the area in pre-historic times. They are federally listed as threatened. We are working cooperatively with the Nevada Department of Wildlife on recovery efforts.
- The Santa Rosas support some of the better habitat in Nevada for sage grouse and other upland game birds. Big game species include mule deer, mountain lion, antelope, and California bighorn sheep. Elk are now established in the area migrating from adjacent ranges. An elk management plan has been developed in coordination with other agencies in northern Nevada.

PROJECTS, PARTNERSHIPS, OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES

PARTNERSHIPS/PROJECTS

- **Friends of Nevada Wilderness**
 - Removal of old, unnecessary fences
 - Trail maintenance
 - Campground improvements
 - Noxious weed control
 - Data collection
 - Bitterbrush and sagebrush planting in recent burns for wildlife
 - New projects include sage grouse fence flagging/markers, wilderness campsite inventory and visitor use monitoring

- **Nevada Outdoor School**
 - Environmental education
 - Noxious weed treatment
 - Sage grouse fence flagging/markers
 - Bitterbrush and sagebrush planting in recent burns for wildlife
 - ATV/UTV cattle guard installation
- **Paradise Valley Weed District**
 - Cooperative noxious weed treatment
- **Ft. McDermitt Tribe:**
 - Educational opportunities on rangeland health, noxious weeds, fencing projects and unauthorized livestock removal
 - Unauthorized domestic horse removal planning efforts and assistance
- **NV State Department of Agriculture**
 - Applied for grants for the following projects: Sage grouse fence marking/flagging, ATV/UTV cattle guards, easy pass fence structures for hikers
 - Working with the State of Nevada to assist the Ft. McDermitt Tribe in removing unauthorized livestock
- **Nevada Department of Wildlife**
 - Multiple wildlife projects, such as planting sagebrush and bitterbrush
 - Construction of fish barriers to promote Lahontan cutthroat trout recovery
 - Sage grouse telemetry collaring, sage grouse population counts
 - Stream surveys
- **Bureau of Land Management**

Working with Winnemucca, NV and Vale BLM on numerous projects:

 - cooperative fire and dispatch (Service First agreement)
 - coordination of livestock permits
 - unauthorized domestic horses

OPPORTUNITIES

- **HUMBOLDT COUNTY RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)**

Title II of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Public Law 110-343) authorizes funding for local projects located on or directly benefitting National Forest System lands. In 2011, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack established the Humboldt (NV) Resource Advisory Committee (RAC), a diverse 15-member citizen committee, to recommend projects.

The SRS Act, which was re-authorized in 2008 and 2012, enabled Humboldt County to receive approximately \$197,000 in funds between 2008 and 2014. Additional funding (\$5,500) was received in 2015. The additional funding for 2015 has not been allocated as the RAC has not been able to meet because not all members have been vetted. The District is awaiting a decision on a request for term extensions for current RAC members.

A majority of the SRS funding helped to fund the weed crews and much needed improvements to the campground, as well as other recreation improvements.

- **RECREATION TRAILS GRANT PROGRAM**

- Nevada Outdoor School (NOS) worked with the Forest Service to develop a project proposal that was successfully submitted for Recreation Trail Program (RTP) funding through the State of Nevada State Parks which administers the grant program. RTP is designed to supplement and assist current federal, state, local and volunteer trail efforts. The program is intended to expand the quantity and improve the quality of recreational trails in America through financial and technical assistance and improved communications among all trail interests. The project creates a 22-mile motorized trail loop route system in the northern portion of the Santa Rosa District that incorporates ATV passage structures so riders don't have to get off their ATV to open gates. Riders will pass through some of the greatest varieties of landscapes and wildlife viewing opportunities in Humboldt County. The end product will result in a greatly enhanced riding experience for visitors to the Santa Rosas while maintaining the integrity of grazing systems. Increased gate effectiveness will allow for optimal range management for resource conservation. The district is still working with NOS to complete the installation of these features.
- Friends of Nevada Wilderness received an RTP grant to install hiker passages on the Summit Trail in the Santa Rosa-Paradise Peak Wilderness, where the trail passes through fences associated with

livestock grazing management. Four pass-through fences have been installed with two more to be installed this season.

- The Paradise Sonoma Conservation District received an RTP grant to continue the work of installing ATV passages on the Santa Rosa District. They are also working on noxious weed treatments and reseeding bitterbrush projects for a fire restoration project.

CHALLENGES

- **CHEATGRASS/MEDUSAHEAD INVASION**

Cheatgrass and medusahead are invasive species that successfully replace native vegetation, including sagebrush, after wildfires. Across the Santa Rosa District, cheatgrass and medusahead are currently a small component of many vegetation communities. A single fire can establish cheatgrass and/or medusahead as the dominant species, especially on lower elevation sites. This places sage grouse habitat and big game winter range at risk; some sites have already been lost.

In the short term, managing wildfire to avoid cheatgrass, medusahead and other noxious weed expansion is a high priority for the District. In the long term, we understand that wildfire is a natural component of the landscape, and we need to continue to develop management strategies that will use fire to help us gain the species composition that we desire.

Both the Santa Rosa District and BLM's Winnemucca District have implemented a green strip program. Perennial grass species that stay green longer are being planted in strips as defensive zones in stopping future wildfires.

- **UNAUTHORIZED LIVESTOCK** Grazing by unauthorized horses on the Forest and adjacent BLM and BIA lands has been a problem over the last three decades.

During a survey flight of the area in February 2015, we counted approximately 1,200 horses. Population estimates support that there are potentially 2,000 privately owned domestic horses to remove off Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Ft. McDermitt (BIA) Reservation administered lands. These unauthorized livestock are competing with other permitted livestock for forage and are damaging wildlife habitat, including sage grouse habitat. Many of the affected permittees are also members of the Ft. McDermitt Tribe. We continue to work with Brad Crutcher, Tribal Chair, and members of the Tribe to find a collaborative solution to this ongoing problem.

- **SAGEBRUSH & SAGE GROUSE ROD IMPLEMENTATION**

Over the last century, sage grouse populations have declined across the West due to the loss of habitat or fragmentation of habitat. The Santa Rosa District manages a significant amount of sage grouse habitat. The Forest Service is looking for ways to better manage and diversify age class of vegetation on the Santa Rosa District to increase sage grouse populations and improve sagebrush health.

CONCLUSION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and committee members, for today's speaking engagement that enabled us to discuss our concerns and highlight our successes. I will be happy to discuss any questions that you may have regarding the Santa Rosa Ranger District, I can be reached any time at 775-623-5025, ext. 115.

-END-

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Garrotto has worked for the Forest Service for 16 years. Garrotto started his career as a seasonal archaeologist working for the Grand Canyon National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in the late 1990s. These parks have some great archaeology and were wonderful places to start his federal career. He began working for the Forest Service on the Gila as a fire archaeologist, before becoming became the north zone archaeologist on the Reserve and Quemado ranger districts in 2001. He moved to Carson City to become the District Archaeologist in 2007. In 2012, Garrotto completed his first district ranger detail on the Beckwourth Ranger District of the Plumas NF, followed by a second detail in 2013 on the Santa Rosa Ranger District. Garrotto holds an MA in Anthropology from Northern Arizona University and a BA in Business Administration from Columbia College.

He spends his time enjoying the outdoors, snowboarding, kayaking, mountain biking, hiking, photography, and exploring the region.