

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
AUSTIN-TONOPAH RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

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Eureka, Nevada**

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INTRODUCTION

Members of the Committee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to present before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Lance Brown and I am the District Ranger for the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District and have been serving in that capacity for 7 years. My total federal land management time in Nevada is 19 years that included prior time with both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

My testimony today will update the committee regarding management activities on the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District. I would like to focus my presentation on some key priority program areas.

BACKGROUND

The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District is located in central Nevada, contains approximately 2.1 million acres, the largest District in the lower 48 states. The majority of the District lies within Nye County, with Lander County and Eureka County also included within administrative areas. There are currently 7 permanent employees with 7 permanent employee vacancies.

Transmission Line (Greenlink North)

- Bureau of Land Management is the lead agency for the Greenlink North Transmission Project, Forest Service has a decision to make on National Forest System lands.
 - Total transmission length in the agency preferred route is approximately

235 miles with 10 miles that crossed National Forest near Austin, Nevada.

- Forest Service worked with the applicant and BLM to identify alternative routes crossing National Forest that would meet the Toiyabe Land and Resource Management Plan (1986), as amended, for placement of transmission within an existing corridor and co-locating the transmission line with existing 230kV line.
- Planning effort is approaching the publication of the draft EIS stage.

Developed Recreation and Trails

- The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has focused on reconstructing and improving our developed recreation facilities and trails to improve recreation opportunities for the public.
 - We are also prioritizing improving our campgrounds to provide facilities with lower long-term maintenance costs. GAOA and RAC funding has assisted with partial implementation of 4 campgrounds with new infrastructure and a complete renovation planned for Bob Scott Campground. Additional funding will be sought for the remaining 5 campground for improvements.
- Comment period for Recreation Site Fee establishment or increase on the HTNF closed July 1.
 - District currently has 1 fee site, Bob Scott Campground, seeking to increase the daily fee and establish \$10 fees for the remaining campgrounds on the District.
- For trails, we are actively working with two primary partners to improve and maintain our non-motorized trail system, Friends of Nevada Wilderness and Great Basin Institute. Significant challenges remain on repairing trail damage received from Tropical Storm Hillary in August 2023.

Forest System Roads Impacted by Tropical Storm Hillary

- The District has nearly 2,000 miles of Forest System Roads.
- Tropical Storm Hillary heavy rain and runoff obliterated or severely damaged numerous Forest Service system roads in the southern portion of the District in the Toiyabe,

Toquima, Monitor and Hot Creek Ranges.

- Repair and rebuild efforts began last fall with assistance from Nye County Road Department and Forest Service Road Crews, additional repair, re-route, and maintenance is planned this summer.
- Forest Service received initial qualifying road damage on three maintenance level 3 roads through Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO), finalized reports are currently being prepared to hopefully secure federal funds to continue the damage repairs.

Minerals

- Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has a highly active mineral exploration program - at any given time there may 5-15 ongoing Plans of Operations.

Range Management

- The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has 34 active allotments, 9 vacant allotments, and 4 closed allotments per the Forest Plan. We are currently staffed with one Rangeland Management Specialist covering permit administration on the District.
- District is currently in a planning process to authorize livestock grazing on 6 Vacant allotments, the Monitor-Toquima Vacant Allotment Project.
 - Draft Decision Notice and FONSI was published in April 2024 initiating the Objection Process, and the Forest Service is currently reviewing Objections and consistency with the decision with law, regulation and policy.
- Three Range Allotments have Lahontan cutthroat trout and habitat, a Federally Threatened Species. Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was issued to Forest Service on April 2020.
 - Three allotments covered under the LCT Grazing Biological Opinion have been administered to standard.

Wild Horses and Burros

- Austin-Tonopah RD has 10 of the 34 active Wild Horse and Burro Territories

(WHT) in the Forest Service System.

- The District has management plan decision for the Hickison Wild Burro Territory in the North Toquima Mountain Range and the Little Fish Lake Valley Wild Horse Territory situated between the Monitor and Hot Creek Ranges.
- The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service prepared a joint gather plan that was approved for the Little Fish Lake Valley Joint Management Area and awaiting priority setting by BLM.
- The District is currently in the Pre-NEPA planning stage for a larger Wild Horse Territory planning effort to establish Appropriate Management Level (AML) on the remaining 8 Forest Service wild horse territories.
 - The 2024 field season is a Forest Priority for resource data collection and updated census flights in cooperation with BLM.

Wildlife Management

- Austin-Tonopah Ranger District has partnered under a Conservation Agreement and Strategy to manage the Toiyabe sub-population of the Columbia spotted frog. Active management by improving habitats and watershed stability combined with yearly population monitoring continues to be successful. Partners include Nevada Division of Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, and Bureau of Land Management.
- Forest Service is partnering to restore Lahontan cutthroat trout in up to 23.1 miles of stream in the upper Reese River and Stewart Creek in the Arc Dome Wilderness.
 - NDOW is the lead agency working with USFWS and the Forest Service, on use of chemical treatments to remove non-native trout. Post-treatment will consist of re-stocking the stream systems with Lahontan cutthroat trout
 - A Decision Notice was issued on this project in 2019; however, additional coordination is needed with the Yomba Shoshone Tribe prior to implementation.

Basin and Range Shared Stewardship

- Stewardship group began meeting in Fall 2023 to begin partnering and collaborating at landscape levels to manage fuels for resiliency across administrative boundaries and landscapes.
 - Seeking additional partnerships and participation from counties and tribes.

CONCLUSION

This concludes my prepared comments. Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have about any project, programs or management of the Austin-Tonopah Ranger District.