



NEVADA LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS

(Nevada Revised Statutes [NRS] 218E.510)

MINUTES

May 15, 2026

The second meeting of the Committee on Public Lands for the 2025–2026 Interim was held on Friday, May 15, 2026, at 9 a.m. at the Winnemucca Convention and Visitors Authority, 50 West Winnemucca Boulevard, Winnemucca, Nevada.

The agenda, minutes, meeting materials, and video recording of the meeting are available on the Committee's [meeting page](#). The video recording may also be found at <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Video/>. Copies of the video record can be obtained through the Publications Office of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) (publications@lcb.state.nv.us or 775/684-6835).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN WINNEMUCCA:

Senator Melanie Scheible, Chair
Assemblymember Natha C. Anderson, Vice Chair
Senator Ira Hansen
Assemblymember Rich DeLong
Assemblymember Cinthia Zermeño Moore

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Michele Cruz-Crawford (Excused)
Clark County Commissioner Justin Jones (Excused)

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU STAFF PRESENT:

Jered McDonald, Deputy Research Director, Research Division
Maria Velazquez, Research Policy Assistant, Research Division
Erin Sturdivant, Senior Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Robert Lemus, Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Ryan Dombrowski, Technology Communication Systems Specialist III, Information Technology Services (ITS), Administrative Division
Brad Zehner, Technology Communication System Specialist II, ITS, Administrative Division
Christine Galvez, IT Professional I, ITS, Administrative Division

Items taken out of sequence during the meeting have been placed in agenda order.
[Indicates a clarification.]

AGENDA ITEM I—OPENING REMARKS

Chair Scheible:

Good morning, everybody. We are going to get started. I will call this meeting of the Public Lands Committee to order. Will the Secretary please take the role?

[Roll call was taken and indicated in Members Present.]

Chair Scheible:

Please mark Senator Hansen present. He is in the building; we have seen him. If I realized he was not in his seat, I would have given him a moment. Sorry Senator.

That being said, we are going to open up this meeting. Welcome everybody to Winnemucca. Thank you so much to the Winnemucca Visitors Authority for allowing us to utilize this awesome convention space. If you have a few minutes today you should take them to walk around the edges of the room and check out some of these amazing displays that they have on minerals, and buckaroos, and the State of Nevada, and Humboldt County.

We do have a packed agenda this morning, so I am going to be a little bit strict with the time limits. In public comment, each person will be limited to two minutes of comment and then if you have anything else to say, you are more than welcome to submit that in writing. For presenters, we are going to limit you to 15 minutes each. I know that my members always ask really good questions, so I will allow them the time to ask those questions, and if we start getting too far off track, we will follow up offline. I never want to stifle discussion, but we do have a hard stop at 4 p.m. today. We will be taking a relatively short lunch break around noontime with our presentations, so you can prepare for that, and we will be taking the presentations mostly in order. I did get a request to move up one of the presentations. That is Agenda Item IX.C. so we will try to fit that in probably after [Agenda Item V](#), but we will see how all of this goes. I think that is most of the housekeeping that I have.

As always, we request that you turn off your cell phones, other noisy devices, and please recognize there are a couple of us up here with computers. We are utilizing them to access meeting materials and not to scroll on Facebook. I think that is everything I have for all of you. I will put the phone number on the record really quickly. We are streaming to YouTube, so I know that we cannot see our friends from afar, but they can see us. If anybody wishes to call in to provide public comment, that phone number is (888) 475-4499. The meeting ID is 849 8183 8699.

AGENDA ITEM II—PUBLIC COMMENT

With that, we will open up our first period of public comment. Is there anybody wishing to give public comment here in Winnemucca? I do not see anybody coming forward, so we will go to the phones. AVH (Audio Visual and Hearings Unit), is there anybody on the phone line to give public comment?

AVH, Information Technology Services, Administrative Division, LCB:

Thank you, Chair. If you would like to participate in public comment, please press *9 now to take your place in the queue. Caller with the last three digits of 460, please press *6 to unmute. Again, caller with the last three digits of 460, please press *6 to unmute. Please continue.

Scott Beckstead, Government Relations and Policy Director, American Wild Horse Conservation:

Thank you, Chair, and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I am the Government Relations and Policy Director for American Wild Horse Conservation, the nation's largest wild horse and burro advocacy group. As a lifelong horse owner and as one who grew up working with livestock, I have spent decades working in animal welfare and public lands policy. And I want to respectfully urge this Committee to reject the false narrative that Nevada's wild horses are primarily responsible for degradation of our public lands in Nevada. The Bureau of Land Management's own data tells a very different story. According to the Agency's rangeland health assessments, wild horses are identified as a causal factor in less than 1 percent of BLM-managed public lands that are failing to meet rangeland health standards. Less than 1 percent, yet wild horses continue to be scapegoated while the impacts of commercial livestock grazing, which vastly exceeds wild horse use across Nevada, are too often ignored in these discussions.

At the same time, we are managing many wild horse herds to extraordinarily low appropriate management levels, or AMLs, levels that raise legitimate concerns about long-term genetic viability. In some HMAs [herd management areas], populations are now dangerously low, and that is not preservation, that is a trajectory toward genetic collapse. What is especially frustrating is that there is a better way, and even the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board has acknowledged it. The Advisory Board specifically recommends that the BLM prioritize fertility control in every HMA, including herds that have not yet reached AML. The Board also recommended creation of measurable five-year plans focused on reducing population growth throughout proactive fertility control and maintaining HMAs already near AML before they explode beyond management targets, but the BLM has largely failed to implement those recommendations. A perfect example is the Triple B Complex roundup conducted in 2025. In that operation, the BLM—

Chair Scheible:

We do appreciate you calling in to join us today. Please submit the rest of your comments in writing.

Mr. Beckstead:

Okay. Thank you so much. ([Agenda Item II A](#))

Craig C. Downer, Wildlife Ecologist and Native Nevadan:

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity. I am a native Nevadan going back several generations. I am a wildlife ecologist, too, with a master's from the University of Nevada. I have a little nonprofit called the Andean Tapir Fund/Wild Horse Burro Fund based in Minden, Nevada.

I have the following concerning the unjust fencing out of the historic Virginia Range wild horses from Washoe Lake. The decision of the BLM Nevada and the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) to fence off Washoe Lake on its east side, particularly in its Jumbo West section, constitutes an egregious unjustified betrayal of the historic Virginia Range wild horses or mustangs. Also, the decision betrays the majority of people who know about these beautiful and harmonious animals. Our BLM and Nevada Department of Agriculture to bypass the NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] requirement to do an EIS [Environmental Impact Statement] on this major impact that will greatly disrupt the historic wild horse herd as well as the ecosystem to which these horses contribute positively is very disrespectful and seriously mars the quality of life of Nevada.

The Virginia Range and surrounding areas is the very cradle of the wild horse movement in America. Here, Storey County voted to protect its wild horses not only for their uplifting presences but also for their major role in preventing major destructive wildfires. As an ecologist, I also know that the naturally living horses are deeply rooted returned natives, the keystone species here in western Nevada, as throughout many areas in North America. They are ecosystem restored—.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much for calling in. That is two minutes.

Mr. Downer:

I will send you the rest of my statement by writing ([Agenda Item II B-1](#)) ([Agenda Item II B-2](#)), okay?

Chair Scheible:

Okay. Next caller, please.

Catherine Ryals, Member of the Public:

Good morning. I am calling this morning in regards to our public lands. Wild and Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was signed into law in 1971. The Act provides protections to all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public lands of the United States. It is a crime for anyone to harass or kill these animals on federal land. The Act requires that these horses and burros be protected as living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West. BLM is also permitted to close public lands to livestock grazing to protect wild horse and burro habitat. Due to the Act, BLM manages horses and burros as wild, regardless of their native or nonnative status.

BLM has assessed 114 million acres of grazed public land. Of the total assessed, more than 50 percent failed to meet land health standards. BLM identifies livestock grazing as the primary cause for failing land health standards. BLM's data also reflects a continual increase in livestock grazing. BLM has been allowing permit renewals, reauthorization without NEPA review or public comment. Nevada ranchers defied the federal government during a previous drought by putting their cattle on the rangeland that had been closed to grazing. Land health standards are failing due to the actions of the ranchers during the drought, the ongoing trespass livestock, and overpopulation of livestock. BLM continues to allow permit renewals without NEPA review or public comment for our public lands even after identifying livestock raising as the primary cause for failing rangeland health standards.

There continues to be concerns of unauthorized illegal trespass livestock on public land. Here are a few: Gold Butte; Mary's River Enclosure; Tippet Pass; Coleville; Sequoia Kings Canyon. There are even concerns relating to the cause of wildfires and arson on public land. A rancher and White Pine County Commissioner has been indicted on federal arson charges. BLM's data reflects wild horses and burros are the cause for only 1 percent of failing land health standards. It is time to stop blaming wild horses and burros. ([Agenda Item II C](#))

Chair Scheible:

That is two minutes. Thank you so much.

Ms. Ryals:

Thank you.

Cambria Smith, Member of the Public:

Good morning. I feel like these public comment meetings are not taken seriously, but they should be because we love America as much as ranchers do. Of course, economy is important, but fairness and equity is important as well and that includes transparency to the American public who pay taxes, who care about these animals, who—like my great grandfather—fought in World War I on one of these wild mustangs.

Getting caught up in semantics, the blame game, the numbers game, it all goes together to a false narrative that is lying to the American people, and that is what angers me the most, as well as these beautiful animals that really are not starving. Everybody knows cows and sheep destroy lands more than any wild horse could. Plus, there is way more cattle and livestock, in particular, just generally speaking, than wild horses. You are wiping them out at these low AMLs, and it is all on purpose because you hate them.

So, what about the 1971 law and a Republican that signed it? Nixon? Did you not love him? Did you not care about the children that signed their letters? Now you mock them. What about future generations of children that will not see these animals? All they will see is cows and destroyed lands. It is about time we truly take care of our lands and realize that the horse and the burro actually help the lands by spreading seed diversity unlike cows. They do not stand in water either and destroy streams. Stop making up lies and shoving them down the throats of Americans, thinking they are stupid and thinking everyone else is from the city, because I am not from the city. I am a country girl, and I want to see the country. Basically, be fair. This is all just a bunch of unfair, biased lack of evidence-based data BS in my opinion, and it is really hurtful to see this happening to America.

And cows also help climate warming. Our planet is burning up. What is it going to be like this summer with all the data centers and everything? But basically, the cows take a lot of water, too, so take them off the land first, not the horses, because that is what the 1971 law said to do. The horses and the burro are multiuse. What about that? Trump is trying to get rid of the multiuse. This does not belong to the ranchers. This is our public lands, so stop trying to steal it and ruin it because it is going to affect your cattle when all the lithium is poisoning the water, too. So, get it straight. Tell the truth to the American people. Thank you. This is upsetting.

Cheryl E. Abbate, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Las Vegas:

Hi. I am a resident of Mount Charleston, Nevada, and have lived among wild horses and burros there. After reviewing the agenda documents for this meeting, it seems to me that Elko and Eureka County plan to advance the proranching, antihorse narrative that we are all familiar with by now. They plan to call for more roundups of wild horses and perhaps even more extreme management actions. Apparently neither county is interested in discussing the widely documented ecological costs of livestock grazing. Their presentations are representative of the broader inconsistency in how the debate over wild horses on public lands is being framed. The majority of Nevadans reject this antihorse rhetoric that is perpetuated by a handful of wealthy ranchers and their supporters.

During the public comment period of the last meeting, several Nevadans noted that if wild horse management is necessary, there is a humane, science-based alternative—fertility control. We do not need to resort to inhumane roundups, and any suggestion of more extreme measures, such as the destruction of excess horses, should be categorically rejected.

Numerous peer-reviewed studies dating back to the '90s have demonstrated the effectiveness of fertility vaccines in managing wildlife populations, including wild horses and burros. For instance, consider the peer-reviewed study published in the journal of *Vaccines* in 2024 that examined the Virginia Range fertility control program. The study used the PZP [porcine zona pellucida] vaccine to manage wild horse numbers. The study concluded that the program was "able to significantly reduce growth rates of a large and extensively distributed population inhabiting challenging terrain." According to researchers, the treatment coverage reached 72 percent within four years, which resulted in an almost 60 percent reduction in foaling. This conclusion is consistent with earlier and more recent research that you can find through a quick Google search.

In conclusion, I urge the Nevada Legislature to ask Congress to make humane fertility control a priority and issue a congressional directive that suspends the inhumane roundup of Nevada's beloved wild horses and burros. And I urge members of your Committee to refrain from making the unsupported and harmful claim that fertility control "does not work." Finally, I encourage you to firmly reject any calls of violence against wild horses, including those that are implied through vague language like full implementation of the 1971 law. Thank you. ([Agenda Item II D](#))

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. Next caller, please.

AVH:

If you recently joined us and would like to provide public comment, please press *9 now to take your place in the queue. Chair, you have no more callers wishing to provide public comment at this time.

Chair Scheible:

All right. Thank you so much.

AGENDA ITEM III—OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC LAND ACTIVITIES AND IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES IN NEVADA

Chair Scheible:

That brings us to our next agenda item, Agenda Item III. We have some presentations from a couple of different counties in this area. Again, I plan to go in order unless anybody jumps up and gives me a reason to shuffle you. We will start with Humboldt County. Please, come on up whenever you are ready.

Ron Cerri, Vice Chair, Humboldt County Board of Commissioners:

Welcome to Humboldt County. Welcome to Winnemucca. About ten years ago I had the privilege of sitting on this Committee, and I very much appreciated that I represented local governments, and I enjoyed it very much. Glad to be with you again today.

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, I am a fourth-generation rancher from Humboldt County. My family runs a cow and calf operation 50 miles north of Winnemucca in a small community of Orovada. I am here to describe how decisions and activities on public lands have had outsized effects on nearby rural communities.

Mining in Humboldt County is the largest economic driver followed by agriculture. Until recently, gold dominated the local mining. That all changed when Lithium America received permission to go ahead with their proposed lithium mine and processing facility located in rural northern Nevada. Six years ago, residents of Orovada and Kings River community learned of the record's decision approving the Thacker Pass mine. As expected, there was a lot of different opinions regarding this proposed project. A lot of people and organizations were opposed to the idea of a mine processing plant of this scope going forward and concerned about the effects it would have on Quinn River Valley. Once it became clear that the project was slated to move forward, opposition to the project emerged. Opposition to the project was not just due to the mining of lithium, but the inclusion of the processing facility. People were concerned about the health risks related to the heavy use of chemicals needed to process lithium ore and the air and water concerns about the proposed processing facility.

Several concerns, cultural concerns, were raised by Native American tribes, including the Fort McDermitt Shoshone Tribe. Their concerns revolved around lack of consultation with tribe representatives, asserting that the proposed mine was on the site of the 1865 massacre, therefore a site of historical importance to their people. This went through the courts where the courts ruled in favor of Lithium America. Legal challenges where opponents argued the Mine's permitted process was rushed and violated environmental law. Environmental impact concerns were destruction of prime Sage-Grouse habitat, high water usage, contamination from sulfur use, and water and air quality. Water is an ongoing concern. Nevada is the driest state in the nation, and in a farming community, water is essential.

The communities hope Lithium America continues to work closely with Orovada and Kings River on water and other issues, some of which are foreseeable and others that may spring up in the future. Knowing a project of this scale would certainly bring major changes to their community, the residents of Orovada and Kings River organized to protect the place and the way of life they value. A meeting was scheduled to begin discussions aimed at bringing our community together and reaching a consensus about what we were going to do moving forward. Everyone was invited to participate—the public, opposition organizations,

Native Americans, agency and government leaders, and Lithium America representatives. Several meetings followed, and as a result of these meetings, the Thacker Pass Concerned Citizens Group was formed with the community requesting regular meetings with Lithium America to identify concerns, address problems, and pursue mitigation. While Lithium America was under no obligation to do so, they agreed. And while there are challenges, the discussions generally have been productive.

Two examples highlight what collaboration between the community, and a large company can achieve. First, the company and the community agreed the Orovada Elementary School is a safety risk. The school is located about 100 yards off of RS, Rural Route 293, the main transportation route to the mine. Lithium America asked the community to identify land to construct a replacement school and committed to fund it. The group located Bureau of Land Management, BLM land, and working with the company helped secure a new site. Construction has not begun largely because inflation has increased costs. My understanding is that funds have been placed with the Community Foundation of Northern Nevada to collaborate with the Humboldt County School District, but the amount may no longer cover the full project. A new school remains urgently needed, and I hope the school board and Community Foundation can reach a workable solution.

Second, the community and Lithium America identified the need for a turn lane from Highway 95 onto RS 293. Without it, trucks, buses, and mine traffic had to turn into oncoming traffic without a safety turn lane, disrupting traffic and creating a serious hazard. Lithium America coordinated with NDOT [Nevada's Department of Transportation] and paid for a new turn lane.

Principal issues still require sustained engagement. Thacker Pass Concerned Citizens Group continues to meet as ongoing issues arise both as a committee and also with representatives from Lithium America. Until the new school is built and student safety in Orovada is fully addressed, Lithium America Corp should remain actively involved.

About a year ago, Lithium America Corp began active construction on phase one of the Thacker Pass mine project, roughly ten miles from my ranch. This \$2.3 billion development is the second largest ongoing project in Nevada and employs about 2,000 construction workers and contractors. Orovada, by contrast, is a farming and ranching community of about 200 residents, with the influx of working workers and traffic presenting a significant change to community life as we know it. In small towns like Orovada or in small towns like Winnemucca, Battle Mountain, and Lovelock, large projects can have outsized impacts, changes that might barely be noticed in bigger cities like Reno and Las Vegas. Even a few 100 workers and especially the roughly 2,000 type of Thacker Pass project can strain local services in small towns and reshape local communities, affecting restaurants, grocery stores, and other businesses.

Employers and local governments alike struggle to hire and retain employees with a limited labor pool and to compete with mine wages and benefits. For example, when construction began, the County lacked enough building department staff to complete the required inspections, so we had to contract with an outside firm. As a result, the county forfeited about 60 percent of the inspection fees, affecting feed revenues that could have supported local services.

I also question why the state grants tax abatements to mining companies for resources that can only be extracted where they are. In my view, these abatements are unnecessary giveaways that shift costs onto rural governments with limited resources. Humboldt County welcomes growth, but we also need the revenues now to expand services, not three or five years down the road.

Projects like Thacker Pass along with gold mines draw many people to an area due to the good pay and benefits. Most are good people, but some arrive seeking work and for various reasons are not hired or are hired and then quickly let go. Some end up in our jail; others run out of money and become homeless. This creates added costs to our taxpayers as our Human Service Department must now find them temporary housing and provide them with food.

A long-standing issue that only the state can address is growing safety concerns on Highway 95. U.S. 95 is a major north-south artery from Mexico to Canada and a vital trucking route, but it remains a two-lane highway that gets busier every year. Thacker Pass project more than doubled the amount of traffic every day between Winnemucca and Oroville. I have not been a Commissioner for 12 years now, and each year the Commission has urged NDOT to add some passing lanes, and we have gotten nowhere. If the state promotes development that increases hazards to communities, large or small, it has a responsibility to make those roads safe. This can be as simple as just putting in a few passing lanes or turn lanes.

Now I am going to switch gears to public land ranching in Humboldt County. So far, 2026 is shaping up to be one of the driest years I have seen in my lifetime ranching in Humboldt County. For the first time in 40 years, I will not put up any hay because I do not have the irrigation water. Most ranchers, including myself, rely on winter snowpack to supply our surface water, for both winter feed production and stock water. But it has been essentially nonexistent this year in the Santa Rosa Mountains where my water comes from and the water for other ranchers in Oroville and Paradise Valley. The snowpack at its highest level this year reached only 13 percent of normal.

This is also the first time in 40 years I have had to haul water to my livestock out on the range. Normally in May we have more water than we can use. Everyone with a grazing permit has already turned cattle out, and we are going to have to watch closely to prevent our cattle from overgrazing, particularly in the riparian areas. I expect many ranchers will bring cattle home from their BLM and forest permits early this year. And many of us, I have already, myself, reduced my herd by selling about half the replacement heifers that I typically keep. With drought conditions, hay prices will rise, and many ranchers will have little choice but to sell part or all of their herds. We try to find a bright spot when we can. One is that with so little moisture, cheatgrass barely grew this year, so little moisture means less cheatgrass probably should mean less fire.

In closing, I would like to thank this Committee for holding their Public Lands Committee meeting in Winnemucca and taking the opportunity to travel out to the mine, which I think you did yesterday, and really see what a jewel the northern part of the state is. I want you to know that those of us in rural Nevada, where economies rely on the use of our public lands, very much appreciate the work you do. That is the conclusion of my presentation. If there are any questions or if you have time—.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. And you are correct, most of us did go out to the Thacker Pass Mine yesterday and we drove through Orovada; we saw the turn lane and the elementary school. It was nice to come full circle and hear you mention those as well. I am going to see if my Committee members have any questions. Sure, Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

I do not really have a question, more of a comment. Thank you so much for telling us the issues that you are going through as a rancher as well. I knew about the water issue. Yeah, I think we all do, but having to sell off half your herd at this time. Thank you. That must have been very emotional because that is not just right now, that is also going to impact the next three or four years.

Commissioner Cerri:

Yes, it does.

Vice Chair Anderson:

So, what is the long-term impact? I guess I can create a question out of it. What is the long-term impact of that unfortunate decision that you had to make for resources that were out of your control?

Commissioner Cerri:

Well, livestock predict cattle. By the time a cow is born and by the time it produces can be two to three years. So even after this is over and conditions, we hope, improve, it is going to be years down the road before we are able to get our numbers back to where they were prior to this drought, but there is very little recourse available to us, so, yeah.

Vice Chair Anderson:

And then, also, with the rising costs of alfalfa and other feed, is that also having an impact, or was it only the water?

Commissioner Cerri:

The rising cost of feed, rising cost of diesel fuel, rising cost of fertilizer, all combined together, are going to even make it more difficult to retain more cattle to build our herds back up. So, yeah. Thank you.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

Thanks, Madam Chair. Great to see you again. We have worked together since what year were you elected? 2010 also?

Commissioner Cerri:

Yes, I term out this year.

Senator Hansen:

So, anyway, it has been a long time. Question on the whole Lithium America project. The school—have they provided any money to rebuild the school? Is that the plan where they are going to help finance that?

Commissioner Cerri:

If I recall right, I think I have this straight, they committed \$16 million towards the construction of a school, and they also did the engineering and architectural work that was required of it. That early, that initial work they did, they claim took a pretty good chunk of that, a few million dollars to do. With what is left, they put the money with the community, the Northern Nevada Foundation, to administer it. They have obviously got a lot going on out there; they do not need to worry about this school. They have been very good about working with us to find the land that we need, but with the size of the school—and it is not a very big one—it does not take much to spend \$13 million on a school these days or \$14 [million] or \$15 [million], whatever. They evidently cannot get it done with what money is left.

Our school district is having a very tough time meeting the needs that it has presently of maintenance, and we have got some aging schools that need work, so they do not have any extra money. So, before they commit to the school, they want to make sure that the money available will finish that school, that it will be ready for occupancy and they do not have to find additional funds to get the school made. Right now, it does not look like there is sufficient funds, and it is only going to get worse. Inflation is not going to make the situation any better, so I do not know if we have, if Lithium is going to have additional discussions with the school district, find some additional dollars or whatever, but we did get a commitment that we intend to hold the Mine to and the community does and get the school built. The longer it takes, the more at risk our students. Our parents that have to pick those students up off this busy road every day are at, so we need to get this done and work together to get it accomplished.

Senator Hansen:

Follow up on that. The highway, the turnouts. Originally there was discussion about making it four lanes instead of two. The turnouts. When Alexis and I toured with Tim Crowley, a year and a half or so ago, the idea of making four lanes kind of put on the back burner, but they did agree to do turnouts. Are the federal government folks helping finance that, or is that all strictly going to be NDOT money?

Commissioner Cerri:

I think the money from the federal government comes into Nevada, which is then—and I hope I am not speaking out of turn here—but which then NDOT has to figure out the best places to put that money. I have been to Vegas; I have been to Reno. There is a lot of roads that need built there and this may not be a priority, but it is if you live there and it is your family that has to travel this road, it is a priority.

Senator Hansen:

No, it is not a matter of priority. It is a matter that, what I understand, Lithium America got \$1 billion dollars of federal monies to help do the project. So, out of \$1 billion, if you could contribute \$10 to \$20 million or whatever it would take to make the roads, to build the schools, that would still leave them \$975 million to do the project.

Along those lines, now, obviously Lithium America is building on federal lands. You as a rancher—and I assume Humboldt County is like everywhere else—almost all of the ranchers have allotments, whether it is Forest Service or BLM allotments. How critical are those allotments to the success of Nevada ranchers?

Commissioner Cerri:

Are you speaking of just the allotments that were in the Thacker Pass project?

Senator Hansen:

No, I am sorry. Anywhere, all allotments. I do a little homework on BLM allotments, especially there is like 300 or 400 people actually have allotments in the state.

Commissioner Cerri:

Well, they are what make our operations viable. Because Nevada, not like other states where there is a lot of productive land, it is not that it is not productive, but we run maybe a cow to 50 acres in Nevada because of the scarcity of feed, where in other states, they will run two cows per acre. We cannot afford to. Even back when these ranches were homesteaded, they could not afford all that land, or they could not acquire all that land under the Homestead Act. So, came out with grazing permits to use our public lands. Without them, most operations, I would say 95 percent of them, would not be viable. There is just not enough private land.

Senator Hansen:

Well, the reason I ask that is the federal government has *Code of Federal Regulations* 4140, which makes it illegal for ranchers who have allotments to block public access. This whole meeting is about public lands and the use of it. And I am concerned because the ranching community has, in the last 20 years especially it seems, been shutting off access to the public domain while at the same time using that public domain for private commercial grazing; and it is a clear violation of those rules. I have been pushing this for a while, and I am looking forward to the Elko County presentation because we are going to get into this a little bit. But I am kind of thinking if I was the Nevada ranching community, the last thing I want to do, and as you heard in the public comments, there are open movements across this country to eliminate public lands grazing, period. And it would seem to me it would behoove the ranching community, the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, and so forth to aggressively encourage people to be able to use those same public lands for all the other multiple uses. Yet, what I see is the opposite. I see the ranching community circling the wagons and protecting people who are illegally blocking access to that same public domain. So, I just want to get that out there.

I know you are on Rebel Creek there at the Sawtooth Mountain. The west side of the Santa Rosas is not one of the real bad areas, but when I look at the west side of the Diamonds and the east side of the Humboldt Range, the entire Independence Range, I could go on to several others. Those lands are now blocked for public use, yet the same ranchers who need that public land to stay viable are then turning around and denying to the general public the use of those multiple-use areas. To me, it is like you guys want to fight these wild horse people all across the nation and have us support you as a sportsman. The idea that I see the ranchers blocking public access all over the place does not make me want to support protecting the ranchers who are, in fact, blocking the use for all the other people of

those public lands. Typically, grazing allotments are three or four months out of the year, so the other rest of the time they are completely eliminated from everybody camping, hunting, fishing, rock hounding, whatever they want to do. I know you are quite influential in those circles, and so I want to put a little plug on the record for that.

Commissioner Cerri:

Could I address that a little bit?

Senator Hansen:

Absolutely.

Commissioner Cerri:

I think it is vital that each county do an assessment of what roads are public and which are not, and we have done that in Humboldt County. It is unfortunate that this is the way that it is turning, that you are seeing it, and I hope that it is not that flagrant, but Humboldt County has identified all RS [Revised Statute] 247[7] roads the best we could, and we have it mapped out as public roads. It is awful difficult when somebody says somebody is trespassing, come out here, and the sheriff to show up and then he has to determine is this a public road or is this a private road. We have mapped those kinds of things, and I understand where you are coming from.

Senator Hansen:

Well, thank you. RS 2477 is only one aspect. We at the state legislative level have already passed similar laws based on the Unlawful Inclosures Act (UIA), which is a federal law which supersedes, goes well beyond the RS 2477. I do not want to get in the weeds on that, but there already is a law that has nothing to do with RS 2477, and in fact, makes it illegal for anyone who has a road that essentially goes from public through private back to public to lock those gates and block those accesses. That is the Unlawful Inclosures Act. But anyway—.

Ron, thank you very much. We will talk a little bit more about that with Elko County here in a minute. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. Unless there are any other— Oh, Assemblymember DeLong.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for the presentation. I wanted to get this on the record. I believe that the federal funding or loans that were given to Lithium America specify that that money has to be spent on the project, and so, you cannot take that loan money and put it towards the community development. The company has to put up, basically, its equity capital to deal with those things. I wanted to get that on the record.

Commissioner Cerri:

Yeah, and add to that, they told us that the strings tied to that loan could not be used to build a new school. Yes.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. Appreciate that and thank you so much for your presentation. Pleasure to have you here. We will move on to our next presentation from Elko County.

**Curtis Moore, Director, Natural Resources, and Assistant County Manager,
Elko County:**

Thank you, guys, for coming. Thanks for having me. A little bit about Elko County. I know you guys probably know a lot of this, but just to catch up a little bit here. ([Agenda Item III A](#)) About 73 percent of Elko County's land is administered by federal agencies. Elko County has a population of a little over 58,000 in 2025 according to the State Demographer. Local economy is heavily reliant on natural resources industries and public lands access. There is a little bit of information there on wages from the County from different industries, including mining, agriculture, that sort of thing. Down here at the bottom, a total estimated spending on outdoor recreation in Elko County is \$178.9 million, according to the Nevada Department of Outdoor Recreation. Because of how the County is set up, much of that recreation is on public lands.

I would like to start with things that are going well. We have been able to work with the Nevada Department of Outdoor Recreation through an infrastructure grant to build a staging area for a trail system that is going to be built on BLM lands right outside of Elko. These will be the first trails that are on BLM lands in Elko County in that District, and they will be multiple-use, nonmotorized trails, so mountain biking, equestrian, running, walking, I guess pogo sticking if you are athletic enough, whatever you want to do. Also, with state funds we have secured two transportation alternatives grants. One is a multiuse path out in Spring Creek that will connect two schools, some grocery stores, some youth sports facilities, and some medical facilities all along there where there is currently no pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure, so that has been good.

Onto the challenges. Probably nothing super surprising here, so I am not going to belabor a ton of technical points on this for you guys, but our biggest challenges from public lands right now are crickets, weeds, RS 2477 roads, and wild horses.

We will start with crickets. The former State Entomologist Jeff Knight would always sort of drop this bomb during every presentation that he gave, and I feel obliged to continue it. They are not a true cricket; these are in fact a shield-backed katydid. They have cyclical invasions, often originating on public lands. The exact sort of factors that go into this cycle are not super well understood, but we know they are cyclical. They present dangers to crops, gardens, and public safety. If you get enough of them on a road, they get really slick, and we have had to send out snowplows and other things. They have also caused problems with retaining medical professionals. This top picture here is from a couple of years ago at the Northeastern Nevada Regional Hospital. We actually lost some doctors; after this invasion, they just were done. They also had to hire some folks with leaf blowers to go out and clear passages so folks could get to and from the hospital, and people ended up not going to the hospital in certain cases because they did not want to deal with crickets. When you are doing your risk-reward calculations, crickets versus heart attacks, some people, really adverse to crickets.

They are managed at the state level by the Nevada Department of Agriculture in conjunction with the BLM and with APHIS [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service]. They do treatments on public lands, and they do a good job. There is, just like with every

state agency, there is never enough of them to do everything you want them to do, but that is where that goes at the state level. I will come back to these guys, but for me, crickets and weeds are kind of linked, so I am going to deal with both of them right here.

Weeds. You guys are familiar with these. They cause damage to rangelands. They increase fire danger, they reduce native biodiversity, and they reduce habitat for native wildlife. Not going to tell you anything on weeds that you guys have not heard before. There is a few responses we have got to these. This picture is from an old movie that I love now since I have started working with crickets. It is called "Beginning of the End." There is the regular version and the mystery science theater version. Both are worth watching.

For weeds, we have partnered with conservation districts to treat county rights-of-way for weeds, and this is what we have been doing for about the last 20 years, and it has been going pretty well. There is some changes we will probably make to the system here coming up, but it has been serving us pretty well. We have also hired a seasonal employee to help with cricket abatement, and that has been working. In 2025, we treated over 50 miles of road with about 3,000 pounds of carbaryl bait. I did not include the pictures on here, but if you guys want them, feel free to reach out. I have got pictures of miles of dead crickets. There is so many of them, and I do not know where they go. I have so many questions about them.

As well as the crickets, we have been partnering with the Nevada Department of Agriculture and the BLM to share information and coordinate treatments. In the last couple of years, the Department of Agriculture has put together a reporting form where somebody who encounters crickets can actually go on and pinpoint the exact location where they saw the crickets. These things move about a mile a day when they really start going. They are kind of like trying to catch a slow-moving invisible wildfire when you are out there. Having that real-time pinpointed stuff is really handy rather than sort of catching somebody, hey, I was out here fishing, did not have service for the last three days. I saw them here. I do not know where to go get them now, so this has been really handy.

One of the things that we decided to do after a few years of these crickets, is we decided to try to pull some funding together to help us sort of better manage this, and as long as we are talking about it, a lot of the equipment was the same. We thought it would be nice to have, you know, if we were going to have a guy in a truck with a sprayer, it would be nice to, once he is done with treating crickets, it would be nice to have him do weeds. It is all the same equipment, same roads, a lot of the same certification, so this would be great. We are going to put together a District for weeds and pests, and so we kind of mickey mouse the District together. I will show you that, talk to you that a little bit on that next slide. It got really weird with the funding and with how the Board had to be staffed and stuff, and it got really unwieldy, so we ended up having to dismantle that same District and figure something else out.

With each of these issues, I am going to try to bring you guys some suggested steps instead of complaining at you. We would love for you to continue or increase funding for Mormon cricket abatement. That helps a lot. Like I said, most of these things originate on public lands. Usually when they get to private lands, people start treating them and you do not get as many eggs being laid. Most of the infestation comes from public lands and so more treatments on that would be great.

Then, we would love to see something streamlining the creation of districts for weed and pest management. Like I said, there is a lot of overlap between the equipment that we have to buy and what staffing looks like. We cobbled together this District using provisions from

NRS 318 and Chapter 555, so our funding was really split and the way we had to sort of staff the Governing Board of this District was really unwieldy and did not work great for us. So, that is what we would ask on that.

RS 2477 roads. I do not know if you guys have heard of these; they are kind of an underground issue here. But they are rights-of-way that were built across federal land before the land was taken out of the federal estate, patented, otherwise reserved in the case of national forests or before the passage of FLPMA [Federal Land Policy and Management Act] in 1976. The unlawful closure of an RS 2477 right-of-way can carry civil or criminal penalties for landowners, and it can protect Nevadans from accessing public lands that would otherwise be available for recreational or other uses. And so, it kind of points both ways. It can inconvenience both sets of people that interact with these.

For roads that go over private lands, the only two mechanisms to determine the status of an RS 2477 are a quiet title action or a criminal proceeding, now that it is listed as a public nuisance. Elko County is litigated, or sorry, at the federal level, the quiet title action remains the only mechanism for resolving a conflict over an RS 2477 road. Elko County has litigated a claim of this kind, and it took over 20 years and a lot of money, a lot of staff time, and we ended up with some law that we do not love from that. Both require a significant investment in time and money and provide pretty much no incentive for settlement in this case. When you look at what your options are, what your best alternative to a negotiated agreement is, it is almost the same whether you litigate it or not, so there is not a lot of alternative incentive for settlement.

The oldest RS 2477 routes often go through the home areas of ranches. You guys will see these when you are out in rural Nevada. You will see a road that goes— There will be a house on one side and a barn on the other with some corrals. That is because when you are taking a wagon through, at five miles an hour, you can stop and unload your wagon on one side and unload your tack and other stuff on the other side. Now, when you have jeeps and side-by-sides and other things going through there a little faster, it creates some more conflict.

There is some problems with— It turns into a patchwork. The existence of an RS 2477 right-of-way can vary across and even within parcels, and so that right-of-way is limited to the footprint that existed when it was established. This is sort of a quick illustration, but you can see the path going through the green parcels would be an RS 2477 road, and you can have situations where you will have— There will be an RS 2477 road there and then there will not be because that was taken out of the public estate before the road was built. Then you can have another RS 2477 along there.

They are very time-intensive; they are very fact-intensive; they take a lot of research. A lot of these patents and a lot of these reservations were done, oftentimes, before these particular parcels were even fully surveyed, and so a lot of times, you end up relying on journals or other older, less reliable maps than a surveyed map to try to figure out what is going on there. That is what happened with our Jarbidge case. We were relying on journals and records that, you know, there were 100,000 sheep grazing at the top of the canyon for the summer and they had to get there somehow. So, they are at the bottom of the canyon in the winter, at the top of the canyon in the summer. We assume they took this, but we did not have a really good map, and that is where we ended up stuck there.

Chair Scheible:

I am sorry to interrupt you. I want to let you know, I know you still have another issue that you want to discuss. You are at about 15 minutes now, so if we can keep that in mind, please.

Director Moore:

All right, thanks. So, solution we would ask from you guys. One thing we would love to see is some kind of administrative pathway to go forward on this. Right now, like I said, it is civil or criminal. Provide incentives for landowners to provide durable access over their property and to provide a mechanism for allowing the relocation of roads that go through high-value grazing land or the home areas of ranches. These are the areas of the highest conflict and sort of what provides the incentive to lock out those users.

Wild horses. This is a picture of my wild horse. His name is Rooster. He is not great. I do not like him, but he is mine. Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (WHBA), you guys know about that. It came out the same year as "Shaft" and "Bedknob and Broomsticks." This is not based on cutting-edge science or the newest developments out there. One of the biggest problems from our end is that Congress has not provided adequate funding to reduce the number of horses to AML. All of the BLM offices have a plan to get the horses to AML through roundups, through birth control, whatever you want to do. Congress has not provided the funding.

What we would ask from you guys. There is not much you can do at the legislative level, but we just ask that you call on Congress to provide funding to remove horses down to AML and then do whatever they want to do, whether it is birth control, whatever, to keep them down there. I also think there is some problems with how the law is written, but I do not have time to rant at you about that for all day. It will cause an increase in the number of horses in long-term holding, but that is a problem Congress caused and a problem they need to solve.

So, wrap up, these are my requests. Continue to support programs and grants supporting outdoor recreation. Huge fans of that. We have got a lot going on right now. Expand the NDA response to crickets and weeds; streamline the creation of weed and pest districts; create an administrative process to recognize routes across private land; provide settlement incentives and road realignment mechanisms; and request that Congress clarify the management goals of the WHBA and fund roundups to AML.

Chair Scheible:

Excellent. Thank you so much. I think it is time to open it up for questions. I know Senator Hansen is very eager, so I will go to him first.

Senator Hansen:

I am eager. Thank you. You guys did not even mention the Unlawful Inclosures Act. That is a federal law that makes it illegal, like your patchwork thing, where you had the RS 2477 going through public and private and back to public and so forth. Why do you guys ignore that? I mean, that is pretty clear. There are court cases on it. It is illegal to block access to the public domain. It has nothing to do with RS 2477. There is an entirely separate federal category. You guys did not even mention it. Why?

Director Moore:

I think there is some more nuance to it than that. Also, most of the direction in the Unlawful Inclosures Act, it goes to the state, federal, or the state, or territory federal attorney to open that up, and so there is really not a lot of directive here at the state or county level from that law.

Senator Hansen:

Okay, well, federally that is the law, and they have had numerous court cases, but we at the state level did. We took, in 2019, and we now have NRS 202.450, [subsection] 5, which is literally copied verbatim from the UIA and from *Camfield v. United States*, which is the United States Supreme Court decision, and we made those blockages a public nuisance when they cross private property and they illegally lock people off of that public domain. So, we have done it on the state level. For some reason, Elko County is the unique county that claims that our law that we passed, they cannot enforce, and that if you come across a locked gate on a private land, you yourself have said that is a civil matter even though we made it at the state level a criminal matter. Now the problem, if we go back, we can go back to 1993 interesting enough to Bernie Anderson, Natha's father, he had this exact issue at that time, and they passed a law saying it is illegal to lock gates. No teeth though. In 2019, we put in the teeth. We made it so that an average citizen can abate a public nuisance, and that is going clear back to Blackstone. Yet Elko County insists the only way that you can get a gate open in Nevada on a road that goes through private land back to public land is a civil court action. In your administrative and your recommendations, is there something that we missed on the state level that you guys do not have in your toolbox to enforce the state law?

Director Moore:

I think you are mischaracterizing what we have talked about a little bit. One of the things I talked about here is it can carry civil or criminal penalties. And your law is the one I am referring to, is that it can carry criminal penalties.

Senator Hansen:

By the way, it is not my law. I was a cosponsor. It was passed unanimously by the Nevada Legislature—the law you are referring to.

Chair Scheible:

Very briefly, if I could have you give your name before you speak so that, as we keep our record, we know who is talking.

Director Moore:

Yeah, sorry.

Chair Scheible:

No problem.

Director Moore:

One of the things I referred to was there are civil penalties, which is the law you were referring to. One of the things that we have talked about is that does give a, there is a civil, or sorry, there is a criminal remedy. If a person comes across a gate that they think should be open, they can call the sheriff up there. The sheriff will take a report and bring it back to the District Attorney's (DAs) office. The District Attorney's office will do the research and see if it is a road that should be open. If it is, then they can bring that criminal action.

Senator Hansen:

Okay. Real quick, along those similar lines now. NRS 405.191 passed in 1979 requires counties to map their RS 2477 roads. Has Elko County mapped their RS 2477 roads?

Director Moore:

We have done a couple of things. We have not fully mapped out that, again, because the only way to really map out an RS 2477 road is to take that map, do the research, parcel by parcel, mile by mile. And then, that would be a claimed RS 2477 road, and then you could submit a quiet title action over that land.

Senator Hansen:

Okay, what you just said, though, you guys have mapped. It is actually; it is done as per law. You guys have formally declared all the maps, and then the maps, I can get 328522. That is the file in the Elko County Recorder's Office. By the way, you have to file it also with the Nevada Department of Transportation, so I reached out to NDOT. Sure enough, they have 328522 filed with them. You guys have mapped them exclusively. And so, for you to sit here and say Elko County, what you guys, you have not followed the law that was passed almost 40 years ago, you have mapped them. They are in your documents. They are officially public roads, including, by the way, I went back and researched what the County Commission specifically said, and they gave private property owners—they put it in the *Elko Daily Free Press*—an opportunity to challenge these mapped roads crossing private property. So, Elko County was fully aware of that, and Elko County has fully mapped those, yet you do not even recognize those maps as existing.

Director Moore:

No, the maps exist. They are colloquially known as the Gardner maps, and according to the legal guidance that I have got currently, those act as one of the elements to proving an RS 2477 claim is to prove that the county accepted that right-of-way for public use. It satisfies that element of it. The legal guidance I currently have still says that we need to, if you want to establish that as an RS 2477 right-of-way, it needs to go through the quiet title process.

Senator Hansen:

Right. In other words, all those roads remain blocked even though the state has passed laws saying that you guys have to map them. You have a uniform, excuse me, the Unlawful Inclosures Act. You have our public nuisance law, yet somehow, Elko County alone is requiring people to go through a civil court process, which is expensive, takes forever, when we actually have done at the state level, made it so that people can use the public nuisance statute to be able to access that.

I am sorry. I know, Madam Chair, I am taking up more than my time. The last question I have got—right-of-ways. Elko County has a whole series of right-of-ways that are recognized by the county, which go through private property. Do you guys have an actual Elko County map or a location that we can go to see those?

Director Moore:

Yes.

Senator Hansen:

How do I access those? Because when I tried to find those— As you know, we just had a court case involving Dolly Creek and your own District Attorney, Deputy District Attorney, informed us that that is an Elko County right-of-way. Yet, that Elko County right-of-way, as we speak, have big signs and locked gates all over it preventing people, private citizens all across Nevada to access public land. Yet Elko County has refused, for three years now, at least, to open those roads up even though they acknowledge them as a right-of-way in Elko County on your own maps. How do we find those? And when we do find them, how do we get the county itself to actually open them up? Because your own sheriff drove through all of those locked gates to come and find a gate on BLM land that I had cut to get to my own grazing allotment, as you know. Somehow, he did not do anything about the three locked gates to that, but then he goes to the BLM land and investigates that one. Where are your right-of-way maps? And, if in fact, that road is on a right-of-way map, why has not Elko County insisted on keeping that road open for the citizens of not only Elko County but all the people that like to use the public lands?

Director Moore:

Couple of pieces to what you are talking about here. Elko County maintains a GIS [geographic information system] system, where you can go on and look up most county rights-of-way. Some of the sort of far-off ones or the oldest ones are not fully mapped, mostly because we have got one guy in there doing it, and he takes things as they come in. Elko County is what, 17,000 square miles, and some of these rights-of-way go back to the 1880s, and so, there is work being done there; and so, there is that. There is recorder's documents that you can go and look through if there is a particular parcel that you are interested in.

As I have explained before, there are criminal penalties that come along with this. If a person comes across a locked gate, they can call the sheriff. The sheriff can come out and take a report, and they can submit that to the District Attorney's office, who will then do the research and bring criminal charges if they find that there is enough evidence. It is just like any other crime. If there is another nuisance, if there is a house next to you that you suspect is being used often for drug activity, you can call the sheriff's office. They will come out and investigate. If there is enough evidence, they will bring it to the District Attorney's office. We will charge them with a crime if there is enough evidence.

Senator Hansen:

Okay. Madam Chair, one last thing that is very important. This is a big issue not only for public access, but because of— I will give you a very specific case. We had a rancher in Elko on the Mountain City Highway. Two 16-year-olds drove a car across his ranch through private property, no locked gates, no "No Trespassing" signs, back onto public land where this rancher has a, by the way, an illegal airstrip. The rancher then confronted these two young men. The rancher was intoxicated. The rancher pulled a firearm on these two,

fired the firearm after waving it in their face, indicating it was a fully loaded firearm; and basically, nothing happened. These kids were accessing public land across a private piece of property, not trying to cause trouble or anything else, but the rancher had it in his mind that he had the right to literally threaten children's lives because they wanted to access the public domain. And in Elko County, their DA— Now, the DA and the sheriff, I am going to make it very clear, I think the DA and the sheriff up there have deliberately avoided enforcing these laws during the entire time they have been on the books. That is a personal opinion, but it is also getting serious now when a person blocking access to the public domain can pull a firearm on somebody and shoot it and then not face any serious criminal activity. That really raises the bar in my mind about how serious the sheriff and the district attorneys are in protecting the public's right to the access point.

And that is why one thing I do want this Committee to perhaps recommend is that in the next legislative session, we use our subpoena power and we bring the sheriff and the DA in front of the Judiciary Committee to have them explain why they have allowed the situation in Elko County to get so bad that people are literally being threatened with firearms for simply, at worst, a minor trespass violation—a misdemeanor trespass. This is a huge issue. It has been going on for years and it is just getting worse. And what I see is unfortunately there is only maybe 100 people in this entire state that have federal allotments, U.S. Forest Service allotments or BLM, that are illegally blocking public access. But rather than try to open those things up so all public users can enjoy the multiple uses that the public lands are for, they lock it up. They use it exclusively for their grazing, and then they do everything possible to prevent reasonable public access, including roads that have been, as Mr. Moore just pointed out, in existence for at least going back to the 1880s in many cases.

Thank you, Madam Chair, but that is something I think we should look into. You know this Committee is going to recommend some changes in law. Mr. Moore really did not provide any changes for expanding public access through private property, but rather gave some possible administrative things. I think what we need to do is if the current law is inadequate to allow prosecution of individuals that are continuously blocking public access for laws that go back to 1885 and the United States Supreme Court going back decision from 1897, even after all that, they cannot do it. We need to find out why. And frankly, I have not heard anything that could indicate why you have not nailed anybody criminally on any of these things. Never, never once in the entire history of Elko County. By the way, I have several other counties that are actively opening public access. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have taken more than my fair share of time. Appreciate you allowing me that.

Chair Scheible:

Did you want to say anything in response? You do not have to. Okay, I think we may have a few more questions. I will go to Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you, Chair, and this is going to sound, feel like we had talked about this, but we had actually not talked about it. When you introduced RS 2477 roads, you made a comment, I am sure you meant it off the hand, but when you said, "It is a law we do not love," it stood out for me. Does that mean that you are not, and it is not because of the family history with it. That comment, though, of it is a law we do not love has me concerned whether or not you are actually enforcing that law. Have there been any sort of enforcements of that law? I

realize that my colleague just brought up other information, but has there been any enforcement of the RS 2477 roads in the last ten years because it is a law “we do not love,” which again, I think you meant that off the cuff, and were trying to bring some humor into the room, but just wanted to get some clarification around that.

Director Moore:

Thank you for giving me a chance to clarify that. What I was referring to is what we call the Jarbidge South Canyon case. And when I said there is some law we do not love there, what the court ended up holding in that—and it was never overturned, so it is just case law now—is that we needed to provide actual maps of these rights-of-way before they were taken out of the public estate, that the circumstantial evidence that we provided that there were sheep in the bottom of the canyon in the winter and then sheep at the top of the canyon in the summer, was not enough to meet the clear and convincing evidence standard that is required to establish an RS 2477 road.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much, and I do have a follow-up, if I may, Chair. It is interesting we are talking about this today because today would have been my father's 84th birthday and he was very much involved in this language as Senator Hansen just brought up. It is about the public lands, and it is about public access to lands; and there has to be enforcement of it. And from what it sounds like right now—thank you for that clarification around the court case and everything—but it does not always feel like that is what is happening.

I am going to actually move on. And actually, I am going to make it a little bit less about this right now, but when it comes to the permitting office of your, again, like I said, we are moving on from that; how many members of your staff are in the permitting office and what is the current backlog when it comes to permitting of, whether it is mining, whether it is data centers, whether it is other elements or other organizations that wish to come in and work in Elko County at this time? What is the backlog?

Director Moore:

Just to clarify, are you talking about permitting on public lands?

Vice Chair Anderson:

Public lands as well as other lands, any sort of land at all. If the word *land* is involved, I want to know how far back you guys are in permitting.

Director Moore:

Okay, no worries. We have got three people on our Planning and Zoning Department. I do not know how many applications we have currently got in our office. We get between like 10 and 15 a month, and most of those we deal with the next month at the monthly Planning Commission meeting. There is not much of a backlog there. Some more complicated things— Most of the things we get are like parcel maps or we get a few zoning request changes every year. I think next Thursday we are dealing with a variance for a shed. And then, we just went through the conditional use permit for a person who wants to do some development of a ski area. There is not really much of a backlog that I can speak of. I did not bring that information with me today, and I am sorry.

Vice Chair Anderson:

No need to apologize. I do not think it was something that the Chair probably had asked for. It is something that is always brought up more than a few times to me about how backlogged some of those offices are.

So then, this actually brings up another question that came from our last Public Lands meeting. When the Commission meets, is there a Planning Commission that is different than your County Commission? And if so, does that Planning Commission have final say or does the County Commission have the final say as to whether or not a buildout or a new company can come in? Cause there are some counties that it sounds like the Planning Commission, which is not an elected group, is able to make a decision, and the County Commission has to automatically go with it.

Director Moore:

In Elko County, for most things, the Planning Commission will make a decision and then there is usually about a 10-day appeal period, and then they can appeal it to the County Commission, and then once that decision is filed, they have a 25-day period where they can appeal to the District Court. There are specific instances like our utility scale solar and wind ordinance, which allow the appeal to go straight from the Planning Commission to the Public Utilities Commission just because that is part of what that state statute seems to require. But in Elko County at least it goes Planning Commission, County Commission, District Court.

Vice Chair Anderson:

And just to verify, the Planning Commission is not elected, it is selected or appointed by the County Commissioners.

Director Moore:

Yes, they are appointed for four-year terms by the Commissioners.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Based upon what you were saying—and again, thank you for so much time, Chair—the Planning Commission can approve, and it is only if others appeal to the County Commission that the County Commission will review the information.

Director Moore:

Mostly there is certain things like with large subdivisions over a certain size, or a division of land in large parcels, or a road dedication or things like that where it goes to the Planning Commission and then the Planning Commission makes a recommendation to the County Commission and then the County Commission ratifies or changes that recommendation. But for certain things, master plan amendments are like that, but for certain other things like zoning changes in conformance with the master plan, then yeah, those just go to the Planning Commission, and then if there is no appeal, then that is the final decision.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you. Thank you Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? All right. Thank you so much for your presentation, for answering all of our questions. We really appreciate you being here.

With that, we are going to have a surprise change in order here. I will be inviting forward our presenters from Item IV from the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority if they are here. There you are; come on up; and then we will go back to our regularly scheduled programming.

Martin (Marty) Plaskett, Vice Chair, Eureka County Board of Commissioners:

Good morning, Madam Chair, and members of the Public Lands Committee. We thank you, and beside me is Jake Tibbetts, Eureka County Natural Resource Manager. We thank you for the opportunity to provide Eureka County's perspective on public lands, topics, and issues. In your meeting materials we provided a white paper ([Agenda Item III B](#)) of various issues and requests that we will leave behind for the Committee's consideration. Mr. Tibbetts will highlight some of the specifics when I turn it over to him.

Nearly all our community viability is dependent on management and activities on or related to public lands. Our primary economic drivers and social structure, past and current, are tied to agriculture, mostly ranching and farming, and also mining. We also value the recreation opportunities, expansive open spaces, and quality of life provided by our public lands.

Our dependency on federally administrative land and the often yo-yo effect of uncertain and changing policies coming from various federal administrations has real effect on us. Our overarching request of this Committee, the full Legislature, and our federal agency partners is to generally push back on and limit regulations, legislation, policies or projects that reduce access to public lands, minimize sustainable multiple use of public land, do not bring local community benefit and increase our dependence on federal dollars, which all undermine local community self-determination and our efforts to bring socioeconomic stability and balance. I will now turn it over to Mr. Tibbetts and look forward to any questions you may have after.

Jake Tibbetts, Manager, Natural Resources, Eureka County:

Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the Committee. It is good to see you all again, see some familiar faces and meet some new folks as well. I have been in this role as the Natural Resource Manager with Eureka County about 18 years now. I am thinking back of all the interims when the Public Land Committee and one interim as a Subcommittee had the opportunity to testify, present. I have always welcomed that opportunity, and reflecting back on a lot of that, it seems that sometimes it may be a bit of a broken record, it is the same issues over and over and over again. And you hear many counties bringing up the same issues over and over and over again.

Spending time reflecting on that, when I first got the job in Eureka County 18 years ago, about the first week or two of my job, I started looking back through old minutes, old records, county commissioners, or—we had a Public Land Advisory Commission back about 30 years ago—just to be familiar with some of the issues and some of the actions the county had taken. And we could play like minute roulette here and I could point any page in

here and I could read from these minutes, and it would be exact issues that we are talking about today. I think this Committee could look back on all your past minutes and recommendations and reports from your efforts and prior efforts over all these many years as well and change the date, perhaps, cause there are many of the same issues.

What is interesting about all that is we can ask ourselves, well, what has really changed? What have we accomplished in the realm of public land management? I have come to the conclusion that because we are still working on these issues, that is a win. We did not go the way of the dodo bird, where we are still working on these issues. Yes, there is still conflicts that come up. There is still tension. There is still disagreements. There is still policy considerations, but we continue to work on these issues, and it means that we have not lost our voice and perspective, and there is still important things to work on.

Being involved in very distinct public land administrations with very diverse goals and policies and approaches, we have experienced regulations, National Environmental Policy Act efforts that become significant in some of our local agency offices and sometimes not in others. In Eureka County we work with three different BLM districts and one forest ranger district. So even across those districts and local offices, sometimes we see things just applied a bit differently.

Some things that are dictated from Washington, D.C. as far as public plan policy, it does not always translate down to the local level. And so, we have really learned over all this time that the local relationships do matter with our local agencies, and we value those. It is not that we always agree on everything, but we really value those relationships and building that with those folks that we can work through some of this conflict. I think I mentioned it two years ago at one of the meeting, that I have come up with this term now, "moving beyond conflict to a healthy tension." And so, there is always going to be some disagreements, but to try to move beyond the conflict to that healthy tension, and it keeps everybody honest when you have that healthy tension.

With that being said, there have been efforts over the years to provide streamlining measures or other policies and priorities that work against what we believe is the mantra of "keep it local" and try to do things that benefit local communities. Sometimes that lack of principled coordination amongst all parties really leads to some of that conflict, and we really want to try to get over that. So, we strongly believe that local government coordination with federal agencies as a two-way street. Again, that term *coordination*, being on an equal level, working together, where the antonym of that, as I previously talked about, is *subordination*, where you have one party that is subordinate to another. So, working in coordination really can work through those efforts, understanding what the roles and responsibilities of everybody are, the rights of everybody involved, and how you can move on. We think formal processes in the state to stand that up in every county is really worth the effort, but this really takes a lot of work on the counties. I am very fortunate to have a job that I get paid to do this work. A lot of counties do not have the resources to have somebody in that role to birddog these issues all the time.

If you look at the handout ([Agenda Item III B](#)) that we gave you, basically items one, two, and three do highlight some suggestions for the Committee assistance that we believe this standing up some good formal public policy would help to temper against some of the swings and sways of the pendulum across various agencies. I will not belabor it in detail, but wanted to point to you that those are the items that we point out.

Regarding specific public lands issues and topics, we can mostly say “ditto” to a lot of what you heard in Lincoln County from counties and also some of our predecessors here today, but we do want to highlight a couple of things for your consideration. I typed these notes up that I have in front of me, and as I sat through the previous two discussions, I was feverishly crossing out all the stuff about RS 2477. And I say that in jest, cause actually, we do have some stuff in the document, and this became a very hot seat here. I could tell that during those prior two conversations.

The first thing I want to talk on is just this week on Monday, the BLM rescinded what is called the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule. It is more commonly referred to as the Public Lands Rule. That rule was put in place in 2024, and it was never really implemented because it was put in place towards the end of a prior administration into this new administration. We point out to you some of our perspectives related to this rule and other conservation versus protectionism type things in item four of that handout we leave behind.

I want to make it clear that Eureka County does support the rescinding of the Public Lands Rule. We support that that was rescinded, but that does not mean that we do not support addressing the issues that the Public Lands Rule was trying to address or purported to address, namely public land conservation and restoration. We believe there are tools available even without this rule to work in an incentive-based way and coordinated with our public lands users and our federal agencies to do the things that rules intended to do.

We have proof that the ecological and socioeconomic reality that land and resource preservation set aside museum-type management will never provide the benefits to our ecosystem and to our societies that we need, and it is actually the proper, sustainable management of our working lands that really can and does. We want to point out that the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and other federal acts have conservation built in as a component of uses, not as a standalone thing. It is a component of all uses.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Legislature and others to ensure the ongoing and use and conservation of our public lands and point out some of the great things the state has done. You will hear about some later on through the state Conservation Credit System (CCS). There are ways to incentivize and to do things that do conserve our public lands but continue to allow for those working lands.

So here is where I get into the hot seat. Much of the conflict we have seen on public lands over the many years is related to public land access and water rights on public lands. You heard Mr. Fontaine speak about the Baker case. We have had some lively discussion on RS 2477 and unlawful enclosures. So first off, related to the unperfected historic rights-of-way, RS 2477. I do not mean they are not vested; they have just been unperfected. They have never gone through that adjudication process and then also the prestatutory vested rights and federal reserved rights.

I want to point to this Committee that currently there is a case in front of the Nevada Supreme Court related to federal public water reserves. Mr. Fontaine spoke about a federal case at the Ninth Circuit. This is a case in front of our Supreme Court and an adjudication that was completed in Diamond Valley under the McCarran Act, and the federal agencies did bring forward, BLM brought forward their claims under that, and we are currently in an appeal where the BLM has appealed to our Supreme Court about the District Court's determination over their public water reserves. That case will be very important in the state because this issue has never been settled under state water law in this state as far as the specific types of public water reserves. I wanted to highlight that for your information.

Also, in our packet we highlight ways—this is item five—how we think you can address, help on RS 2477 roads, as well, and then item nine is related to water rights on public lands. If we truly want to settle two issues, so I do not have to keep coming back—you know, I am getting older and greyer, too, and keep coming back and keep the same broken record again—these are two issues that we can settle. And there is a very important state role in this, and so that is what we think—let us get these things out of the way. Let us get these things out of the way.

In item seven of the handout, and it was touched upon earlier, we do support efforts to streamline permitting of projects on public lands, but as long as that does not come at the expense of local community coordination and engagement. To assist in this realm, we ask the Committee to consider establishing state policy that better clarifies and empowers local communities to work with public land project proponents to develop and implement community benefit agreements. They are also called CBAs—community benefits agreements; and to box in what that would mean, so for substantial and impactful projects on federal lands to ensure there is local benefits of those projects.

Quickly want to hit on ranching and public lands grazing; point you to item eight in the handout and some specific requests of the Committee. At your prior Committee meeting and then today, there have been comments about how livestock grazing on public lands is decimating our public lands. We strongly assert that livestock grazing on public lands is not decimating these lands. Our ranchers are true stewards of the rangelands. The most prime and invaluable wildlife habitat, including for Sage-Grouse in the State of Nevada, is primarily on private lands that are managed in concert with their public lands grazing allotment. If we want to keep our habitats and our public lands intact, we need to keep our ranchers in business and we need to bolster properly managed grazing. In this realm, BLM and the U.S. Forest Service have recently published, signed an MOU [Memorandum of Understanding], and are putting out with a grazing action plan. And the BLM, just this week, released their revamp of their grazing regulations that basically, because of various lawsuits and things over the years, we are operating under grazing regulations from the mid-1990s. We believe these efforts will greatly assist, and we ask the Committee to support these current efforts by both the BLM and the Forest Service.

I am buttoning up; getting close here. I wanted to point out that there is an informational book. I put a bunch on the back table back there. It is called *Landscapes Through Time: Eureka County, Nevada*, and it relates to what I have been talking about today. This book, the lead author on this is Barry Perryman. He is a range emeritus professor from the University of Nevada, Reno, and he was the lead author on the book. These books are free; we give them away. There is no value to them. We give them out in our museum and tourist-type things. So please, please take one.

What we did on this is— There was an effort to collect as many historic photographs as could be found in and near Eureka County going back to the late 1800s, the early 1900s, and into the mid-1900s. Then these areas were located, relocated on the landscape, and repeat photography was taken at every one of these sites. And then there was a range description, described the “sciencey” stuff behind it. We had a range professor, of course, talking about what the site, what should be there, what was expected to be there, comparing the two photographs. Overwhelmingly, it provides a very good visual support with a lot of science behind it that we have had a largely sustainable management of our rangelands and that our rangeland sites are actually in good or better condition today where

there has not been catastrophic wildfire, and a lot of that is because of the sustainable management of our ranchers. But what is striking in this book is you will see, and what is very noticeable, is the expansion and infill of pinyon and juniper woodlands over the same period of time.

That brings us to Item 11 in our packet. There is a request for the Committee to support and bolster current efforts by agencies and individuals to implement landscape scale projects that utilize pinyon-juniper woodland biomass in a way that benefits energy production, rangeland health, wildlife habitat, hydrologic function, and economic stability.

With that, I know we throw a lot of information at you in a short period of time plus a 15-page document. Again, thank the Committee for the opportunity to present today, share our perspective, and we welcome any questions you may have.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much for that presentation. Right at 15 minutes. Excellent work. Questions from our members? We will start with Assemblymember DeLong.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for the presentation. I am not going to ask about RS 2477 roads. I did want to touch on that state case that you mentioned about the BLM's, public water reserves (PWR). Was the BLM asserting PWR 107 claims?

Mr. Tibbitts:

Yes, that is exactly there, public water reserves 107. Just for the Committee's background, it is an Executive Order that was just issued under the Pickett Act of 1910 that gave the President the authority to do that. And so yes, it was Order 107, which is a public water reserve order.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Just a quick follow-up. Is that in Diamond Valley or Kobeh Valley?

Mr. Tibbitts:

This is the Diamond Valley adjudication and the BLM filed for public water reserves, claimed public water reserves on 66 individual springs within the Diamond Valley Basin.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the presentation. I really like the deep dive information. On page 9 you mentioned the Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan Amendment. Can you go into that a little bit more cause I have a feeling that that is actually a federal item, if I am understanding correctly. Are you asking the state to possibly implement that also in NRS statute or is that more of a policy type of change that does not necessarily have to go through the full legislative NRS changes?

Mr. Tibbitts:

Thanks for the question. You say page 9?

Vice Chair Anderson:

Page 9; it is under five. It is the first paragraph on page 9, the last sentence where it says, "The recent Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan."

Mr. Tibbitts:

Yeah, so the point of this is really is that if you look at land use planning efforts, the Bureau of Land Management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, there is provisions in there for those land use plans to be coordinated with state, local, and tribal governments. And so, we have seen a push towards more regional, or plans with what they call management direction, from Washington, D.C. So, when you have a cake that is half-baked with direction that is not from the local level, it is really— We might be able to put some sprinkles and frosting on top, but you cannot sometimes change the substance of the cake. And so that is kind of what that point is about, and using the Greater Sage-Grouse Plan as one of those examples where there was a lot of sideboards set in place at a national level that then we had very limited ability to affect any state or local influence on that.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you. If I may have a follow-up. Thank you so much for that clarification that this is simply an example of how important it was. Love that, and actually that brings up another question that I asked of a prior county as well. When you are going through the planning stages, do you have a planning commission? Does that planning commission make the final decision or is it the elected body of your County Commission that makes a decision as to whether or not a business, a company, whether it is data centers or something else, can actually be allowed into the county?

Mr. Tibbitts:

That is a little difficult question for Eureka County. So yes, we have a Planning Commission. Our Planning Commission is more in somewhat of an advisory role. They make recommendations, review things, but it is our governing body, our County Commissioners, that make decisions. But we have developed very limited land use regulation and permitting at the local level, so when we are granting like a permit for projects, typically we are relying on either state agencies or the federal process in doing that. We have been able to— Marty might have sharp elbows here, so we got to be careful. We are a small county in population and yes, we have some large impactful projects, but we have been fortunate to not have to layer in a lot of that stuff now. But I can tell you, the County Commissioners are considering, I think of their agenda next week, a contract to look at our entire master plan and all of that as trying to come up to speed and be in the current century, so to speak. So, we might have a different answer for our unit in two years, but as of right now, we have really not imposed much permitting and regulation at the local level.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you. My last question, well maybe, I think my last question. How many individuals do you have in your permitting office, and do you have a current backlog? When I say permitting, I do mean new industries coming in, whether that is data centers, mining,

whatever the case may be, cause I know you and I have talked about this in the past, and I am trying to figure out if there is in fact, now, enough county employees or if we continue to see a huge issue with the backlog.

Mr. Tibbitts:

So, Marty, you want to take this? As I mentioned in my previous response, we really are not permitting those types of projects. We become very involved in those; that is what a lot of my job is. And we use, again, whether it is water right permitting processes, state permitting processes, or federal land, the nexus with a NEPA process to help shape projects, so we really do not have a backlog of permitting because we are not permitting those types of things. It takes a lot of work, though, just to stay on top of these things even without issuing permits, and the county has proven over decades that we are going to be very involved in those activities regardless of whether we have to sign a permit or not.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? I have one question. Is Eureka County equally plagued by these crickets?

Mr. Tibbitts:

We just send them to Elko County. But no, we have been plagued by them. In fact, Commissioner Plaskett is a farmer himself, and he can attest on his private land there is a lot of high-value hay that the crickets impact as well. And yes, we work with Elko County, our neighboring counties quite a bit on prioritizing co-county treatments and projects and things. But yes, four or five years ago we had a huge plague right in the main street, Eureka, for a long period of time. So, yes, it is definitely an issue for us, too.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. Go ahead, Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

Thanks, Madam Chair. In this age of political correctness, should we not be calling them "Latter-day Saint" crickets? Do not laugh. Just kidding.

Mr. Tibbitts:

You are speaking to the Latter-day Saint. I do not know if I am going to touch that one.

Senator Hansen:

Me too. So anyway, this year there is a slight hatch. In fact, we were driving here from the ranch, there was a bunch of them crossing the road. They are little, tiny ones at the moment; nothing like the past two years, though.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. Very much appreciate it. I think that brings us to the conclusion of Agenda Item III, if my memory serves. We are at 11:30; we are going to get through at least one more presentation before lunch. We have already done [Agenda Item IV](#), so that takes us to [Agenda Item V](#).

AGENDA ITEM IV—REVIEW OF THE CENTRAL NEVADA REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY AND HUMBOLDT RIVER BASIN WATER AUTHORITY

[This agenda item was taken out of order.]

Jeff Fontaine, Executive Director, Central Nevada Regional Water Authority (CNRWA) and Humboldt River Basin Water Authority (HRBWA):

Good morning, Chair Scheible, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Public Lands Committee. On behalf of both the CNRWA and HRBWA, thank you for the opportunity to present the Authorities' recent activities and issues to the Committee. ([Agenda Item IV](#))

You have seen this slide before. As you know, CNRWA is a unit of local government established in 2005, and there is basically the mission statement, which is to prepare communities in central and eastern Nevada for sound water resource decisions that promote prosperous economies and strong civic institutions in a healthy natural environment.

We now have ten member counties of the CNRWA, with Mineral County being the most recent to join in 2025. Each member county has three board members—county commissioners, former county commissioners, a lot of community members that are appointed by the respective county boards of commissioners, and CNRWA is subject to Nevada's Open Meeting Laws.

This is the Central Hydrographic Region. It is the largest of Nevada's 14 hydrographic regions. It covers much of central, eastern, and southern Nevada, consisting of 77 groundwater basins. As the slide indicates, the region is really characterized by the absence of regional surface water flow, so there is no river systems in the Central Region and groundwater basins that are often interconnected by subsurface flows. I would say that the subsurface flow issue and the flow between connected groundwater basins has become a significant area of interest for us, and I know for the state and others, and really understanding the extent of these flows are critical for accurately calculating groundwater yields.

The [Nevada's] Division of Water Resources (NDWR) and the State Engineer are here today. I am sure they will be talking about their work in the Nevada Water Initiative to try to address, or at least understand, those groundwater flows. They have been working on two pilot basins in the Central Region, both Pine Valley and Railroad Valley, and those hydrographic areas as part of that initiative. And if funding is available, I know they would like to get to the South-Central Marshes Flow System, which contains 15 groundwater basins in Esmeralda, Nye, Mineral Counties to try to understand that flow system as well. And of course, agriculture is the predominant manner of use in the Central Region.

As far as recent activity is concerned, responding to projects to water right applications that may adversely impact a member county is really a core function of CNRWA. It involves monitoring and evaluating project proposals, environmental impact statements, and certainly applications for new appropriations and changes to existing water rights and really taking a look at those and occasionally having to protest those that potentially conflict with the interests and needs of the member counties. This, by the way, does include doing this work in neighboring states that have shared groundwater basins with Nevada, and that is the case with the Pine Valley Water Supply Project, which is a proposed interbasin water

project in western Utah. We did protest that application with the State of Utah and have joined a number of other counties in Utah as well as White Pine County ranchers and others in appealing that to the BLM's record of decision for the pipeline itself to the Department of Interior.

I would make another note about protests because we have these discussions quite often both with CNRWA and Humboldt River Basin Water Authority as well, and that is, we have a protocol, at least in CNRWA, it is pretty clear about when and why that organization will file a protest and it would be based for both organizations, number one, to support a member county, and it would not be something that CNRWA or HRBWA would necessarily go out and file on its own. But a lot of times, those protests are filed because the organization wants to preserve its standing in a future administrative action or even a judicial action. We see applications and the way things work is that for applications that come through, there may not be a lot of information, or the information is not something that we fully understand. Again, a lot of those applications are filed often to preserve that standing, and then that would give the organization more time to work with the applicant to try to resolve any issues. And in some cases, they cannot be resolved, but at least there is an opportunity to do that.

I mentioned appeals. CNRWA does not participate in appeals to decisions, and again, we joined a number of counties and other entities to appeal the BLM's decision for a pipeline project in Utah. And the other project that we have been very involved with, both with CNRWA and HRBWA, is the Baker Ranch's appeal regarding the retroactive application of the McCarran Act amendment to federal water rights, and that is in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. It was heard by a panel of the Ninth Circuit, and that is a really important case, and the outcome of that case or decision will have some pretty serious implications not only in Nevada but the rest of the West.

We also, as part of the activities, have been assisting member counties, individual counties, in some cases mediate and resolve their concerns with water projects in their counties. Not all of the ten member counties of CNRWA have dedicated staff to sort of follow these and engage in these things. Mr. Moore and Jake Tibbitts, for example, are probably the two primary folks that work in the region on these issues. But there are a lot of counties in the central region that just do not have the capacity to do that, so we work with those counties to try to identify and possibly resolve any issues. We help them with their hydro geological analysis with legal counsel.

Lately, we have been working quite a bit with Esmeralda County. They have a lot going on in Esmeralda County that deals with water issues. Probably the most important one right now is addressing the County's concerns about applications to change the manner of use of water in Fish Lake Valley, which is sort of on the borderline in terms of being overpumped or not being overpumped, and those change applications are intended to change the manner of use from irrigation to mining for the Rhyolite Ridge Lithium Project.

We also helped organize and try to come up with some procedures for implementing the voluntary Groundwater Rights Retirement Program, and thanks to this body, a lot of work and really pleased about the passage of both AB [Assembly Bill] 104 and SB [Senate Bill] 36. You will recall there are no regulatory requirements in either of those bills and so we want to make sure going forward that we had some procedures in place, and so we worked with a number of folks to try to do that.

We have been supporting the Desert Research Institute's [DRI] Rural County Water Resource Planning Initiative, and CNRWA especially has really been a long-term advocate for linking water and land use planning. In 2019, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 150, which requires counties to adopt and update their water resource plans, but a lot of the counties have been challenged to do that because of the lack of funding and technical expertise. So, DRI was successful in receiving some ARPA [American Rescue Plan Act] funds to assist these rural counties to develop and update their plans. We have been working with DRI pretty closely to help them sort of develop the plan elements and identify individuals in each of the counties to work on those plans. I think last time I checked there were eight counties participating in that program and getting assistance from DRI, including six of the CNRWA member counties.

We, this past year, updated our groundwater monitoring program. The person who had been doing that program for us, a retired USGS [United States Geological Survey] employee, had been collecting those samples in really remote locations throughout Nevada. After 11 years he retired. We have a new person doing that. It has given us a chance to really take a fresh look at that program to make sure that we are being efficient in capturing the data that we need, which is getting groundwater level data in basins where no one else is doing it. And so, adding that to the state's database as well.

Assisting in research on water and energy issues in the Central Region. There seems to be a lot of interest from researchers wanting to understand the connection primarily between water resources and renewable energy development in the State of Nevada. And of course, with the geothermal, with lithium, there just seems to be a lot of interest. We have been working with researchers from Boise State, University of California, Berkeley, and other places to help them to the extent that they are looking for information as well as getting in touch with people and communities and providing some basic background. They do keep us up to date on what their findings are, and I know that they are presenting information occasionally to groups like the Nevada Water Resources Association and others. We welcome that opportunity to work with those folks and research those topics.

And then lastly, just overall preparing resources and presentations on water resource issues. And for our counties, again, it is really about giving them the information that they need to make good decisions. We have been talking about everything from monitoring management mitigation plans, to renewable energy, to lithium, and of course, our most favorite and latest topic, data centers.

Finally, the issues for CNRWA protection of existing water rights and rural water interests, continuing the land use, and water planning for sustainable growth. Once the plans are done—and quite frankly, the plans that are being done are primarily the inventories, the science, the hydrology, and those types of things—we want to make sure that those plans are actually integrated into the county's master plan and that are being used to really fulfill their intent purpose, which is to guide future development. And one of the things that we really want to focus on, and this is having to do with our experience with not only the Water Rights Retirement Program but also seeing applications now for change applications to change the manner of use in a lot of these farming communities from irrigation to other uses. Could be ag [agriculture], could potentially be data centers, or any other change use. We want to avoid those negative impacts, because we know that there is water that is going to be changed from irrigation to other uses, and we want to make sure that those impacts are addressed, that we anticipate those. We want to avoid them to not only the individuals but also to communities as well, so, an important issue for us.

Lithium brine extraction. I do not really have much to say about that except if you look at a map of where the inferred lithium claims are in the State of Nevada, they are predominantly in the Central Hydrographic Region, which will affect some, if not all, of our member counties.

And then, I mentioned everyone's new favorite topic, data centers. We have done quite a bit of extensive research and certainly participating in the various forums to better understand the impacts of data centers and water resources. Again, our focus is the water side of things, to the extent energy affects the water and vice versa. We look at that, and as far as the economic impacts and whether they are right for an individual community, that is the individual community's decision, and obviously the state, I am sure, is going to have some say about data centers going forward. But we are focused on the water, and we obviously want to make sure that the consumptive use of water is limited, if not completely eliminated, if that is at all possible.

Moving on to the Humboldt. ([Agenda Item IV](#)) Same thing. Established 30 years ago, and it was developed to, basically back in 1995, to oppose a proposal to export excess water from the Humboldt region to the lower Carson River Basin. Humboldt is five member counties: Elko; Eureka; Humboldt; Lander; and Pershing, similar to CNRWA Board of Directors with three representatives from each county and similar activities.

I want to acknowledge Humboldt County for their support of the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority. The County hosts our meetings in their Commission chambers and also acts as our fiscal agent. I know that at least three of our Humboldt River Basin Water Authority Board members are here, Commissioners Cerri and Plaskett and Mr. Tibbitts. We really appreciate their support and participation in the organization.

This is the Humboldt River Basin. It is a large watershed area; no outlet; it is fully contained within the State of Nevada. Nonetheless, still subject to waters of the U.S. for some really odd reasons, and we have been trying to petition to get that WOTUS [Waters of the United States] designation removed lately because of the proposed changes in rulemaking and those kinds of things. It is primarily related to some small commercial fishing operations and legacy hunting out of the sink that makes Humboldt a place for interstate commerce kind of thing is what that is all about as far as I can understand. There are 33 groundwater basins, and of those, I think some 28 are over appropriated and maybe 8 at this point in time are over pumped.

So recent activities, same as CNRWA—evaluate water right applications and protest those that may adversely affect existing water rights. I would say that the Humboldt region is much more active in protesting applications than CNRWA, and that is primarily because of the growth in the region and conflicts.

Conserve Nevada funding application. We did apply for funding, HRBWA did, for a limited amount of money. I think there is \$3 million available in the Conserve Nevada bond program for water and land acquisition, and it would be in the Humboldt Basin targeting groundwater pumpers. Following up on the pilot study that HRBWA implemented with the ARPA funds does require a 10 percent match, so we are trying to figure out how to get that done and have applied, or in the process of applying, for that match from the State Board for Financing Water Projects through the grant for capital improvements for public water systems. I know Brandon Bishop is here from DCNR [State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources] to maybe talk a little bit more about all of that.

Support UNR's [University of Nevada, Reno] "Where We Live Project." Just a quick update on that. The University of Nevada, Reno, is part of a three-state collaborative project funded by the National Science Foundation, and they have been reaching out to community, and we have helped them do that. Their research is about understanding the public's perception and how the public and communities adapt to natural hazards such as drought, wildfire, and extreme heat. They want to be able to use that research to advance science, education, and workforce development.

Implementing community outreach program for the Humboldt River issues. The Humboldt system is large; it is complex; it has got a long history. And there is just not a lot of, I would not say a lot, but there is, I think in the public domain, a lack of information, both technical information and an understanding, quite frankly, of how the system is managed and how the decree is implemented. And basically, we have really expressed an interest in working with the state and starting to implement a pretty robust outreach program to try to get folks prepared for what may come in the future in terms of conjunctive management. So, this is communities, this is starting at the very elementary school level, quite frankly, all the way up to community leaders and water right holders to really make sure that everybody fully understands the complexities of the Humboldt River and the situation that the basin is in. We are working with the Division on preparing maps—a map series similar to what the state prepared for all the groundwater basins in the State of Nevada—and identify all of those features in the Humboldt—all the dams, all the gauges, all the snow tail sites, all the cloud seeding sites, all the irrigated lands, those types of things.

We are also working with the Division of Water Resources to start working on a informational series that we can put on the Internet and have available for outreach.

And then lastly, we are working with a company to develop a sort of tabletop 42 by 40 inch 3D model of the Humboldt River that we can have and be able to see this thing in relief and see sort of where all the features of the Humboldt are, and that would be something that would be available to be moved around to schools to community events and those types of things.

We are participating in Division's Humboldt Stakeholder Working Group that has been ongoing for at least a couple of years.

And then lastly, we at the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority really are a public forum, and it is not just for member counties and commissioners, but we have a lot of individuals, water right holders, ranchers, businesses, and other community folks that do attend the meetings and participate. It really is a good forum to hear different perspectives as well.

Diminished flow in the Humboldt River is really the issue here. There are all kinds of issues, but it is long-term over pumping in the groundwater basins. The fact that there is no upstream storage for consumptive use. South Fork is not a reservoir that can be used for augmenting flows in the Humboldt River. The loss of proper functioning riparian areas that is vital to storing water in the banks and the wildlife habitat, drought, and then last but not least, the warming trends, which is basically reduced snowpack and earlier runoff.

The Division of Water Resources, of course, is working with USGS and DRI on the capture models in the Humboldt. There are three models. The upper, the lower that have been published, and the middle model, which is where the majority of the capture occurs, is still in review. This is a map of the domain and the purple and the green shaded line areas being where the capture management zones are, and the purple where the capture management zones that have been identified, at least provisionally, in the middle segment and the upper

segment that has been published, need to be revised. There is some changes and things that need to be revised. This of course is going to serve as the basis of the science for conjunctive management in the Humboldt region.

This slide basically shows under the current situation with no conjunctive management per se, at least for permanent conjunctive management. We have an interim order that deals with new appropriations and change applications. But basically, in Pershing County Water Conservation District in Lovelock, their full allotment of water is 3 acre-feet a year, and you can see for the last 28 years, or 23 years, what they have received. And this year, it is going to be less than 0.25 of an acre-foot or around 0.25 acre-foot of water for this year's allotment.

This highlights the dire situation in the Humboldt, and this is from the Natural Resource Conservation Service stream flow forecast for May 1. The estimates for, well, I should say the snow water equivalent, which is really the snowpack, is the lowest it has ever been recorded in the Upper Humboldt, Lower Humboldt region. The other thing that is not on this map is the fact that it is also the earliest snow melt on record in the region, and that is probably true of much of Nevada and much of the West.

The State Engineer is here. He may go over some of these in more detail, but what happens in the Humboldt River is really going to be important for the rest of the state, because what happens there is likely to be what may end up happening for conjunctive management in other river systems, especially decreed river systems, which I think all of Nevada's river systems are. Certainly going to set precedent for the quality and details related to the data, to the modeling needed to support conjunctive management.

These are some of the recommendations. I think there are 19 recommendations for management of the Humboldt going forward that have been discussed over the last two plus years by the Division's Humboldt Stakeholder Working Group. There is a lot that needs to be done. I am not going to go through all of them, but I will highlight just a few for a little bit of discussion.

And no action is the first one, but that is not an alternative. So where do you go from there? Well, there has been a lot of discussion about curtailment lately and/or lack of curtailment or not planning for curtailment. But it is still a tool, and one that I know everyone wants to avoid, but it is still the tool.

The capture zone maps and the science. As you saw earlier in those maps, there needs to be revisions to at least one of the models in the Upper Humboldt, and the middle model is still being reviewed and analyzed.

Establishing a conservation or conservancy district. That is something that the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority has been discussing. I think there is some expectation or interest, strong interest in having the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority basically be that entity, that conservancy district, maybe similar to the Carson River Subconservancy District. We have had presentations from those folks and looked at what they can do and what they cannot do.

Then, probably the most important discussions that we are having with regard to sort of things that can be done, is using excess decreed water for offsets to reduce pumping or even decreed water that the owners might want to sell for offsets.

The water buyback, Water Rights Retirement Program, I think that could have a really important impact in the Humboldt Basin given the current situations and then this whole market-based approach to water exchanges and buying and selling. Water right holders can sell their water rights today. We do not need necessarily any special legislation to change that, but I think what is needed is the structure and some sideboards in terms of how that is all done and why that would be done and how that gets managed.

My last slide is—and these are just concepts at this point, so I am not making any firm recommendations—but these are things that we have been talking about both with the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority and Central Nevada Regional Water Authority as well as a wider stakeholder group that meets regularly to talk about these issues and pretty much the same members as our stakeholder working group from the last interim that worked on the Water Rights Retirement Program and some others. But funding for groundwater rights is an issue. We have got the authority, we have got the program, I think we have the know-how, and we certainly have the need, but we do not have the money; so, working on some ideas there.

Another issue that we had, HRBWA and CNRWA had proposed last interim to the Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Public Lands at that time Subcommittee was addressing issues around the groundwater basin assessments. That was actually something that was contained in AB 45, which did not move last session. But we think we are getting closer to agreement with the Division of Water Resources and the Department and hopefully we will be able to come to some agreement before next session. This relates to putting a cap on the amount of the assessments that can be imposed by the State Engineer, making sure that those funds are not able to be used to supplant General Fund dollars, quite frankly, for Division of Water Resources operating expenses, and also just some more, I guess, information and transparency about how those funds are used and how the caps or the assessments are set.

3M [monitoring, management, and mitigation] plans is another thing we want to talk about specifically to clarify that 3M plans, the State Engineer can also require 3M plans for a change application if the State Engineer deems it is necessary right now. It is not explicit in statute, and then also, about the County's participation in the 3M plan, where that water point of derision is. Right now, the way the statute reads, is the County has to keep track of all this and then anticipate that the State Engineer might require a 3M plan, and then if the State Engineer does and they can participate, I think we should have the State Engineer notify a county if they are contemplating requiring a 3M plan of an applicant so that the county can participate that way.

Cloud seeding, that is a long-standing program that historically has been funded by the State of Nevada and funding was cut during the difficult budget years, but the last two sessions, the Legislature did fund cloud seeding for DRI to do their operations. Especially in the Humboldt, that is hugely important, and HRBWA has partnered with DRI on cloud seeding for a number of years now. In fact, I think Commissioner Cerri still probably has a cloud seeding unit on his ranch. And why that is even important is because DRI was having to mobilize and demobilize their units on public lands every year, and so now we have got more of a stable operation there.

The Humboldt River Basin Water Authority structure. Again, HRBWA has quite a few authorities. We are not sure if we would need more or if we would want more, and we are not even sure what it is that we would want until we find out where the state is going in

terms of their conjunctive management, but we want to be ready. We may be asking for a bit of a placeholder, if you will, to be filled in later, but we do not want to miss an opportunity if that is something we really want to move forward with.

Lastly, it is not on here, but I want to reiterate both CNRWA and HRBWA's support for NDWR and including funding to continue their Nevada water initiative to update the baseline science and improve the understanding of groundwater availability across the state. And you all know that right now we are managing groundwater basins and 50- and 70-year-old information; that concludes my report.

Again, thank you for moving me up on the agenda, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. Questions? Looking to the right here. Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you. I keep on telling myself I am not going to ask any questions, and ask a question. My question has to do with the Humboldt River Basin geography slide, and also along with that, the article that came out—I think it was last week or maybe it was just a few days ago, and it has been one of those weeks—from the *Nevada Independent*, which mentioned about those changes. The first thing that I have got a question about is, with the way the basin is set up, it feels a lot like the Colorado River sometimes with the upper counties getting a lot, the lower counties not. Is that, in particular, when it comes to, it looks like Nye and Churchill, are they getting the same amount of water as those upper counties are getting? Especially based upon what we just heard from Commissioner Cerri when it is the 13 percent from some of those mountains not coming the same, that water, so are the lower counties getting as much as the upper counties?

Executive Director Fontaine:

Vice Chair Anderson, that is the issue, and we often refer to the Humboldt as our Colorado River, but it is for different reasons, I think, and that is because we have an operating agreement. It is called the Humboldt Decree, Bartlett Decree. But because of— That decree was issued in the 1930s when there was water based upon the amount of irrigation that was taking place at the time. That is not the case today. We have a completely different environment. We have a lot more use in the River, and the groundwater pumping has exacerbated all of that, of course. And so, that is the issue. It is a little bit more specific maybe than what is occurring in the Colorado, but yeah, same climate change, warming temperatures, less snowpack, just less water resources, more demand, and are now waking up to the need for conjunctive management, and how do we deal with all of that.

Vice Chair Anderson:

A quick follow-up then. That is an issue for our smaller, for our counties downriver. They are not getting as much.

Executive Director Fontaine:

Again, Vice Chair Anderson, it is not necessarily just downriver. It is primarily, yes, with Pershing County Water Conservation District because water does not make it downriver, it just does not make it downriver. But we have water right holders with senior decreed surface water rights upstream as well that also are not getting their deliveries because of all of those issues.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much. And then my last question, from that article, it gave some information or gave the idea that there are some possibilities of measures being done that are not necessary by state law or by a court case. Is that actually happening? Or, in your opinion, recognize that it is your opinion, and if you are comfortable giving it—is there a need for that state law or a court case to make sure that counties are in fact doing what is necessary? Or are they doing it without NRS, the Legislature getting involved in it?

Executive Director Fontaine:

Vice Chair Anderson, if you are referring to the state law about curtailment, that is a whole different issue, but it is not. As far as what can be done today, yeah, there is certainly plenty of things that can be done today that do not require a change in state law, and a lot of those were discussed. There is some low-hanging fruit there, but whether or not that is going to be enough to solve the problems remains to be seen, and quite frankly, my personal opinion is not highly probable. So, where do you go from there?

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much for the candor. That is exactly what I was trying to get. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Of course. Other questions? Okay, I have one quick, hopefully quick question. You had mentioned towards the beginning of your presentation that there is a case currently in front of the Ninth Circuit Court, and I was wondering if you could repeat for us what that was.

Executive Director Fontaine:

Chair Scheible, it is an appeal by Baker Ranches having to do with their water rights in Lehman and Baker—Lehman Baker Creeks. Those rights were adjudicated in the 1930s. And since that time, or even maybe a little bit before that time, the Park Service or the federal government acquired some water rights, or they reserved some water rights and then they acquired some of those decreed water rights for their campgrounds and then of course the national park was created and all that sort of stuff. Apparently, the Park Service was using water rights in a way that was interfering with the decreed rights of the Baker Ranches and precluded the Baker Ranches from even curing or fixing the problem, you know, diverting for campgrounds, not clearing obstructions, those kinds of things; and the Baker Ranches tried to get relief and did not. I know that at one time, the State Engineer reviewed that but felt it was more of a federal issue and so it went to district court. Federal district court sent it back to the state. It was appealed to the Ninth Circuit. Oral arguments were held, I think, last month, but the crux of the issue is about whether or not the McCarran Act, which amended federal law waiving the federal government's sovereign immunity when it comes to water rights, and the fact that these two streams were adjudicated prior to the

McCarran Act amendment. And the fact that the Department of Interior at that time, or the federal government at least, was aware of the adjudication process but chose not to participate, claiming that they did not have the authority to participate. But now, we cannot seem to get this resolved.

The oral arguments, and they are online and everything, and I am not an attorney, you are, but there seemed to be a lot of, sort of concern about opening all of this up because it seems to be an opinion that, well, we can simply deal with sort of a modified adjudication of the whole system to include the federal government's claims and those sorts of things. I do not think there is an appreciation for what an adverse ruling to the Bakers would do in the State of Nevada, and probably the rest of the western states that have a prior appropriation doctrine.

So, we participated, HRBWA did, CNRWA did, participated with, I think 9 or 11 other entities to file an amicus on Baker's appeal. I am not sure where that is going to end up, but it is an important case.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. I appreciate that explanation. And with that, I think that concludes all of our questions. We very much appreciate you being here, and that will conclude [Agenda Item IV](#). We will go back to Agenda Item III with our presentation from Eureka County.

AGENDA ITEM V—OVERVIEW OF RECENT MINING ACTIVITIES IN NEVADA

Chair Scheible:

We will hear from the Mining Association with an update on mining activities in Nevada.

Amanda Hilton, President, Nevada Mining Association:

Good morning, Chair Scheible, and members of the Committee. I am very grateful for the opportunity to be here today. I am joined today by Nikki Bailey-Lundahl and Kyle Davis, who are in the audience, for any other specific questions or technical questions we have at the end.

I really appreciate you holding this meeting in the heart of mining country. Humboldt County is home to ten operating mines producing opals, gold, and geothermal. Soon this county will also be producing lithium, and I appreciate the time that so many of you took and you invested in going to see Thacker Pass yesterday. Last year this County had nearly 2,000 people working in the mining industry, but as you learned yesterday at Thacker Pass, there is now a significant higher amount of miners in this County. There are more than 220 vendors in Humboldt County that do support the mining industry.

The Nevada Mining Association's Mission is to unite, inform, advocate, and serve as the public voice of Nevada's modern mining industry. ([Agenda Item V](#)) Our Association was founded in 1913. We are one of the oldest associations in the state and we currently represent about 450 members. Those members are from all of the different elements of the mining value chain, from exploration through development, construction, operation, and reclamation and the vendors that support each of those activities. Our members are a wide range of vendors ranging from global companies such as Komatsu to small mom-and-pop operations in Las Vegas such as Motor Mission and Radiator, which has a shop just a few blocks away from Allegiant Stadium.

We assist our industry in several areas. We focus on public awareness and education, legislative advocacy, regulatory concerns, networking and supply chain opportunities, and industry career awareness.

While there are 10 mine operators in this county, there are more than 100 mines across the State of Nevada today producing more than 20 minerals. Nevada has the highest percentage of nonfuel domestic mineral production in the country, and we produce about 70 percent of our country's gold. We also produce several strategic minerals such as copper, lithium. We are home to the country's only operating lithium mine today. We produce magnesium and we produce barite. Other minerals that are produced in Nevada include gold, silver, gypsum, silica, and others. In 2025, the value of just the copper, gold, and silver that was produced in our state exceeded \$12.6 billion.

Some other key statistics about the mining industry in Nevada. We have about 14,500 direct jobs, but we have more than 30,000 total careers throughout the total mining supply chain in the State of Nevada. One of the things we are very proud of is how well we take care of employees within the mining industry. The average salary in 2024 was more than \$120,000 a year. That also comes with excellent health care and retirement programs with most of those companies. Total economic output of this industry in 2024 was \$16.6 billion.

We do not have all of the statistics yet from 2025, but I can proudly share with you that from 2023 and 2024, this industry paid nearly \$1 billion in taxes, and these numbers on this slide represent only the mining operators. These do not represent the major vendors and suppliers located throughout the State of Nevada that are also paying sales and use tax, property tax, modified business tax. It was a significantly higher number than this that can be attributed to our entire industry.

The chart on the screen now shows 2024 Nevada GDP [gross domestic product] by industry, and mining ranks 18th in this list. Industries that had a higher GDP that year include real estate transactions, tourism, and construction. But as you all have spent time in Winnemucca, I know you can tell what an outsized impact this industry has in the rural communities. I have had the opportunity to eat in two restaurants, the last two meals in Winnemucca, and both of those restaurants have been stuffed with people in mining clothing and people who work for this industry. So, this is the major economic driver for the rural communities in our state.

About a month ago, the Fraser Institute issued its annual report on mining investment attractiveness. The Fraser Institute is a think tank located in Canada that sends out a survey every year to mining executives across the globe, and for this year's report, Nevada was designated the "premier mining jurisdiction" by these executives. For the last 11 years, Nevada has been in the top ten, but for the last year, we went up one slot, and we have the number one spot. This is because of the strong and well understood regulations in our state and because of the well-built-out mining supply chain. There are vendors and suppliers that can support mining entities, and we also have a highly skilled workforce. These executives feel like Nevada is the number one place to invest money in future mining operations.

I have been a miner for the last 20 years, and one of the things that I am so proud about with this industry is how seriously safety is taken. Mining is actually one of Nevada's safest industries. The workplace injury rate is 68 percent lower than the state's average, and the statistics for this industry are comparable to jobs in information technology or finance. As you were at Thacker Pass yesterday, I am sure you saw several representations of how safety is so important, and at the workforce hub alone, there are posters all around talking

about how safety is so important at that facility. All of our operators have mine rescue teams because they are often located in rural areas where it is difficult for emergency services to get to, so our operators take care of that by training up their own employees so that they can respond more quickly to any incidents, whether that be a personal medical or a workplace injury.

Mining's footprint in Nevada is actually quite small. Of the 70.7 [million] acres in the state, about 200,000 acres are permitted for mining. That is 0.3 percent of Nevada's land mass is permitted for this industry, and the actual mining activities are on less than the 200,000 acres.

Before any mining activities occur on any mine site, the operator has to post a bond that is approved by the State of Nevada and also approved by the federal government. Today, Nevada currently holds \$4.5 billion in mine reclamation bonds. Before Thacker Pass or any other property puts a shovel in the ground or makes a disturbance, that bond has to be posted, and that is how the state ensures that the operators are here for the long haul and that there are funds set aside to take care of any reclamation required.

This slide shows all of the state agencies that currently have mining oversight, and you can see the wide variety of state agencies that do have regulations or have some sort of input into what happens on a mine site. There is a very similar list at the federal level. This is a highly regulated industry, and our operators are always working to ensure they are exceeding the expectations of these regulators.

There has been a lot of talk at the federal level about critical minerals, and a critical mineral is designated as it is essential to the U.S. economy, national security, or there is a supply chain resiliency issue. In September of last year, I had the opportunity to go to the Pentagon and to be an ambassador and an advocate for the Nevada mining industry and to be able to talk to representatives with the Department of War about how Nevada has the minerals that can help solve some of the problems that they have. These mineral deficiencies do not only exist at the Department of War, they are needed for medical supplies, they are needed for energy transition. Our country is at a real deficit today with how we do not have a full processing capability for many of the minerals, but I am really proud of how Nevada is solving the problems today and can continue to solve the problems. We can continue to strengthen and secure our domestic mineral supply chains for our entire country.

I have briefly talked about several of the minerals that are produced today in the State of Nevada, but we have opportunities for more. And that is what I want to talk about, about what has changed in the last two years. One of the minerals we are talking a lot about today is tungsten. And that is currently nearly all produced in China, but Nevada has a rich supply of tungsten. Nevada has produced tungsten in the past and we have the opportunity in the future. There is a company called Guardian Metal Resources, which has received \$6.2 million from the Department of Defense for their Pilot Mountain Project in Mineral County. We are supporting them. I have been able to help them identify possible processing facilities in the West so that we can help them get online more quickly. There are a few other tungsten exploration projects in the state, but this is the most advanced.

Antimony is another mineral that has been produced in Nevada in the past, and can be and we hope will be produced in Nevada in the future. An example of an antimony project is NevGold Corp's Limousine Butte Project in White Pine County; they are in the early permitting stages and resource delineation stages.

And boron, right now, there is one boron producer in the country, and that is located in California. But at Ioneer's Rhyolite Ridge Project, they have the opportunity to produce boric acid and boron carbide in the future, and that would be the second boron producer in our country.

In the last two years we have a few operators with major project updates. The permitting process takes decades, so it is a slow process. Over the last two years, these are the four companies who I would like to highlight. First and foremost, Lithium Americas received the \$2 billion loan from the Department of Energy for their processing plant, and they are well on their way with construction activities. Orla Mining is planning to receive or expecting to receive their record of decision in August of this year, and that will be a gold producer in Elko County. As soon as they receive their record of decision, they will be ready to start construction. AngloGold Ashanti has the North Bullfrog Project in Nye County just outside of Beatty, and they are also well on their way with their final permitting, and they have a couple of other projects in that same area, but that could, once again, be a major gold producer. And finally, Ioneer's Rhyolite Ridge Project in Esmeralda County received a \$1 billion loan from the Department of Energy, is a fully permitted site, and currently is seeking a strategic partner to help build out that project.

While there is such a great spotlight on our industry and the need for our country to be producing these minerals, our industry still does have challenges. One of those is workforce development. We have several legacy miners who are going to be reaching retirement age in the next five to ten years, and those are our miners with lots of strong experience. We are working to train up the next generation of miners to make sure we have all of the skills that we need on sites.

The permitting timeline is still problematic. Last year it was reported that it takes about 29 years to permit a mine. At the federal level that is changing. There are some things that have been moving but we do not know what certainty is there for those new timelines.

Supply chain gaps. With all of the tariffs that have been put in place over the last couple of years and even learning about the impacts of the war in Iran on our mining operations in Nevada; we are seeing supply chain gaps that are delaying the construction of some of our projects or expansions of some of our projects.

Then the overall investment in these mine sites. These mine sites are costing billions of dollars to get through the construction period, and there is a lot of uncertainty when it comes to minerals' prices. The reality is China has a stranglehold on a lot of these markets, and they are manipulating those prices. So, for investors to invest in some of these critical minerals or rare earth minerals, they need some more security when it comes to the future metals' prices.

And then just overall rising costs, and what that looks like for these long-term construction projects, and how much money is going to need to be raised to get those projects off the ground.

Overall, we are very proud of this industry, and we are very optimistic about the future and how Nevada can continue to lead the way with mineral development for our country. May I answer any questions?

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. Are there questions from our members? Assemblymember Moore.

Assemblymember Moore:

Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the presentation. Your slide on the state specific taxes for 2023 and 2024 piqued my interest, because you highlighted what the mining operators contribute to the state, but you did mention that this number did not include the non-mining operators. I am curious to know if you happen to know what that number is.

Ms. Hilton:

I do not know, and it would actually be very difficult to calculate because we have about 2,000 vendors in the State of Nevada that support the mining industry. So, gathering the property taxes, sales and use taxes, and modified business taxes from 2,000 different companies would be very difficult, but we know that it is significant.

Assemblymember Moore:

Thank you for that, and I have another question. You did mention that there is some non-mining operators all over Nevada, and you mentioned specifically the company that is located near Allegiant. This is more of a request. Can you send me information specifically around Assembly District 11? I am curious to see. Thank you.

Ms. Hilton:

I would be glad to send you that information. We actually just prepared a study that shows the number of vendors throughout Nevada in each legislative seat, so we can send you that exact number.

Assemblymember Moore:

Thank you.

Ms. Hilton:

You are welcome.

Chair Scheible:

Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

Thanks, Madam Chair. First of all, I want to thank mining. I have represented— Well, let us start with the ones I do not get to represent anymore when they redistricted. Esmeralda County and Mineral County—they are the two poorest counties in the state. At the same time, I got to represent Elko, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Pershing. Thanks to mining, they are doing phenomenally well. I am old enough to remember right here in Winnemucca. I remember driving in 1998 down this main drag, and this town was drying up. That was when gold dropped like \$250 an ounce and there was just nothing here, so it is so nice and refreshing to come here. We just had Eureka County here. Eureka and Elko have got a little bit of an issue. Eureka's got money coming out of it is ears because of you guys, and Elko's got all the responsibility to pay for the schools and everything. I will let you deal with that.

The question I have though is in White Pine County—copper mining. I was watching a show recently, and copper, apparently, they are expecting a big uptick in the value of it. White Pine is also an economically distressed county. What is the projection by the mining industry on copper production in White Pine County?

Ms. Hilton:

I actually live in White Pine County, and I worked at that copper mine for 20 years, so I can speak very personally to the economics in that County. I do not know what that specific mine life is for that site anymore, but I do know that that mine is truly the economic driver for that County. That mine has been operating consistently since 2004. It took a five-year break before that, but it has been operating in that community for about 150 years. I read a lot of articles about what the copper price projections are and they are certainly robust, and I know that County will benefit from that.

Senator Hansen:

Good. I am hoping and looking forward to Esmeralda finally getting Ioneer. There was a mine that was going in literally right in the heart of Goldfield. I do not know what happened to that. They were moving the highway at one point. Any updates on Mineral County, Hawthorne primarily? Is there any activities around there that can— Little old Hawthorne, I do not represent it anymore, but I have a soft spot in my heart for it. The decline in the lake, their economies collapsed, highway bypassed them. I am hoping that there is some projections by you guys, but if you start now, it is going to be 29 years though before they will get any benefit, it sounds like, huh?

Ms. Hilton:

I have good news. The Pilot Mountain Project, the tungsten project, is actually located in Mineral County, and that project has gotten the support from the Department of Defense and is on its way. No guarantees what will happen, but I know it has had investment from the federal government.

Senator Hansen:

Last quick question along on tungsten. There is actually a ghost town; lots of people live there. Tungsten, right at the base of the Eugene, just to the west of where we are right now. Is it possible for tungsten, without government subsidies, to become a minable commodity? I mean, I am glad to see Ioneer. I am glad to see Lithium, Nevada, Thacker Pass. It bothers me, though, that we have billions of dollars in government subsidies to make these projects. I understand these are strategic minerals and all that, and there is a legitimate need for that, but is there in the not-too-distant future the possibility of a mineral like tungsten being high enough in value on just a regular market that we do not need to subsidize these things by the federal government?

Ms. Hilton:

I think with some of these minerals that the production has dropped in the United States. The pricing mechanism to measure the market price has become very opaque, so it is difficult to even tell what the price is today, much less to project what it will be in the future. There are a couple of headwinds when it comes to tungsten. One is what is that market price, and the second is where will it be processed and refined.

Senator Hansen:

I know historically tungsten has been used during wartime. It is very valuable and the government even subsidized it back at that point. But kind of hope that.

Last, more of a comment. I have been talking to your mining folks on it. I do not know if it is still true, but mining bought a lot of ranches in Nevada for various reasons. I understand they still own a lot of those, but they leased them out to cattle operations, primarily. And consequently, you have a tremendous influence on opening up the public access through those ranches. I want to put a little bug out there that I would love it if the Nevada mining industry would help enforce state law that requires public access through private property and back to public lands since you guys actually may own a lot of the ranches that are currently being illegally blocked, as you heard the discussion earlier. It would be great for you guys to do a proactive thing, so on the floor of the Nevada Legislature I can say I have got some problems, but overall the Nevada mining industry has stepped up to the plate and is insisting that the public domain that they utilize for production of minerals is open for all of the other multiple uses as well.

Ms. Hilton:

I cannot speak directly today to how the ranches that are owned by mining companies are treating that matter, but that is something I will gladly look into and get back to you.

Senator Hansen:

That is all I ask. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Assemblymember Moore.

Assemblymember Moore:

Thank you, Chair. Looking through your slides and your presentation, you talked about reclamation and what happens once the mine operations are done with. This is my first time being on this Committee, and I am not familiar with a lot of the things. What happens, for example, if the reclamation plan, once the mining operation ceases, is not followed through? Is the mining company responsible? The state? Who becomes responsible for making sure that that plan is followed through?

Ms. Hilton:

Before the bond is put in place with the State of Nevada, the reclamation plan has to be approved by the state and by the federal government. It is much more beneficial for the mining operator to do concurrent reclamation. So, at most of the mine sites across Nevada, they are not waiting for the end of mine life to do that reclamation work. They are doing it as they mine because they already have the equipment there and the people there. So that is the way most of the operations are working. If there is a time, which happens very rarely, that a site does not meet its obligations for that reclamation plan, then those funds are put in place so that the government regulators can go in and pull those funds and take care of that reclamation work at the end.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? All right, thank you so much for joining us today.

Ms. Hilton:

Thank you.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you for answering all of our questions. That concludes [Agenda Item V](#).

It is just about noon, so what we are going to do— I understand everybody here also probably wants to eat lunch, but we also have a lot more material to get through. So here is what we are going to do. The staff and the members are going to take about a 15-minute break to grab some food, use the restroom. I will allow everybody to bring food back to the dais and ask all of your indulgence as our members finish up lunch or maybe a drink or something on the dais. I want to give you all a road map of what we are doing after lunch so that if you do want to step out to grab something to eat and there are certain presentations you do or do not want to miss, we will start up at 12:15 with the State Water Engineer from IX C. They have asked to be moved up in the agenda. I know everybody wants to go earlier on the agenda, and nobody wants to go later, so we are doing our best here based on the order in which you asked me for that particular accommodation. So, we will come back with the State Water Engineer. From there, it is my intention to go in order. So, we would go from IX C back to VI, VII, VIII, the rest of IX, and then finish up with [Agenda Item X](#). If you are not here when we plan to go to your presentation, I will move on to the next person, and then I will come back to you later when you get here. No hard feelings, but that is what will happen. With that, we are going to go to a brief recess, and I will see you at 12:15.

AGENDA ITEM VI—OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WINNEMUCCA DISTRICT

Chair Scheible:

Since we do have a couple of folks back who were not here when I made my other announcements, just a reminder to say your name on the record before you answer any questions. That is for the purposes of our minutes. And turn on the microphone using the button on the right; please turn it back off when you are not speaking.

Perry B. Wickham, (Acting) District Manager, Winnemucca District Office, BLM, United States Department of the Interior:

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and Committee members. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to your public lands. Appreciate everything you guys do. I am certainly not going to speak for the entire Agency, but I will do my best. I came prepared for more of a local synopsis of what it is that we have accomplished in the past year and what we are moving forward with this year, but I will start out with the “where we are” in our current operations.

You may or may not have known, Jon Raby, our State Director, retired at the end of April. Justin Abernathy, was assigned as the Acting State Director, and Kim Dow is the Associate

State Director. I heard that this week that this Congress confirmed the new BLM Director Stevan Pearce. I have not heard when Mr. Pearce will be taking the helm, but he will be relieving Bill Groffy, and Bill will be going back down to other duties as assigned.

As you know, BLM Nevada is the leader in mineral and energy permitting throughout the nation. We set the bar for permitting excellence and making things available for the mineral and energy industry. Given some adjustments we have had to make, we are trying to do a little restructuring and going to be more of a unified, processes agency here in Nevada.

I heard earlier some of the county officials were saying that they work in two or three or four different counties and, not counties, with three or four different BLM offices in their county and that inconsistency, that is not something that really helps with efficiency. So, we will be working on moving forward with restructuring in that sense to unify each of the districts to be more of a state-based operation.

We certainly want to work with the counties and sustain the commute for community development projects. We have all kinds of acts and programs throughout the federal government that could help facilitate that, whether it is land sales, the Recreation and Public Purpose Act, and other acts that will help us to do that. And of course, in order to do that we have to maintain that open line of communication, be available for them to understand who we are, and then also help them and be involved in the communities for those types of developments. And we certainly do want to keep working together.

Geothermal has been on an uptick lately. I do not know if you know, but the Department of Energy made a lot of money available for geothermal development, so that has been a big, big push here in this District. I think we have picked up 14 new applications in the last 30 days, so it is a big thing.

I did hear a lot of stuff about RS 2477, and I have got to approach that. I feel like with a little more communication with the counties and the Committee here that we could talk about some of the options. Being from Oregon, working in the O&C [Oregon and California] railroad lands, that was a big thing back in the day. The timber companies up there had total control over those lands, because they would not allow anybody else to remove timber across their private lands, and that left them the only ones that were able to get to those federal timber. Well, the federal government did not like that, and rightly so; it was not opening up a fair market for the timber. If the timber company was the only one that could get in there and get that timber, well then, they were controlling the price. So, the federal government came along and said, hey, look, you want to play that game, then you guys are not going to be able to go across federal lands. So that is where the reciprocal rights-of-ways came into play.

If there are landholders—and I am not going to point just to cattle ranchers as being the problem here—I think it is private land intermingled with public land. It is the nature of checkerboard. And so, with the ability to do reciprocal rights-of-ways, I think maybe a little chat with Congress or the folks that make those decisions. I certainly do not. I am not the one writing the laws. I just implement them as they hand them down to me. But I think that the ability to go into these reciprocal rights-of-ways— In other words, if you have to access public land to get to your private land, then we are going to work out an agreement where you have that right, and at the same time, we are going to acquire rights for the American people to gain access to other public lands. I am certainly open to working with the counties or this Committee to see if that is something that we can elevate to a point where we resolve some of these problems because it is an issue. There is also, you know, funds

available through the Lands and Water Conservation Fund. It is another department in the federal government that makes money available so that we can negotiate with private landowners about gaining access across private lands for better access to public lands.

The other thing that came up this week on May 12—I believe one of the other county officials had brought it up, which Mr. Tibbitts, I believe—was the recission of the Public Land Rule, and I am certainly open to any questions that you guys might have regarding that.

And with that, I think I will wrap it up. I know it is a long day, and again, I could go into all the projects that we do here on this District, but mostly we play an active part in providing recreational opportunities to off-road races and other events. We do rocketry out on the playa. We have several national defense companies that are out here testing rockets as well as amateur folks. We do a myriad of stuff. We have seen a lot of uptick on mineral exploration, which allows companies to come in and go out and drill and look for minerals that may be present out on public lands. With that, I will wrap it up and be open for questions.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. Do we have questions? Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Shocking. I have another question. Thank you so much for the information. Appreciate hearing about the new BLM Director coming in and everything. Do you know— I will just put it out there. What I have heard from many different individuals is the length of time to get information from the BLM, whichever division it might be. Do you know what your current backlog is of how many—whether it is mineral or other explorations are out there—how long, what the average is to get back to individuals who are attempting to use the land for any sort of way for those permitted process?

Mr. Wickham:

It would be my expectation that we would get back the same day. I have a cell phone. If anybody wants it, I will certainly give it to them (775) 225-5676. I am here to serve the American people; that is what I was hired to do. I grew up in a time, and I tell my employees if you are my age or older, they probably had a bad experience with the Bureau of Land Management. It was not the nicest agency back in the day, and I do not believe in the word *no*. I believe in opening up the book, listening to people and what they want to utilize public lands for, and to see if we can find a way for them to utilize them and find a solution to what it is that they are seeking.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much. Love hearing that. Hopefully there will be some others that will adopt it as well. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Of course.

Mr. Wickham:

Remember, they are your lands. They are public lands. They are not BLM lands. Thank you very much.

Chair Scheible:

Hold on. You still have some grilling from Senator Hansen, possibly.

Senator Hansen:

Actually, you mentioned the playa. Does your District include the Black Rock Desert? If yes, the reason I am asking is I represent Pershing County. We have Burning Man. Burning Man is a big pain in the butt for Pershing County because it costs them more in tax revenue than they get from Burning Man. And we have tried to do it through the legislative process, and frankly, Burning Man is a \$75 million a year enterprise that hires these top law firms and lobbyist firms out of the Bay Area, and we have not been able to get a reasonable negotiation to have them help pay some of the, at the very least, the costs associated with Burning Man. But more importantly, in my view, they are a very successful enterprise and there is nothing wrong with them contributing to things like a new neighborhood pool or a senior citizen center or things like that in Pershing County. I did not write down your phone number, but I would love— After talking to the Pershing County people, they believe BLM does have the leverage to perhaps get a reasonable amount of money to Pershing County from Burning Man. Can you address that at all?

Mr. Wickham:

Yes. The Black Rock Desert is managed by the Winnemucca District Office. I think I did share my phone number with you if you would like to give a call. That would be (775) 225-5676. And yes, I would certainly entertain again what it is that the Pershing County is looking for and put that up against the regulations and what it is that we are allowed to do and see if we can come up with an answer to your question.

Senator Hansen:

Good. Last question, the Unlawful Inclosures Act. We talk RS 2477, but the UIA is actually much more basic. Essentially, any road that starts public, crosses private, and goes back to public on federal lands, it is a right-of-way, and there have been several court rulings. Checkerboard won just recently in Wyoming. Why does the BLM not approach it that way? We have talked about getting quiet title action through the Attorney General of the State of Nevada. We do not need quiet title action, because we already have a federal law that says you cannot block access to the public domain. And I love, by the way, you want to serve the American people. The American people are the owners of the very land we are talking about, yet, in so many cases here in Nevada, we have the American people being denied access to their own land, while at the same time that land in so many cases is being used for private profit. So, thoughts?

Mr. Wickham:

I was intrigued when you mentioned earlier that there was a law. I was unaware that there was a federal law that said that that was the case. My background being in lands, for the most part, it is something I have been passionate about my whole life and also have a lot of respect for the private landowner. I would not want somebody just showing up in my front yard and pitching a tent and telling me that they are spending the night because well it

looked like a nice place to spend the night. So, given the fact that you brought this to my attention, I am certainly going to look into that, and I want to hear from more people that think that this is a way that we can utilize those. But again, we have to do it with respect. Those are private landowners. Somebody could buy a piece of property and have a road on it. Oh sure, if it is a dedicated or right-of-way or a documented easement, you are going to see that in your title report. But if you are in Pennsylvania, you buy 40 acres out here in Nevada and you show up and you find out there is a jeep road going across the middle of your property that was not on your title report, well, you might catch them a little bit off guard. So, I think it is a matter of communicating with people, find out what the policies and the laws are, and see how you come up with a solution to that.

Senator Hansen:

Good. I am in complete agreement. We actually own an 800-acre ranch with an allotment. And there are two roads that literally bisect my house that are both public access roads, one of which was blocked by a previous owner, illegally blocked with a big sign threatening anybody that comes by. Obviously, I do not want people to be camping in your yard, but what I also do not want is like the situation that we have right near me. We have an individual who owns ten acres, but the entire road network goes right through those ten acres that then goes to literally thousands of public acres. This guy blocks all access. So anyway, got a little report for you before you sneak off.

Mr. Wickham:

Okay. Very good.

Senator Hansen:

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chair Scheible:

All right, not seeing any further questions, thank you so much for joining us today.

Mr. Wickham:

Thank you. You guys have a great afternoon, and again, thank you for everything you do.

AGENDA ITEM VII—OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, IN NEVADA AND THE SANTA ROSA RANGER DISTRICT

Chair Scheible:

That takes us to Agenda Item VII. It looks like the Forest Service is on their way up here so I will let you get settled and then go ahead whenever you are ready.

Jon Stansfield, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt-Toiyabe (HT) National Forest, United States Forest Service (USFS), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, members of the Committee. I am joined here by our Santa Rosa District Ranger Boyd Hatch and our Forest Service Nevada State Liaison Cheva Gabor. Couple things, just to share my intentions today, just generally what is going

on with the forest, and I am going to be tying my presentation ([Agenda Item VII A](#)) to the Agency's priorities from our Chief Tom Schultz.

Some things about the national forest. The HT here; it is the largest national forest in the lower 48 at 6.3 million acres, 700,000 acres of which is in eastern California. We have national forest system lands located in 13 of Nevada's 17 counties, and the HT is the epitome of a multiple-use unit, or forest, as we call it, with a robust minerals program, grazing, recreation, hazardous fuels, forest health, and wildlife habitat improvement work and timber production.

As I said, I am going to align the presentation with the Chief's priorities and start briefly with our foundational priorities of safety and organizational efficiency. Safety is core to everything we do. We focus on our employees, our neighbors, and our visitors. Organizational efficiency, always looking to utilize emergency authorities, changing regulations, streamlined processes, and looking to do things differently as an Agency. Locally, given the fact that we are spread across the entire state, we have had to take a one-forest approach that basically allows us to unify our resources from across the forest. We are no longer in an environment where, similar to what you heard from our BLM friends there, where you can just have every district operating independently. We need all hands on deck, and so that is how the HT has taken on the workload of late.

As far as fire readiness and response goes this year, we are currently conducting our preseason meetings with our cooperators and completing our readiness reviews with our engines, helicopters, our hotshot crew, our interagency wildland fire module, and our prevention and patrol resources.

I can say we are comfortable with our staffing and preparedness, but we really do continue to struggle to fill positions in rural Nevada. Couple of things I would like to highlight specifically around that is, one of the things we have chosen to do around that struggle to staff is that we have our interagency Arc Dome Wildland Fire Module crew located in Ely, and that is a Forest Service and Nevada Department of Forestry crew. We have had to join forces out there to try to field resources and so we are really proud of that. There is not a whole lot like that out there.

We have a new fire station that we are trying to build in the next couple of years here in the mountain springs area of the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. And most recently our forest prevention team was recognized with what is called the Ember Excellence Award, which gave a nod to their program leadership and outstanding efforts to further the mission of the Great Basin geographic area in fire prevention. With the snow drought we are all very much aware of and a seasonal outlook that identifies warmer temperatures and above normal potential for wildfires, we are currently focused on risk-based, aggressive initial attack and continued coordination and unification amongst our federal, state, county, and local partners.

Active management on the forest. We continue to leverage investments, capacity, and partners to improve forest and rangeland health and reduce hazardous fuels. We have developed several large-scale projects located in priority landscapes across the state over the last year, some of which is: the Deer Mountain Timber Stand Improvement Project in Jarbidge; the East Humboldt Ruby Mountains Fuels Reduction and Resilience Project out of Elko; the East Side Fuels Project in the Spring Mountains; and our Truckee Watershed

Hazardous Fuels Project on the Carson District just outside of Reno. For all these projects, we historically and will continue to coordinate and implement these projects utilizing our respective good neighbor agreements with NDF [Nevada's Division of Forestry], NDOW [Nevada's Department of Wildlife], and NDA.

As active management responds to timber, comprehensive forest health and fuels reduction treatment means finding a way to remove thin trees and vegetation from the landscape. We prefer to do this in a way that benefits communities and local economies, and we have been making some really good strides in that. Some examples include on the Mountain City Ruby Mountain Jarbidge Ranger District. We are working with National Forest Foundation, NDOW, Elko County Fire Protection, Mooretown Rancheria, Nevada gold mines, and the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team to remove fuel wood from our pinyon-juniper treatment areas and provide those to local and tribal communities as fuel wood.

On our Carson District we are working with the Washoe Tribe, the Sierra, the California region forest adjacent to us, the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, the El Dorado, the Tahoe, and the Inyo National Forest to support the development of the Tahoe Force Products sawmill, new sawmill located in Carson there that I am sure you are aware of. Tools include millions of dollars in wood innovation grants that the Forest Service has provided the mill from our state, private, and tribal forestry program; a master stewardship agreement between the forest I just mentioned and the Washoe Tribe; and a good neighbor agreement with NDF.

Active forest management as it pertains to range. You might not know this, but the Humboldt-Toiyabe is the second largest range program on national forest system lands in the country. We have 148 permittees on 253 allotments across 4.3 million acres of the forest. Our priorities around our rangeland program include managing allotments to standard and completing required monitoring with Forest Service personnel and cooperative monitoring agreements with some of our permittees; protecting livestock forage from wildfire, annual invasive grasses, and noxious weeds; and incorporating flexibilities into future range decisions.

Another Agency priority is minerals and energy development. The HT has the largest locatable minerals program in the national forest system. A substantial increase in exploration has occurred of late, given the prices of gold and silver. It has created a really heavy workload for us, and it has required us to become more efficient and a bit more nimble. Again, as I alluded to earlier, we have taken that all-forest approach to leverage our personnel from across the forest and focus on a singular program of work. We have also recently completed what we are calling a "welcome package." The idea behind this is it allows those companies to kind of have their stuff ready to go when they come to us, so there is no surprises, at least in that initial with us getting together and something that we can streamline there.

Enhanced recreation access and infrastructure. We provide a wide array of recreational opportunities. We have a great amount of pride in being Nevada's backyard, and we see ourselves as a cornerstone of the state's outdoor recreation economy. We utilize Forest Service staff, nongovernmental partners, concessionaires, and volunteers to provide service at our campgrounds, our trails, and our visitor centers. We utilize SNPLMA [Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act] funding, Great American Outdoors Act funds, our recreation fees that we generate, and appropriations to provide access, infrastructure, amenities, and service. Some examples include we have pretty much over

the last few years, using SNPLMA funds, have refurbished or rebuilt almost every Forest Service campground across the Ely Ranger District. Most recently and our intentions this summer is to repair the very popular Bristlecone and Mary Jane Trails on the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area that were all wiped out in Hurricane Hillary.

Lastly, I would like to speak to what some call “cooperative federalism,” but what we like to call “shared stewardship” here in Nevada. With 85 percent of the state's land base consisting of federal land, the forest model has been to engage multiple state and federal agencies to maximize capacity, cross boundary treatments, and partnerships with nongovernmental and industry across the forest. I believe that the forest has a strong tradition of state and federal collaboration. As it relates to wildland fire risk reduction, we started with a good neighbor agreement in 2017 followed by a robust shared stewardship agreement and strategy in 2019, which was validated again by a signature from Governor Lombardo in 2024. I should also add that we created a second shared stewardship agreement in 2022 that speaks to outdoor recreation. It will be up for renewal in 2027.

I want to close by sharing that Nevada shared stewardship agreement for wildfire risk reduction, with this emphasis on collaborative prioritization of work and 13 priority landscapes, has leveraged millions of dollars in federal and state investments. Most recently, these investments include more than \$25 million in federal disaster assistance funding through our Forest Service, state, private, and tribal forestry branch for work on the Sierra front and the Elko Priority Landscapes and a \$6 million Better Together appropriation from the state, all thanks to this Committee's support.

I am going to go ahead and turn this over to Mr. Boyd Hatch, and I figure we will take some questions after Boyd hits his piece of it. Thank you.

Boyd Hatch, Ranger, Winnemucca Ranger District, USFS, USDA:

Howdy everybody. I am the District Ranger for the Santa Rosa Ranger District just north of here for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. I am really grateful for this opportunity to come speak to you today. The Santa Rosa Ranger District is just north of us. It is about 280,000 acres just south of the Nevada-Oregon border and lies complete within Humboldt County, Nevada. ([Agenda Item VII B](#))

Following Jon's example, I would like to share a little bit about how we aligned with the Chief's priorities of active management, starting with the range. Santa Rosa District is primarily range. We do not have a lot of other things going on here, but we do have a large robust range program. To give you a little background of our program, there is 12 active grazing allotments, 15 livestock permittees, and livestock grazing consists primarily of cow-calf pairs with a few stock horses. This decision we just went through authorizes 39,847 head months, which equates to approximately 10,700 head of cow-calf pairs that graze on Santa Rosa, which is pretty significant.

In the 2023 decision, the framework for that came out that decision. Under that decision, permittees can utilize the allotments anywhere between March 1 and November 15 in a given year. It is very different from the past. Usually grazing allotments were set up on a very specific date. You are going to turn out on June 1, and you are going to go home July 30. We gave a very broad shoulder in our grazing systems, and it gives us the opportunity to fluctuate grazing management based on that. On good years, like this year, a little hot and dryer—I do not know if I would call it a good year—but on hot dry years like this, we can turn out the livestock a lot earlier than normally we could. It gives us that authority to do that instead of a hard, fast state that we cannot turn out till July 1. That is

the way the permit is. That is the way the NEPA was signed. We gave us some broad shoulders so we could turn out earlier, and then once those head months have been met, then we would come home or utilization at that point in time. It really facilitates a lot of flexibility and the ability for the permittees and our land management specialists to be able to work with the permittees on this.

We also gave flexibility with our numbers. If a permittee needed to run fewer numbers like this year— You heard Ron Cerri speak. He is one of my permittees and they are going to reduce numbers, we would be able to stretch out his season of use because of that, because it is based on head months, not upon numbers. And so, we can equate that out and be able to lengthen his season of use because he is running fewer livestock numbers out there. But on the flip side, if the permittee said, you know what, I would like to run an extra 100 head of cattle out there in pairs, then we could extend that season of use. This really helps with our adaptive management. It gives us a lot of flexibility in that arena.

One of the other great things that we did in this NEPA decision is that we authorized the different grazing rotation systems. We are not tied to a solid you are going to go into this pasture this time, this one next time. We actually made it broad and made it very convenient for the permittees and the livestock and the administrators of those permits to be able to work with those permittees. If there are issues that do arise up there, we can address those issues quickly and be able to address them within the next year so they could change that rotation up, whether it be a deferred rotation this year, we could go to a rest rotation next year. It gave us a lot of flexibility to help those permittees and them. And the one thing I really think, proud of this decision, too, it provides decision space for permittees to adjust to their operation to meet their individual circumstances. I think that is really important on that.

Going into our recreation program, our District is pretty focused on dispersed opportunities. We have only one developed campground, Lye Creek. It is about 7,300 feet in elevation and it sits in a beautiful large aspen stand. It is a great place to go relax during the summer. We take great pride in our campground, and we have many that have commented that it is one of the best campgrounds in the entire state. We have so many other dispersed camping opportunities across there from Martin Creek, North Fork of the Little Humboldt River, and the Quinn River. There is plenty of ways, plenty of opportunities to go out and relax and enjoy your time and get away from the cares of the world. We also have over 40-plus hiking trails, most of which sit within our Paradise Peak Wilderness, and it is a beautiful trail system out there. We also have numerous motorbike, UTV [utility-terrain vehicle], ATV [all-terrain vehicles], and motorbike trails that offer opportunities for those looking for a remote adventure, whether hunting, fishing, or just exploring. Whether you are hiking, want to go out and look at wildflowers, or visiting our vast petroglyph panels, or climbing to the top of Granite Peak, there is many opportunities to enjoy northern Nevada. A lot of people say it is one of the best-kept secrets in Nevada.

Jon talked about the shared stewardship, and as you can see, we have a great shared stewardship here out of this area, our counterparts with the BLM, and many other agencies. I am not going to go through them all; there is so many of them. But we have a great planning group, which we get together often. We meet often. We talk about many of the projects and to help facilitate some of the issues that we have concerning around wildfire issues. You can go to the next slide show.

This slide actually shows some of the different projects we have involved with this landscape group, but our landscape actually goes all the way to the Black Rock Desert on the eastern edge of it to the west side of the Owyhee Desert and then from the Nevada-Oregon border

all just north of here; Winnemucca is our landscape that we work in. The Paradise landscape was created based on the threat of wildfire due to local working groups' shared values. These bodies included: several communities; tribal lands; family ranches; mining; outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing; and habitat for Sage-Grouse and mule deer, along with many other wildlife species. This working group strives to reduce risk of fire throughout collaborative projects on the landscape level across jurisdictional boundaries. Here are some of the projects that I have pointed out on the screen. Wildfire risk includes high potential for human ignitions due to widespread annual invasives and noxious weed infestations. This group also does not just focus on the landscape itself. We actually, when we meet, we talk about other projects that are outside of this. We broadened our focus, so the shared stewardship landscape brings us together, but it also helps us facilitate other projects across the landscape.

Moving in fire preparedness. The Santa Rosa is kind of unique on the rest of the HT. We are serviced by the service first agreement with the new Wildland Fire Service Winnemucca unit. They provide our fire resources. For the 2026 fire season, the Wildland Fire Service Winnemucca unit will be staffing five stations across northern Nevada, one of which is our own guard station out in Paradise Valley, Nevada. We also have a wonderful dispatch center that they service many agencies from Division of Forestry, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the new Wildland Fire Service centers. All of our resources are poised and ready to tackle this year's events. I am very confident in our abilities.

The Santa Rosa's mineral program. It is pretty small; it is not big. We have one exploration project that is underway. It is in between Oroville and McDermott. And then we have one more that is in the planning stages. They came to us and so we are starting to work that. It is just north of Paradise Valley, and they are both gold mining. They are both looking for gold.

With that, I really am grateful for this opportunity and thank you for your time. I hope to see you in Santa Rosa sometime soon.

Cheva Gabor, Nevada State Liaison, USFS, USDA:

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, we are obviously ready to take any questions.

Chair Scheible:

All right. Thank you so much. Do we have questions from our members? Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much. I actually have two questions. The first one has to do with something that our counties brought up. I do not know if you also have to deal with it, and that has to do with crickets, without any sort of religious affiliation, Senator. Do you ever have to deal with those crickets as well, or do you simply work with the counties that are dealing with them themselves? And as Jake brought up to us, most of them are in Elko now, I believe is what we have we have attested to, but do you also have to deal with them?

Mr. Hatch:

Yes, we do have, just like all the other counties, we have a major infestation of the crickets that come across that do impact our communities and across the Forest Service. So yes, we do that, and we do work with APHIS and the other organizations. We identify local areas to go do baiting and treatments across as we find those infestations. My staff does go out there and when we do find infestation, we do report that back to APHIS and work with them on trying to treat them.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much. And then my other question actually had to do with the question that there was— It has to do with the Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest overview that you are currently trying to fund, or you already are getting another fire station. I was a little bit confused with that, and then in connection with it, has there been a need of more safety services with the increase of outdoor recreation in particular since COVID has hit?

Mr. Stansfield:

Thank you for the question. To clarify on the station, it was, I believe, around '18, so a couple of years back, a SNPLMA project for the Mountain Springs Fire Station, and that will be located at the mouth of Lovell Canyon. We are hoping to have that completed in the next couple of years. And per the usual, I think here in the state it is not just reserved for Forest Service, that will be for any and all of our cooperators to have that home base there in Lovell Canyon and service that side of the Spring Mountains.

To answer the second question, absolutely have we seen an increase over the last three or four years in use, and we do the best we can to keep up with it and continue to provide service. We have had to get creative, given our staffing levels. There again, it is looking for that help from nongovernmental and volunteers, but whatever we can do to leverage the staff we do have to try to provide the service and safety that we can out there.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

Thanks, Madam Chair. The Santa Rosas. I am very familiar with it. Absolutely gorgeous. You are absolutely correct. Question though. I cannot remember the name of the, what was the big fire, Saint Martin Creek Fire burned all the way across? Prior to that fire happening, I noticed when I was out there, spent a lot of time—Greeley Crossing, headwaters of Martin Creek, the Owyhee—I think that may be just out of your boundary—but what I noticed was incredible levels of cheatgrass infestation among the existing shrub communities. I mean, to where it was, you know, 18 inches high and stuff, and then the fire happened. What I am wondering is, after looking back in hindsight, was there a lack of grazing? Because when I went out there, you had huge amounts of nonnative annuals among the normal perennials as well as your shrub communities. I could just look at it and say this is going to be a fire, and then one year later, literally one year after I was there, it happened. So, I am wondering, how are you guys on the lower elevations of the Santa Rosa ranges trying to manage that? Because I have noticed on both sides of the range you have severe cheatgrass infestation. Once you have a fire, comes back like nothing but cheatgrass. I am wondering, are you guys expanding the opportunities for sheep and so forth to go in there and knock down those fuel loads, or how are you guys addressing that?

Mr. Hatch:

That is a great question. We have opportunity to take on some targeted grazing opportunities on the Forest Service, and we have implemented some of that in that very area that you are talking about on the Forest Service side of the fence. We actually worked with UNR recently and did a good, targeted grazing. Worked with a local producer there and was able to target cheatgrass was specifically was that goal of that project. I also think with our ability to, with our new range NEPA that we just got finalized in 2023, it gives us that opportunity to also utilize early season grazing in some of those areas that have higher, cheatgrass infestations. Addressing the Santa Rosas myself, that is kind of the way I am going to approach it, and I will let Jon talk about forest wide.

Mr. Stansfield:

Yeah, just a little bit more. Thanks for the question, Senator. Boyd alludes to the Santa Rosa range management decision that really speaks to the flexible grazing, but we have also had real success with targeted grazing across the forest. I think it is a flexible grazing season. I think it is looking at targeted grazing, which we have, I think, done more so on the Carson front, but are absolutely open to continue looking across the forest for those opportunities.

And then I want to bring up that we recently signed our aerial herbicide decision that allows us to keep up with the pace and scale of the cheatgrass infestation from that herbicide standpoint.

And then lastly, as a capstone, if it ever really gets some, continues to gain traction, is our native seed strategy across the state, which it is hard to build those seed banks to keep up with the problem out there. But I think between all those things, we keep trying to get there.

Senator Hansen:

Your flexible grazing strategy, that is brilliant, because as we all know who have been out on the range, cheatgrass is highly— One year you have a ton of it, next year nothing. And you can have a ton and you get November rains, then you have tremendous infestations very early in the spring when you traditionally did not allow grazing. Consequently, it built up and then it would also go to seed head, and you know the animals would not eat it at that point, and you had tremendous fuel load build up, so I am delighted to hear that.

The other fun thing is for your range, Santa Rosas, how bad is the pinyon-juniper investment on that range?

Mr. Hatch:

I love our pinyon-juniper infestation. I think I have named all ten trees by now, and if I find a new one, Senator Hansen, I will name it promptly after you.

Senator Hansen:

Well, thank you. Thank you. No, the reason I— Just for fun, the Santa Rosa is a very unusual range in that it has almost no juniper and definitely no pinyon and only a tiny speck of pinyon, or I mean junipers, over the entire mountain range, and it is because of some— They have different theories on it, but would you not like to have that problem in, say, the Spring Creek Range or Schell Creek or something like that where you have severe

infestations, or expansion, I probably should say. Anyway, keep up the good work. Thank you. Keep working on keeping the public range open out there, too. I will not get off on that issue. I think I have beat that one enough, but thank you for your presentation. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. All right. Unless there are any other questions? Okay, we appreciate you all being here so much and for that update. That concludes Agenda Item VII on our agenda for today.

AGENDA ITEM VIII—PRESENTATION ON THE RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE DIVISION OF MINERALS

Chair Scheible:

This takes us to Item VIII, a presentation from the Division of Minerals. Please go ahead whenever you are ready.

Robert Ghiglieri, Administrator, Nevada's Division of Minerals (NDOM):

Good afternoon and thank you, Committee, for having me here in this presentation. ([Agenda Item VIII](#)) It has been a long day. I am going to try to pull a Jeremy Aguero and cover as much as I can in a fast period of time but still be efficient in this process.

With that, the Division of Minerals, under NRS 513, is required to collect and disseminate mineral production educational materials on the minerals industry. We are completely a fee-funded agency, so no General Funds comes to our Agency. We try to be a resource for the public, the Governor's Office, Legislature, and anybody else on mineral-related activities within the state. We want to make this very clear. We do not pick or preference any company or project one over the other, and there is multiple companies noted in this presentation. We are not picking or preferencing them. It is just used as a reference point.

Nevada has over 80 active mines that are not including the aggregate operations; 27 geothermal power plants, which makes us the second largest producer in the U.S.; 9 oil fields, which makes us one of the bottom producers in the U.S.; mainly gold, silver, copper, molly [molybdenite], lithium, barite, gypsum, and limestone are some of the main commodities. You can see the annual production there is gold, silver, and copper. We are the number one U.S. gold producer, and we have been that since at least 1984. We expect to continue that. The only state that will even come close to us in the near future will be Alaska. And if we were a country, we would be the tenth largest gold producer in the world.

With that for processing, most processing in the state is the standard heap leach with either Merrill-Crowe or carbon circuit for oxide ores. There are three autoclaves and three roasters for refractory or sulfide ores within the state for gold and silver processing. For copper there is one solid extraction electro winding copper processing facility; three sulfide concentrators, but all those sulfide ores are put into concentrate onto truck, onto rail, onto ship overseas. So that is where most of it goes. And then one existing lithium production and you guys saw the second one being built out yesterday.

Gross mineral production by value. Last year, 2025, the USGS estimated \$12.6 billion, the highest by far and away. We are still working with the Department of Taxation on actually creating the exact numbers for the State of Nevada. This is a report by the USGS they put out in January every year. It is really impressive that they are able to get it done that fast. However, we do see deviation every single year on that.

So that puts us as the number one nonfuel mineral producer in the United States followed by Arizona with copper; Texas with aggregates; Alaska with gold, silver, copper; and California with aggregates as being the top five. So those are what you see. Everybody is always surprised to see Florida on that list as well, but they are one of the largest producers for phosphates.

Gold production. Again, the final numbers for 2025 are not there, but we expect about a 3 to 5 percent or 3 to 7 percent decrease from the previous year of 2024. But you can see the '24 and '25 price value change drastically from \$2,400 to \$3,400 an ounce in that one-year time span. I think today it took a big hit, but it is still at \$4,200 an ounce.

Silver, not the same thing. We actually are seeing a 15 percent increase in production for silver this last year. That is from one main mine, Coeur Rochester, not far from here, just to the south. Again, silver prices again drastically changed over the last few years.

Copper, we expect a little bit of a decrease in '25. Copper price is over about \$6 a pound right now as well. Again, this is from three copper mines.

There is, I am going back one slide. There is 22 mines that produce silver in the State of Nevada. The vast majority of it is a by-product. There is only one main commodity or one mine that silver is its main commodity, and that is Coeur Rochester to the south.

Lithium. Again, one lithium producer in the state, about 3,500 metric tons. The mine you saw yesterday, if it gets to phase one, it will be 40,000 metric tons per year. If it gets to phase 5, 160,000 metric tons per year. That is what the world produced in 2023. That is the magnitude of scale of what you are looking at a facility like that. Obviously, it will not be overnight.

If you want to see who produced what since 1989 in the State of Nevada by what company and where, you can go onto our website and you can search and break it down by commodity, by operation. You can sort and filter all of this. You can go to gold in the year 2006 and you want to look at the Betze-Post Mine, you could actually look at it. It will pull up how many ounces it produced, who was the operator, what county it is in, how many employees were there, how many contractors were there. You can filter and sort through this on our Nevada Division of Minerals open data site.

I know the Mining Association covered this, but I would like to also highlight it for an aspect of a state perspective. Number one in '25, but we are always in the top three to five. There is only one time in the 25-year history of this where we were not in the top five. There is no other jurisdiction in the world that even comes close to that. The next closest is Ontario, and their average ranking is eighth. We are consistently ranked one of the top jurisdictions, and the state looks at this as a positive, because it is also based on the stable permitting regulatory environment in the state that is our relationship with our regulators and the federal partners and being able to efficiently and effectively permit mining within the State of Nevada. Again, the Mining Association covered this, but we kind of highlight a little bit more details on it.

The big thing I want to highlight is where the majority of the funding is coming from, and we are in one of those counties now. Eureka, Humboldt, and Lander County are by far away the top three with White Pine being number four. All this money that does not go to the county goes to the State General Education Fund, including the gold and silver excise tax. We do anticipate this money to go up this next year, especially the gold and silver net proceeds. We will see because the cost of business has also gone up significantly in the recent past.

Geothermal production. Again, second largest producer of geothermal energy in the United States; 27 power plants, continue to increase year over year. But the thing of what we are seeing here is we are actually starting to get a spike of permitting and drilling activities again. Last year was the third highest year of permits ever permitted as well as the third highest amount of wells actually being drilled. We were anticipating a lot more drilling activity right now, but the price of oil has gone up, and it is really hard to get drill rigs. So right now, the oil industry is taking the big geothermal rigs away from the state. There is companies sitting there with their hand up waiting for a rig to show up. But if enhanced geothermal does come to fruition in the technology that they have discussed, we see a potential for drastic change.

Last year, the USGS said enhanced geothermal in the Great Basin could supply 10 percent of the U.S. energy. That is a huge number. We are way below 1 percent right now. If that happens, the permitting environment for that in the state will have to be beefed up to where right now it is really two people for all drilling activities underneath my agency. We are going to need additional people, and we are going to need to ensure the fees are actually there. So, my Division is currently updating Nevada's Chapter 534A. One big aspect is we are updating the fees. They have not been updated since 1992. It has been a while. They are not covering the cost of the program right now, so we are doing that, and industry has had actually zero complaints about that and are literally asking me is that enough money because we want to make sure you have a correct database, a way to facilitate this work online and streamline it.

We are also adding the ability for proper regulation around stimulation of geothermal wells and induced seismicity associated with enhanced geothermal. So, we are currently going through this process right now. Yesterday we had a public meeting on it, got a lot of feedback from the public on it, and we will start taking those comments and working through that process.

Again, the Mining Association covered this, but one of the things we would like to highlight is in Nevada, out of the 60 critical minerals, there is actually known occurrences or deposits of 36 of the 60 critical minerals. There is a significant amount that was looked at or was produced that is not being or has not been looked at recently because it is not gold and silver. We are starting to see funding for exploration actually come into the state. It has been a while for that to happen, but we are starting to see more and more activity. And with that, you could kind of rank that off the amount of unpatented mining claims within the state, so we are near record high levels right now.

There was a comment earlier today, this morning about lithium brine exploration, and we are actually seeing what we interpret as lithium claims dipping quite a bit. It went from what we interpreted placer claims in playas of nearly 22,000 claims down to 12,500 claims this last year. Again, if you want to compare the amount of claims, the amount of plans of operations, amount of notice level activity, all that information is available on our open data site, and you could actually compare it against the entire western U.S. and see the comparison between them.

How much permitting and the cumulative permits disturbance in acreage in Nevada. We have this graph broken out on public versus private acres for mining operations and the amount of permits, as well as mining activity accounts for around 200,000 acres, and you could see as a reference point, Storey County is about 168,000. The greater Las Vegas area is over 300,000 acres. You can see it is not a huge portion of the state, but it is not a small amount of land either.

Other activities that the Division has been doing. We have updated some other regulations, [Chapter] 513. I think it was last week that we had the adoption from the Legislative Commission on that. The goal of that was to bring up the timeline of reporting of annual production from April to February, so we actually get the data sooner and can report out faster. [Chapter] 519A was for a small reclamation bond pool to clean up some language within there. [Chapter] 522 is our oil and gas regulations again, cleaning up language there; and then I mentioned our geothermal Chapter 534A.

The state runs the Abandoned Mine Lands Program. We are legislatively mandated to inventory and secure either by doing the securing work ourselves, working with the federal partners, or working with the landowners. Right now, for this year, our focus is 300-plus sites in Pershing, Humboldt, and Nye Counties. We are constantly doing closure projects or permanent closures. We are currently finishing a project on Park Service down near Lake Mead, and then we currently have a contractor out at Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park, closing the rest of the sites on State Park but trying to preserve the cultural aspect of them. And then we are working with the Department of Defense and FRTC [Fallon Range Training Complex] of trying to identify and close off nearly 250 sites that are going to be north of Highway 50 open to the public, but then will still be within the withdrawn area, so we are trying to work with them to get those closed off.

On an annual basis, we always prioritize our fieldwork by proximity to public, recreation, everything else. In 2025, our Agency was able to inventory almost 580 sites, secure 560, revisit over 700, and inventory over 4,000 mining-related features that are not hazardous to the public, so we capture those and database those as well.

In December of '24 the Good Samaritan Act for Abandoned Mine Cleanup was passed. This was a law that passed at the federal level, allowing for up to 15 sites to utilize the Good Sam Law to clean up AML [abandoned mine lands] historic features when somebody did not have any responsibility of creating it. If a company came into or an NGO [nongovernmental organization] went to a site to clean up an abandoned mine site today, and if they went to it and they had nothing to do with causing the effect, if they went and cleaned it up, did their work, came back and five years later somebody found a flaw in it, they would be held liable to have to come back and clean it up. This law helps try to identify opportunities for somebody to come in, clean up a site, and not be held long-term liable for the degradation of the land that they did not cause. If they make it worse, obviously they are going to be held liable for that, but at this point in time, this is what the concept of the law is.

It is not perfect by any stretch, but the State of Nevada is really trying to get one of those 15 sites. We had identified what we believe was a really good site. The Union Mine between Carson and Reno was an old lead mine. It is a low-risk site with a cap-and-cover approach for contaminated soils. We selected the site in '25. We have completed most of the application. We are working with a company who is doing in-kind work for us on the engineer designs, and we have had a whole bunch of meetings with the stakeholders. But the thing is, we have gotten EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] solicitors involved who have worked in CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act) their entire life and have now identified that the university who bought the

land in 1978 after all mining ceased is held as a responsible party because they bought the mine knowing it was a mine and that this may not apply to that law. So, we were going to come in and be able to clean up the site at no cost to the university, and the EPA lawyers are now saying that that may not be possible because they consider the university liable and the university has lots of assets so they should be able to pay for it. As we all know, NSHE [Nevada System of Higher Education] is not flowing in cash, so we are trying to figure out ways to make this happen so we can still come in and get the site cleaned up. We think we may have found a few ways to get that done, but it has been taking some time, so once we finalize the eligibility requirements, we are going to then reengage with stakeholders, work up the financial assurance mechanism, and prepare to submit the application to the EPA.

One of the big aspects of the Division is our education. Main activities for the dangers of abandoned mine sites; mineral mining; and earth sciences. We do a lot of presentations, create a lot of online activities, and then our open data website is a resource for mining-related or mineral-related historic information and recent information as well. In the Calendar Year '25, we did over 300 presentations, reaching nearly 17,000 people. We had over 33,000 visitors to our open data site and over 800,000 visits to online views of mainly our abandoned mines as well as our website.

Some recent reports. We have talked about the copper in a couple of different presentations today, and I have mentioned it, too. Currently, the majority of the sulfide ore within the United States is put onto ships and shipped overseas. We partnered with a few different groups and came up with a report talking about the concept of what it would take to build a copper processing facility. We highlight the economics behind it, the permitting requirements behind it, the community engagement behind it, and the feedstock of the existing operations or upcoming operations on it. Does it make sense? Economically, still not yet. China is literally paying companies to process the ore; they want to control the market. So, it is a good starting point to where if that does change at all, it is a place that we hope people reference. It is by far and away not economic analysis of an individual project, but it is a conceptual paper.

The other one is a *National Hard Rock Abandoned Mine Lands* report. This is the first one that has ever been completed for an actual hard rock abandoned mine lands report. I was one of the lead authors on this and Nevada's highlighted quite a bit within it.

Again, our open data site. It is an opportunity for anything mining-related from anything from claims to historic notices and plans, Sage-Grouse, solar, rights-of-way, withdrawals, oil and gas, geothermal, lithium, and a whole bunch more.

One of the new activities that we have done on this is the Case Recordation Explorer. This actually utilizes the BLM's MLRS [Mineral and Land Records System] database, which is an analog database, and we have been able to mine that, and you could use it to look at any BLM projects that are authorized, pending, submitted within Nevada as well as the western United States. This includes stuff from mining, rights-of-way, geothermal, special land uses, and anything else beyond that that is in the MLRS database. You could actually go in, zoom to an area, use the select tool, select, and it will pull up everything that is approved or authorized, pending, or submitted plan within the BLM MLRS.

Chair Scheible:

I am sorry to interrupt you. You are a little bit past 15 minutes, so if we can move quickly through. I do not want to cut you off.

Administrator Ghiglieri:

No, you are good. I am real close. Okay?

Chair Scheible:

Perfect.

Administrator Ghiglieri:

Again, open data site critical minerals application, same thing, opportunity there. Skip to that. This is another one. So, same thing. MLRS database, but public lands, anything to do with existing restrictions or deeds within lands and the federal.

This one I want to highlight. It takes a long time to get to a mine. This is a six-year average of all the claims, individual claimants, the notice level of activity, plans of operations, active mines, and then one new mine. It takes a lot to get to one of those.

On this last slide, these are a lot of ongoing projects. These are a variety of projects, and these are a variety for a reason. You look at the Barrick-Goldrush Fourmile. The AngloGold Ashanti are new discoveries. You have Twin Creeks, Centerra Gold, which is the Goldfield one that you are referencing that highway. They are trying to get it up and running by 2028, and I-80 where they are looking at a lot of brown fields opportunities, significant amount of lithium exploration, a lot of copper, and a lot of new companies coming back into the state. For geothermal, you have the traditional companies like Ormat that are continuing with the conventional geothermal, but you have new companies like Fervo with enhanced geothermal and Zanskar, who their claim is AI machine learning to help identify hidden blind systems in geothermal, and then a significant amount of exploration for lithium, tungsten, gold.

You have companies coming into Forest Service lands that left Nevada, like Newmont, but have come back. NevGold with the Limo Butte Project where it is an antimony project, so they are looking at actually reprocessing the historic mine tailings and the waste piles is what their focus is right now. And then you see some of the biggest major companies in the world coming back into Nevada with Freeport and South 32 for copper in the Butte Valley region. There is a lot of opportunity in the state. There is a lot of new commodities that are being looked at and there is a lot of new greenfield as well as brownfield projects being looked at.

And with that, take any questions.

Chair Scheible:

Excellent. Thank you so much for all of that valuable information. I am sure we do have some questions. Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

On lithium, I was a little shocked today. I thought Thacker Pass has \$2 billion of federal monies. Ioneer-Rhyolite Ridge has \$1 billion. Yet, traditionally, right over the ridge from Rhyolite, actually, is Clayton Valley, Albemarle. They have been a free and no government subsidy mine for a long time. And, of course, one of the goals of all the subsidies, to drive

the cost of lithium down and expand the production. Have you guys followed that? I am kind of wondering, has Albemarle been given some sort of federal subsidy to try to balance the playing field a little bit, or are they still going traditional free market?

Administrator Ghiglieri:

With the Albemarle project, that has been a project that has been, like you said, I think it started in the '60s. It has been relatively a small producer on an annual basis, but it is one of those rare projects to where there is a very high value. However, with that value, I do not believe there has been any offset to it, but it is also a technology that is leaving 40 to 50 percent of the lithium in the salts. They are not actually extracting very much of it. They are leaving almost half of that resource on the ground. So, I think it is an older technology that was proven with those technology and process to be valuable, and they have opened and closed multiple times due to markets. But yes, that is there. I do not believe they have received any federal funding from my knowledge on that project.

Senator Hansen:

Okay. I want just basic fairness thing. All of a sudden, the government gets involved, opens two giant projects, one of which is literally over the mountain from their project, and with the price of it dropping, it is just inevitable that they are going to go out of business. It is a brine project; it is not as efficient as the more modern ones. Just kind of a fairness question in my mind. I realize that is not your field of expertise, but it seems remarkably unfair to me that we have a traditional Nevada mine that has been going since the '60s, which—you know, I am 65, I was born in 1960, so not like that long ago, in my mind anyway—and to see the government in effect pushing them out in a viable reducing mine and using their own tax revenue to do it, you know what I mean?

Administrator Ghiglieri:

I understand that. And from last I saw with Albemarle, they actually are doing a mine plan expansion. So, from my understanding, they are actually trying to expand and increase production rates in that valley.

Senator Hansen:

Good. Well, then maybe my concerns are way off. They do not need federal subsidies. They are doing it the old-fashioned way. Thank you for your presentation. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Of course. Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you, Chair. My question has to do with the enhanced geothermal regulation changes that you are talking about when it comes to changing the, I guess, updating the fee. With your questions, or with your input from the groups that you are talking with, has there been any sort of discussion about having this automatically looked at like every six years or something as opposed to doing the fight that unfortunately happens? I am sorry. The discussions that unfortunately will happen during the legislative sessions, so that way, we are not looking at something almost 30 years later.

Administrator Ghiglieri:

No, that conversation has not happened for an auto renewal. I do not ever want to get it to the point where we are increasing fees if the funding is not needed. The goal of the funding is to only cover the cost of the program and with the increased amount of activity that is leading to additional compliance and follow-up with companies to where we are actually having to transfer staff that traditionally did not work on it, and so we are seeing more and more work with it. We want to make sure that we have the ability to adapt for that. We felt that it has been 20-something years and they have lasted that long that it has been effective. But a concept like that I am not opposed to at the same time.

Chair Scheible:

I have one question. You had mentioned a project where I think you said it was UNR had purchased what is a former mine site. What site was that?

Administrator Ghiglieri:

It is the Union Mine. It is actually right underneath the Galena Creek Bridge between Reno and Carson that backs up into Pleasant Valley. They acquired the site in the late '70s for an educational opportunity and the Mackay mining school actually did use it for a small period of time for educational. Taking the mining engineers and geologists to the site to teach them for basic ground methods and everything else. It has been closed since the mid-eighties, I want to say. I cannot remember the exact date. It did not stay open very long and then it has been pretty much idle since.

Chair Scheible:

Oh, okay, so it is not a recent acquisition?

Administrator Ghiglieri:

No.

Chair Scheible:

Okay.

Administrator Ghiglieri:

This is the reason why we are frustrated with this project and why it is not qualifying. This is pre-CERCLA [Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act], pre-FLPMA, pre all federal mining regulations when the university acquired it, yet they are still saying they are a responsible party.

Chair Scheible:

Got it. Thank you for clarifying. Now I understand better the challenge. It is a challenge indeed.

All right, unless there are other questions, that will conclude this agenda item today. Thank you again for being here, presenting, and answering those questions.

All right; we are moving on to Agenda Item IX.

AGENDA ITEM IX—PRESENTATIONS FROM VARIOUS ENTITIES WITHIN NEVADA’S STATE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

A. UPDATE ON THE NEVADA VOLUNTARY WATER RIGHTS RETIREMENT PROGRAM

Chair Scheible:

We are going to hear again from some friends at DCNR. We will start with Mr. Bishop on the Water Rights Retirement Program. Please go ahead whenever you are ready.

Brandon Bishop, Program Manager, Conserve Nevada Program and Nevada Water Conservation Infrastructure Initiative, DCNR:

I am the Program Manager for the Nevada Conservation and Recreation Program, which has under its umbrella the Conserve Nevada program, the Nevada Water Conservation Infrastructure Initiative, and the Nevada Voluntary Water Rights Retirement Program.

So to give background, the Nevada Water Conservation Infrastructure Initiative was passed as part of the ARPA funding that came to the state \$100 million were allocated to the program to support water conservation and water infrastructure projects across the state; \$75 million of the program went towards infrastructure-type projects; \$25 million went towards water right retirements. ([Agenda Item IX A](#))

This gives you a snapshot of some of the projects across the program that we are supporting. We are supporting major infrastructure projects throughout the state, as well as those water right retirement programs, and some of the other programs that we are supporting were discussed earlier.

So major achievements. One of the projects that we are supporting right now is the Turf Conversion Program in southern Nevada. To date, that program has converted around 10 million square feet of turf. Another major milestone for the program is that we have supported around 106,000 water meter replacements across the state during this tenure, and for each of those that is replaced, you typically get a 2 to 10 percent reduction in water. And then you heard a little bit about the county water plans earlier today, but we are helping support some of the rural water county plans get across the finish line with a partnership with DRI. Then we have a number of septic conversions that we are working on across the state. And then down towards the bottom of the slide, it discusses some of the critical projects that we have throughout Nevada.

Nevada has over \$2 billion in need for water infrastructure investment. Typically, public water systems are those systems that are 15 or more households serviced, and there is a massive amount of need, and a lot of this need is health safety issues. Some of the big successes that are currently being addressed is in Baker. We have the Lehman Creek. This water system, people were actually going down to the creek with buckets, going back to their home to service their home, and this will bring two wells online and a water system for this community. This program is really addressing just dynamic need across the state, and we work closely with the State Revolving Fund, and with the USDA Rural Development on project funding to address other projects.

So as part of this program, we rolled out the Groundwater Pilot Retirement Program. Within this program, we were able to test several different water right retirement programs. The way that we awarded is we put out a call for grants and we had several nonprofits and governmental entities approach us through grant applications to roll out a variety of groundwater right retirement programs. Through that program we learned a lot, and that led to AB 104 and SB 36 within the last session. These are our partners that we worked with during that process. Through that program we were able to retire just over 22,000 acre-feet of water. Just to give you perspective, as you may have been driving out here, you probably saw the reservoir, and right now, that is about down to 10 percent, 25,000 acre-feet, so that is about that amount of water. Or, if you need another example, Topaz Reservoir is about the same size. But we had five different models—very, very different. We had conservation easements. We had more traditional water right retirement programs, which gave us some good lessons learned.

Then this gives us a snapshot of those areas in Nevada that were targeted for the Groundwater Right Retirement Program. In total, we invested right around \$25 million into this program, and you can see the impact that was had within these basins from that water right retirements. We are currently now in kind of the monitoring phase, so we are looking at these water right retirements and making sure are there any more lessons that we can learn.

This picture on the left here, one of the big dynamic issues that we have with water right retirement is how do we restore those fields after water has been removed, and this is a snapshot of one of those fields in Diamond Valley. We know from this program that we are going to need a lot more time transitioning these fields than we did in the ARPA program. But ARPA, because of the time constraints of the program, rolling that out and getting conversion, you cannot do that in that compressed of a timeline.

Moving forward, the Voluntary Water Right Retirement Program. SB 36 and AB 104 established the Nevada Conservation and Recreation Program, and it established those three programs that I told you about in statute under one umbrella. It provided the legal framework for voluntary retirement of certificated and decreed groundwater rights throughout Nevada, and it made sure that these are coming from willing sellers is the other major component. But it really is to address those areas of conflict around the state where we see declining groundwater and to be used as a surgical tool to address those areas.

Right now, the biggest challenge of the program is funding. We have been working with our partners and the members of the original TAC, Technical Advisory Committee, to address various avenues of how we can support the program, and several of our partners are applying to the Conserve Nevada grant round. Conserve Nevada is one of our bond programs and the Water Capital Improvement Program is one of our other bond programs. The Conserve Nevada program was authorized under AB 84 in 2019 that authorized \$217.5 million for conservation projects around the state. It is about the fifth reauthorization of that initiative since the '60s, and that really has supported outdoor recreation, conservation, wildfire mitigation, restoration, a lot of habitat work around the state. We have currently about 56 applications that were submitted to the program with \$36 million in ask, and we have \$10 million to divvy out, so there will be a lot of competition in that. To date, we have had three water right retirement programs apply to that program.

Then through the Water Capital Improvement Grant Program, this is the program that the state primarily uses to fund water and wastewater infrastructure around the state, and this matches some of those federal funds that come in. This one is also very, very competitive,

cause a lot of times we are dealing with health safety issues with those dollars, but we do have several applicants coming forward with the Groundwater Right Retirement Program applications with that.

That gives us a snapshot of where we are with the program, and I am happy to take any questions at this time.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. Questions? Starting with Assemblymember DeLong.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for the presentation. I had a question on slide number four, which is your major achievements and need. Under the critical infrastructure programs, you list one that is the Kobeh Valley source development. What did that entail?

Mr. Bishop:

That is a Eureka County project that they applied for with the condition of Diamond Valley. Some of the wells in the Diamond Valley area have seen declines in their water levels, so Eureka County is looking to Kobeh Valley for additional municipal water use, and they are doing exploratory work and exploratory drilling for the development of municipal water supplies.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the information and for the reminders of—I am sure a few of us were like, no, let us not go through this again. But when it comes to the water rights retirement, and I really do appreciate, especially under the Conserve Nevada, the number of people that applied, number of money that was asked for, how much we were actually able to give. But with the attempts to also buy back water rights, how many applications have happened that we were not actually able to fund, and/or, another way to ask this is how many applications are we trying to get? How much more money should we try to get in there, with all the money that we have in our state at this time and in the future. By the way, that was sarcasm, cause I think all of us know that we are broke—but how much money should we be trying to get there?

Mr. Bishop:

When we floated the pilot program, we received significant more demand than we had. I do not remember the numbers exactly, but we can get those for you, but it was significant. I think with what has been proposed through Conserve Nevada and what is coming forward to the Capital Improvement Grant Program, there still is a lot of demand out there within those areas that we are seeing a lot of conflict.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Follow-up if I may. That is good to hear that we have so many people that are interested in selling that. I do not know if this is really a question or more of a comment. It would be great if that was actually in the budget that was proposed to us next January, next February, as opposed to us trying to find it as a legislative body. I am hoping that those discussions are going on, and then that way, it is not necessitating or creating a bill request for us to try to look for that when it takes time for the budget. Thank you, Chair.

Chair Scheible:

All right, other questions? I wanted to clarify on the programs that you said applied for the grants for water right retirements. Are those like local water authorities or what kind of entities would be applying for the grants?

Mr. Bishop:

So, in the future, depending upon the color of money that is supporting the water right retirement program, will dictate a lot of who is eligible for application. For the pilot program, we received applications from nonprofits and governmental entities, subdivisions of the State of Nevada, so Central Nevada Regional Water Authority; Humboldt River Basin Water Authority; Southern Nevada Water Authority; Walker Basin Conservancy, a nonprofit; and then the Nevada Land Trust, another nonprofit.

Chair Scheible:

At this point, all of the funds have been expended for the Water Rights Retirement Programs, right?

Mr. Bishop:

The Water Right Retirement— The funds allocated to specific retirements have been fully expended. There is some residual funding in there that is going towards continued observations, but it is pretty minimal. It is a couple thousand dollars.

Chair Scheible:

Okay. Thank you. Did you have a question? All right. I think that covers all of our questions for now. Thank you so much for being here and for answering those.

B. UPDATE ON THE RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE NEVADA SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM COUNCIL

Chair Scheible:

That will take us to the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council (SEC), if I am not mistaken. Please go ahead whenever you are ready.

Kathleen Steele, Program Manager, Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, SEC, DCNR:

Thank you so much for having me. I am here to give a brief overview of the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program and then the task that we have been handling thus far. ([Agenda Item IX B](#)) Just a brief reminder of our mission and goals. The program's mission is to sustain and enhance Nevada's sagebrush ecosystems and the species that depend on them while

supporting the state's economy through responsible land stewardship and resource management. Under that, our main task is to run the Conservation Credit System, which is the mitigation program for the greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada. And the goal of that is to offset impacts from anthropogenic disturbances through enhancement and protection that results in a net benefit for greater Sage-Grouse habitats in the State of Nevada.

This is what we are trying to offset. In the past, we have seen a drastic drop in greater Sage-Grouse populations due to various impacts, primarily loss of direct habitat through increased invasive plants and fire frequency, as well as anthropogenic fragmentation. Other impacts such as pinyon-juniper encroachment, wild horse and burro impacts, predation, recreation, improper livestock grazing, anything that removes quality habitat or any kind of functionality out there are also threats to greater Sage-Grouse. As you can see in the graph, there has been a drastic drop in population in the past, and we are slowly seeing that bottom out due to various positive impacts from state, federal, and NGOs and all the work that everyone has been doing for the last several years.

For the Conservation Credit System, it was started about 2015, really caught up to running in 2016, was established in the NAC [*Nevada Administrative Code*] in 2019. Since then, as you can see in the graph, the projects have increased tremendously. Debit projects have increased, credit projects are slowly keeping up, and we are keeping up. On the graph on the right side, we are keeping up credits and debits, but eventually the number of debits that we anticipate coming in will overshadow the number of credits that we do have. But my staff have done a very good job trying to keep up with outreach, getting credit projects in. The majority of credits that we have right now are private land credits, and I will talk in a little bit about our successes with public lands.

For debit projects, we have over 20 debit projects that are currently trying to determine their obligation. Forty-six additional projects are in planning, which means that they have not started really anything yet. We know about them, we are working with them on the avoid and minimize process, and we have a general estimate, but nothing in concrete yet. Project types include pretty much anything and everything mining, solar exploration, geothermal pipelines, and power lines. Right now, we are seeing a lot of fiber optic cables, a lot of power lines, and a lot of solar.

Sixty-two debit projects have completed their mitigation, which means they have transacted and offset their obligation. We have ongoing management for reclamation activities, so we are working currently on those standards in our system. As you can see in the graph, as soon as the regulation went through, we saw a drastic increase in debit projects.

For credit projects, it has been a more steady climb, not necessarily more exponential climb. We have about 38 credit projects that are currently underway for restoration projects on private lands, including postfire restoration. Unfortunately, we had three of our credit projects burn in this last year, ranging from minor kind of scarring to a pretty drastic loss of habitat, so we are currently working on postfire restoration. We have meadow restoration projects underway as well as a beaver translocation that was done this last year, and we are hoping to go back out and see if it actually settled in. In all, we have over 225,000 acres being managed for the benefit of greater Sage-Grouse for all our credit projects.

We are very excited about moving into public lands credit projects. It is something that we have always thought about in the past, but there have been a lot of barriers, including the fiscal responsibility, and durability, and all of that. But my staff have been working really hard, and we are very excited to have a general framework that we are running with right now to try to see if we can increase public lands restoration. Through our Sagebrush

Ecosystem Council, we received approval of new restoration categories including meadow restoration, pinyon-juniper removal, postfire restoration, and invasive weed removal. This means that we can generate or we can create a management plan and send out the entity without coming back to the Council meeting for Council approval every single time. We can go out; we can generate a plan. They trust us to do these kind of restorations. Other restoration projects are viable; they just have to come to the Council for approval.

We currently have three public lands projects in play that we are very excited about, including postfire restoration and pinyon-juniper removal, which is approximately 30,000 acres of proposed treatment out there. We are hoping to see something signed relatively soon on one of the public lands credit projects with a debit project.

Regarding our transactions, as you can see, those have increased exponentially as well. We have had nearly 100 transactions completed, including internal transfers, which means that the debit project owns both the debit and the credit project, usually a mine that owns the ranch as well, so that is an internal transfer, and then private sales, which is that a debit project goes out and purchases from a private land credit project. These transactions represent the conservation of over 59,000 acres of prime Sage-Grouse habitat on private lands. These are locked away for a minimum of 30 years.

Highlights from this last year. We have expanded statewide training and certification efforts, reaching over 70 participants across multiple sessions, and this is for our verifiers. They are certified consultants who do the work for us, and we have over 70 participants in that.

We have increased coordination with western states through regional collaboration. We are very excited about that. We started this last year. We are reaching out to all the states across, well, in the West, that deal with greater Sage-Grouse mitigation. We all get together and we brainstorm, bounce ideas off each other. Nevada is in the lead on Sage-Grouse mitigation, and a lot of states are looking to us to help guide them in their own programs. We meet annually, and it is a very interesting time. Sometimes they have ideas that help us and sometimes we have ideas that can get them started.

We have increased federal partnership engagement with five CCS trainings. We went out and toured the state to train our federal partners. We had 42 participants from BLM, NDOW, the National Forest Foundation, AFIS, and Forest Service.

We hosted our annual proponents' workshop. This is something also that we started last year, which is we invite all of our debit project proponents and our credit project proponents to come together, get a little bit of a training on the Conservation Credit System. And then we give them food and they talk to each other, and we have had a lot of transactions come out of these. A lot of times before this we would hear, "I cannot get a hold of a credit project; I cannot get a hold of a debit project. What is going on? Nobody is answering their phone." So, we figured, make them talk to each other, and food always makes people talk to each other, so that was very exciting. We had 21 participants and we asked them, "Should we continue doing this? Should we make it every other year?" They actually had full support of doing it annually. They actually asked for it to be done twice a year, which we cannot feasibly do with our staff numbers and our budget.

We advanced the public lands restoration partnerships with the Forest Service, the BLM, and the National Forest Foundation. Like I said, we are planning on investing in 30,000 acres of treatment, which we are very excited about.

Future goals. We want to increase transparency and streamline processes with the CCS. If you have not looked, which I doubt you have because nobody has, we launched a new website two days ago, so we have a brand-new website. It is beautiful and we are hoping that increases transparency and allows people to find the things that they need a lot faster.

We are hoping to strengthen collaboration across agencies, partners, and the states by continuing these conversations that we have started with other states, other agencies, all the way down to our NGO partners.

We want to emphasize public lands restoration to the CCS and the program as a whole. We want to address escalating pressures from wildfire frequency and intensity, which is why we are pushing very hard to have the Council approve fire restoration as a public lands' mechanism. We see that as a growing problem across the state, and we want to start addressing that as best we can.

And then we also need to prepare for growing demand driven by the rising number and pace of debit projects. You saw those charts where it is just exponentially increasing and we expect it to continue to do so.

A couple of issues that we have had is the basically growing operational demands. This program was created in 2012. The CCS was launched in 2015. Active projects increased from 12 in 2015 to over 171 projects currently, which is a 14-fold increase. We have 76 additional projects under monitoring for potential impacts; 150 analyzed projects that are determined to have no impact or are no longer active, but it still took a lot of time for the staff to analyze those projects for the potential.

We were adopted as the mitigation standard in the BLM's greater Sage-Grouse RMP [resource management plan] that came out recently. So, we are not only locked in in NAC, but we are also mentioned in the RMP. We have participation through three different federal regulatory committees, which take staff time. The CCS is increasingly used as an exception process through the federal agencies increasing our workload because we have to sit down and actually determine whether we can be used as an exception process.

We have capacity and resource constraints. Our staffing levels are flat despite programmatic growth. We increase our volume and complexity, and that requires additional specialized staff. My staff currently is great; they are all great. They are amazing, but we are—reached our limits. We are struggling just to make deadlines to be able to process these permits, and especially with NEPA getting a lot faster, we are struggling to keep up. Also, adding in restoration work has increased the need for additional staff to handle monitoring for that and management for that to ensure that we have net conservation gain and that the applicable restoration projects offset the debit projects. Our current staffing constraints restrict our capacity to expand collaboration and ensure timely project analysis and reporting like I mentioned.

That will be it. I will take questions. Thank you so much for having me.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much for presenting to us. Do we have questions? Starting with Assemblymember DeLong.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you again, Chair. Thanks, Kathleen. Appreciate the presentation. Just a question with regard to the public lands projects. How have you addressed the durability criteria on the public land projects?

Ms. Steele:

Thank you. Durability has been a very complex issue, you would imagine. We have a lot of things kind of built in into the system already to ensure net conservation gain. We have increased the reserve account contribution for any credit project on public lands out there. So, they do an increased reserve account. If something should happen, including wildfire, wild horse and burro, some kind of disturbance that is more of an act of God disturbance, we have increased the reserve account contributions so that that can be covered. We also have it in play that if a debit project should move into the area either directly on top of the public lands project or nearby, impacting it has always been a requirement for private land credit projects, and we just moved it over for the public land credit projects, that they would take on any habitat loss. So, in addition to their debit amount, whatever is decreased from our credit project, they take on that burden as well so that kind of offsets, so increases their debit burden, those kind of things. We also are working with the Forest Service and the BLM to try to figure out contracts and durability mechanisms that way, but those are our main instances that are built in. Thank you.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Senator Hansen.

Senator Hansen:

Thanks, Madam Chair. You mentioned that when you do certain projects, things are "locked away for 30 years." Locked away from what? What are we locking the land up away from?

Ms. Steele:

Sure. Thank you. That is a good question. When we have someone sign a management plan, they get credits. They sign a management plan. They are obligated to follow that management plan for 30, or for the duration of the project; and that includes very detailed grazing routine, how they are going to address invasive annual grass, invasive weeds, haying mechanisms, all of that. So that is very detailed, outlined through this document. When they transact, when they sell their credits to a debit project, that is locked in. They are required by a contract to follow that management plan and keep their habitat at that standard or better for however long that debit project is on the land, whether it is a minimum of 30 years up to 120 years. So, when we say it is locked away, they are in contract that they cannot develop, build, destroy, mow, anything like that. They have to keep that habitat like that or better for that duration.

Senator Hansen:

Okay. Now, you have, I think, active projects, I think it was 114 you said that you are monitoring. The one graph I did not see up there other than the very beginning, you mentioned the Sage-Grouse populations are on an uptick. But do you have any specific data for the projects that you are monitoring? If you had 100 Sage-Grouse to start with at this certain project, ten years later, has the population gone up? I did not see any data. Because really, this thing is all about enhancing Sage-Grouse habitat, and one of the ways you could

measure success would be an increase in Sage-Grouse populations on those specific areas. Do you have any data to show that any of these projects have actually resulted in substantial Sage-Grouse population improvements?

Ms. Steele:

Good question. We do not have project-specific data. Some of our projects, depending on debit or credit, do not actually have Sage-Grouse who live on the project. There sometimes may be very important corridors, or they do have Sage-Grouse in a lake nearby and they will get them during the brood-rearing season, which we do not—NDOW might monitor—but we do not actually monitor. That would be an NDOW question. We focus primarily on habitat enhancement, so we take whatever the habitat that USGS has defined through intense modeling and following of these birds, and we manage the habitat for greater Sage-Grouse. The population is more on the NDOW side of things, and unfortunately, I do not have those project-specific numbers.

Senator Hansen:

I would love to see those. Most projects like that have kind of a treatment, untreatment, untreated area kind of a thing, because I have been watching this for a long time. And one of the more fascinating things is you have got 600,000 acres almost in the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge area, and you go back and read, they literally removed all livestock grazing by 1993—100 percent. And at the time, the projections were that the populations were going to go up to 8 to 9,000. I mean they actually gave some numbers. The bird numbers there are so low now that NDOW even stopped their own. They had a special two-day hunt just to keep track of it. When I talked to Sean Espinosa recently about it, I was like, where did all the Sage-Grouse go that used to exist on the Sheldon? After removing 100 percent of grazing and wild horses, everything, there is going back supposedly to total natural conditions, and the result has been a catastrophe for Sage-Grouse populations. I bring that up because I have heard repeatedly things like, well, we are going to monitor this area, and we are going to remove all livestock grazing and that should improve the habitat. Yet, we have a 600,000— Your biggest total was 30,000, I think?

Ms. Steele:

Thirty-thousand for the restoration that we are working on. We have 225,000 acres, so 59 locked away and 225 currently being managed.

Senator Hansen:

Okay, so roughly 250,000 acres. You have got an area that is double, more than double that in the Sheldon where you— But I have not heard any evidence that people have actually been monitoring that to see what the results have been by literally going back to a pristine, ungrazed, undeveloped, no minerals projects, none of that sort of thing there. So, I was wondering, do you guys do any kind of nothing like treatment, untreated area to see what the responses are among the bird populations? It sounds like maybe NDOW does, but you guys do not.

Ms. Steele:

We do not. We do treat, not treated, but like pre and post pictures of the habitat trying to maintain. We do require annual photos on our credit projects, those kind of monitoring, but we do not have any population data.

Senator Hansen:

Well, I would love to see an overlap of your projects and the monitoring and the improvement in habitats. And then NDOW coming in and saying, hey, we started with 100 Sage-Grouse on this 100 acres, and now we are up to 1,500 or something. I mean, some evidence that the actual changes in the habitat is resulting in what the original intent of this. I was around in 2012 in the Legislature, so I remember the development of this program and the concerns on the federal level of the Endangered Species Act, and now here we are looking at 11, 12, 13 years later, but so far, I have not heard any actual data that the birds themselves have dramatically improved population-wise after doing all these projects for all these years. But I guess that is for another time, another meeting when we will have NDOW here and we can ask them has this actually improved Sage-Grouse populations in Nevada. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for your presentation.

Chair Scheible:

All right. Any other questions? Thank you so much. This was a great update, very informative.

Ms. Steele:

Thank you all.

Chair Scheible:

I think that brings us to the conclusion of Agenda Item IX, so we will go to Agenda Item X and hear from the Great Basin Resource Watch.

C. PRESENTATION ON WATER ISSUES IN NEVADA

[This agenda item was taken out of order.]

Chair Scheible:

We will call this meeting back to order of the interim Public Lands Committee. I did forget two quick housekeeping items. For anybody who is new to this process, when you are on the microphone, please give your name before you speak so that we have it clear in our minutes. And also, when you are not speaking, if you could turn off your microphone, we would appreciate it, and I will give you guys some reminders if you need them.

And with that, while we are welcoming our new State Engineer, please introduce yourself and go ahead when you are ready.

Joe Cacioppo, P.E., State Engineer and Administrator, DWR, DCNR:

Thank you. I was appointed to that position March 30. I am going to give you my vast history as we go, and I will do my best to answer any questions at the end.

What I am trying to do today is give you a brief overview on some of what we have been involved in, some of what we are trying to do, and we have broken the presentation ([Agenda Item IX C](#)) into three sections: an internal processes update; brief overview of the

Humboldt River work—Jeff Fontaine kind of stole some of my thunder there, but that was good; I appreciate that—and then, a little bit about the Nevada Water Initiative. And some of the information you hear is purposefully redundant, and for a reason—we are trying to hit home some points. Here we go.

Internally, we are looking to improve some of the work we do. We recognize that we serve the public and that can be challenging at times. We wanted to recognize what we can do better and create some efficiencies so that we can streamline processes, create some more communication and collaboration, and basically some overall transparency.

We have, and it is historic, we tend to create backlogs. We get a lot of applications that come in. Generally, roughly, depending on the year, 4,000 applications a year. Some of those get tied up in litigation, protests, and things like that. But where we can move things forward, that is what we try to do. And to do that, we have worked with staff; we have implemented some training processes. And again, we just want to make sure that we are being there for the public and they are getting the service that they need. We are looking at improving responsiveness to folks. Again, communication, collaboration, and transparency is my focus.

And then, looking at our hydrologic assessment process, how we look at potential conflicts. We want to make sure that we are doing that in an efficient manner, recognizing that not everything is a conflict, but as we are going through these, recognize what can be pushed forward, what needs to be dug into a little bit more.

We also are identifying statutory or regulatory updates and taking the necessary steps to conjunctively manage the Humboldt River region. You have heard a little bit today about the Humboldt River region. It is no surprise to any of you, but we want to make sure that we are involved in that process in a collaborative manner.

Challenges that shape our work ahead. We have got increasing technical issues, diverse economic markets. We have folks that come to us with new ideas all the time. And you are trying to digest those and manage these water resources in a common sense way that hopefully can meet people's needs, but where it cannot, have those conversations so that we can understand where we are coming from, what we need, and maybe what they can do to help the process for themselves as well.

Some of our staffing constraints. We used to be, we had kind of division-wide average experience levels of eight to ten years. We have had a lot of turnover through retirement and things like that, and we are now like roughly two years of experience. Where we used to be able to do things maybe a little quicker through experiences, we are trying to build that experience back up so we can get back there. We recognize that as an internal challenge for us and we are working on that.

Some of the vacancies we have include another senior hydrologist. Everything gets funneled through our— The hydro stuff gets funneled through our Hydro section, and we have a senior hydrologist. We have somebody helping us now as a contract employee to get us through some of this. But everybody else is fairly new, and while they are talented, nothing beats experience and we just got to get more experience under their belt. But we do have two deputy administrator positions. One of them was my position and another one was one of our legal folks, James Vlotin. If you knew James, he moved on to private practice, and while we wish him well, we certainly recognize a need that he left behind.

I mentioned the training already. Just trying to make sure folks are not only skilled in what they do but understand the most available science so we can apply that to the issues we have within the state.

Conjunctive management. We will get into that a little bit more, but it is still relatively new, and it requires us to look at things a different way. And that is not insurmountable, but it is a challenge and trying to make sure people understand what we are trying to do is an important part of not only our internal training but some of the external training that goes with it.

In that, if you look at the shift in the management, since the State Engineer's Office was created and certainly with this State Engineer ruling back in 2021, we were tasked with managing surface and groundwater as distinct sources. That is no longer the case. Science has shown that they can be connected. And so, you look at the Nevada Supreme Court case in 2024. I highlighted what I was trying to hit here. We were looking at groundwater and surface water as distinct sources. Now, the State Engineer's Office needs to manage these rights. It needs to look at surface and groundwater collectively. How do they interconnect and base our decisions not as distinct sources but as combined sources.

And so, you can see that is a pretty big shift over 20-25 years. We understand how to do that, but as technology advances, as we get better science, we are looking into that, and we want to make sure we understand how these basins are working. We have perennial yields that we look at. Those numbers were figured out quite a while ago, and in some cases are going to be accurate. In some cases, they may change. And how we did things back then lays an important foundation for the work we do, and so, we do not want to discount everything because I do not think that would be the right thing to do. You know, as you grow, you learn more, and we are trying to make sure that we have the best information to make the best decisions we can.

Humboldt River region. Mr. Fontaine touched on some of this, and so I am not going to go over this all again, but it is a complex system. In general, broken in the lower, middle, and upper regions. It covers many hydrographic basins, many square miles, and in general, it is a fully appropriated system. With it comes some challenges because supply and demand. We have so much supply; we have a lot of demand, and we have to find a way to figure out how we can responsibly manage that basin, and then we are not going to do it alone. We have to do it collectively. It is best managed locally, quite frankly, with help from the Division, and we want to be an active and responsible partner in that, but we also do not want to pretend we know more than others. There is a lot of great information from folks that live, eat, and breathe in the Humboldt River Basin, and we respect that.

Regarding that, the interaction between surface water and groundwater is important to understand. Right now, the basin, the estimated capture in the basin is 25,000 to 45,000 acre-feet per year. We would love to work collectively with folks and work on bringing that down. How we do it is another story. What people want to see as a challenge. We get that; it is a work in progress.

On the legal side of things, I do not want to just read all the points, but you can see that we are looking at decreed rights. We are looking at newer rights. We are looking at just how the senior rights interact with the junior rights and where they are. It is everything from dates, to geography, to need and all that stuff comes into play. And so, a collaborative focus

is really my push as I get my feet wet in this whole process. Again, some of these upstream impacts are masked. There is some unused decreed rights that complicates the visibility of the conflicts, but understanding conflict is going to be important. And not every impact is a conflict, and we have to just work through all of that.

Strengthening the science. Historically, perennial yields or whatnot, like I said, that lays an important and useful foundation for what we are doing going forward. We are not here to say that what was done in the past needs to be scrapped because that is absolutely not the case. It was good work done by smart people, and we have more science in some cases, better science, and we have smart people now. We are trying to use the past to move into the future, but the scientific work needs to be deliberate to ensure we are making not defensible but solid, sound decisions that people, us included, can understand.

Stakeholder working group and a progress path forward. This has raised its head and gained some focus over the last two years. And with what has been going on internally with our Division, I do not want to say it, we set it aside by any means, but we were not as vocal as we needed to be. We were not as collaborative for a period of time because we had change of personnel, change of State Engineer, a lot of important things going on that it did not get the public attention from us that people felt it needed to, and we were giving it attention internally. There is not a day in in my short career there that has not gone by that we are not talking about all of this, but we recognize the need to get back out, chat with people. The Humboldt Basin River Water Authority, Central Nevada. We are trying to get back, talk to people, look at what we are doing.

Jeff Fontaine did a great job of going through the 19 community-driven management concepts to reduce capture. That is something we are looking at with them, and we want to get more involved with them and others and look at all our stakeholders and partners in this. How do we do this in a responsible manner? And really, you do not do it without getting everybody to the table. We have to be talking to people. We have to try to work collaboratively. Folks have different interests, and while they are different, they are really quite a bit the same. Everybody needs water. Everybody recognizes where we are at with it, the lack of water we have, and how do we work together to make this work. And so, we want to be part of the solution, part of a community-led effort to try to solve this, and it is by no means going to be solved overnight. We recognize that, but there is things we can put in place, work together on, come to agreements on that I think could be real positive for the entire basin, and that is what we really want to be a part of.

Regarding the Nevada Water Initiative. That plays a part in everything we are doing. It is basically a program to modernize assessments, and that is kind of what the slide is saying. We have a growing demand; we have a prolonged drought. We might see some good years where we get a lot of water, but in the end, we know that is hanging out there. We know we are the driest state in the nation, and we have work to do, and we want to make sure we are doing it. This Water Initiative has really shown that it has a lot of merit, and we are hoping other people see that as well. We are hoping you all understand and we can answer the questions you need so that it is not just another Division coming to you going money, money, money. Money is important, but everybody needs it, and we get that. But where things show merit, we want to have those conversations and provide you what you need so that you, too, can make informed decisions and help us out, but we have to help you as well, and we recognize that. This is a partnership as it says on the bottom between us, Desert Research Institute, the USGS, and others as well, but those are our big partners right now as we have jumped into this in its initial efforts.

The benefits to Nevada: long-term water security; understanding what we have; how do we balance our basins; informed, sound, science-based decisions. I think everybody wants to see that. If we are going to make a decision or we are going to approve something at our Division or deny something or fall somewhere in between, folks have to understand why those decisions are being made. And so, the better information we can have, the better transparency we can provide, we can have those better conversations. Also, it is going to strengthen our drought resilience and support that economic stability. We have got a lot of industry, a lot of interesting science, a lot of industry that is really just beneficial to Nevada—agriculture, mining, all those things. There is challenges with everything, but there is fantastic economic growth with that as well, and we just have to do this in a responsible manner when it comes to the water side of it.

Some of our program's successes; some of our pilot basin results. Pine Valley and Railroad Valley really demonstrated the value of modernized groundwater science, and we want to build off of that. Improved recharge estimates, evaluating interbasin flow, and all those things. These are just part of the science that we need to better understand and have the right people looking at this. And again, we do not look at this in a vacuum. This takes the partners. We have got industry that has spent a lot of money doing their own research, and we need to collectively look at some of this stuff and see where that value is and work together and not worry about whose science it is. If it makes sense, we want to make sure we are recognizing it and moving forward in a responsible manner.

Many investments and current momentum. As it says here, \$6.4 million in state ARPA funding plus matching \$3.2 million through DRI and USGS; \$1.5 [million] federal earmark for phase two. There is interest out there and we really appreciate the broad support that we are getting on this. It is important. It is not just our idea, but we are in the middle of it, and we want to demonstrate the strong momentum and clear statewide need. We hope that this continues to gain momentum and we do this in a responsible manner.

Real quick, I will hit on a note that I did not want to forget. Through these pilots, we have produced much more accurate recharge estimates, quantified groundwater discharge, evaluated interbasin flow, and expanded our monitoring networks. All of this is giving us a far clearer picture, really, of how water is moving, the water we cannot see, how it is moving, how do we understand it. I think that is just, again, the better understanding we have, the better decisions we can make.

Some of the key takeaways that we have that I want to leave with you really is we want to serve the public more effectively. It is important for us to make sure that we are responsible stewards, that we are working with our leaders, we are working with the public, and that we are creating and recognizing internal efficiencies that help this process. We are looking to reduce our backlogs. Create some more training opportunities for our staff, retain staff. It is one thing to bring staff on; it is another thing to keep that staff.

Prior to this position, I was in the private sector for 35 years, and you basically live and breathe by the staff you have and trying to keep them. It is a derailing, humbling effort when you got to bring people on and then they move on to greener pastures, and you got to start over again. So, finding a way to value our staff, because we have fantastic staff. Some of them have been there for a very long time. Some have not been there a long time, but they are just smart people, and they bring a lot of value to what we offer, and so we want to keep them. We want to grow them, and we want to make sure that we appreciate them, but also that the public appreciates them as well because the more they are

appreciated, the longer they are going to stay, and those that are providing this service are going to be valuable in the future. We are going to grow that average length of knowledge and average stint in our Division from now, this two-year stretch to folks that have that 10 to 12 years' experience again, and I think that is going to be important.

We also want to continue to focus not only on the training but on transparency and collaboration. When I talked to my predecessors—and I talked to folks like Jason King and others that were in my seat—communication was always a big thing; and you know that ebbs and flows. You can communicate quite a bit when it is easy. When things get a little harder, maybe a little more litigious, you got to be careful how you communicate. It is really important to me that we always communicate. We just have to do it in a responsible manner. I want to make sure we are doing that and we are working with our partners in industry and trying to take care of that.

We are in conjunctive management. We are still trying to figure out how to do that. It means different things to different people, but generally speaking, I think that is how we get through some of these issues we have going on today. If we are not communicating, if we are not looking at innovative tools, and we are not understanding what is beneath us and what is available, we are not going to make those good decisions. And so, updating on how we manage the state's most precious water is what we are trying to do.

That is really what I wanted to cover today. I wanted to leave some time if there is any questions. If there is questions I cannot answer—and I will be honest with you, there is probably a lot of them—I have got some people behind me, and we are going to do the best we can for you. What we cannot answer, I am more than happy to get back to you on and make sure you all get the information you need. Just wanted to thank you for your time and that is all I had today, but if you have any questions, we are here.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much for making time to come out here and present to us; and welcome. It has, again, been what, like a month? Three weeks?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

It has been six weeks.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Six weeks. Just feels like a month.

State Engineer Cacioppo:

Vast amount of knowledge for you.

Vice Chair Anderson:

There you go. All right, so thank you so much. Are there any questions? I see Assemblymember DeLong.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you, Vice Chair. Thanks for being here. Appreciate the work you have been doing. I have got a couple of questions on the Water Initiative. Have the phase one pilot programs in Pine and Railroad been completed? If not, when are they supposed to be completed?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

I am not sure they are actually completed, but they are wrapping up in October.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you. Then my next question is a little bit just from my own ignorance. What basins is the South-Central Marshes Flow System located in?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

Everyone is shaking their head. I do not know the answer to that.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Is it in Nevada?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

Yes. What is that? Yeah, yeah.

Assemblymember DeLong:

I did not mean to ask a third hard question.

State Engineer Cacioppo:

No, no, no, you were not. I wanted to make sure we [inaudible]. And then I got confused because I forgot to say my name again so.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thanks a lot, Joe.

State Engineer Cacioppo:

You are welcome.

Vice Chair Anderson:

I do have a question, what a surprise. My question has to do with— On the slide where you talked about industry-paid-for studies, and that has to do with program success, and how that has actually allowed for some different information to come out. It was slide 11 or page 11. That is the one. With those industry-paid-for studies, are they still science-based? Is there a group that will double-check the information, make sure that the biases are not present, the usual questions you always ask for studies?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

The short answer is yes. That is why we have these partnerships and when we have folks like DRI or USGS or us doing things, having those checks are important. We have been collaborating on the Humboldt specifically with the mining industry. They have folks doing analyses and whatnot, and having the checks and balances are things that we are doing and making sure we are not missing anything and making sure not only do we have good science, but we are applying it correctly.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much cause my hackles go up every single time whenever I hear something of like private-public partnerships, which are good, but you want to make sure that they are still science-based and backgrounds.

And then my other question has more to do with what you brought up with right at the beginning that had to do with on slide three. Well, vacancies. Do you know what your current— How many open positions you have at this time, number one, and then number two, again—and you brought this up very well, but I want to make sure that I have got it in my mind correctly—that it is mostly based upon people retiring, or is it because we are not paying them enough in a very niche area.

State Engineer Cacioppo:

Thank you for mentioning that. It is a combination. We have people that have retired. We have had people that have moved on to the private practice or whatever. My prior firm is an example. We, over the years, acquired several people from the Division, and it is hard to compete with the private sector. It is what we can offer our folks. It is tough. They can make more, quite frankly, going somewhere else. My wife is a schoolteacher and in that industry, it is the same thing. You do not become a teacher to become rich. You do it for the love of what you do and because it is important work. We have important work and people love what they are doing, and we try to make sure those people are valued. I brought that up before. It is important that we give them the training they need, show them that they are valued, and that the work they are doing is important and makes a difference. And we are always going to have that issue with funding. We recognize that. If we are paying somebody x amount of dollars and they can make 30 percent more doing the same thing, and you look at how much it costs to live these days, we all know that it is hard to keep them.

And so, to your first question of how many vacancies; we have about 14. I think, right now, we are sitting at 14 vacancies in an office of roughly 112 people. It is considerable. And some of those are staff level; some of those are high-level positions. It is across the board, so it is a challenge.

Vice Chair Anderson:

All right. I am double checking to make sure there are no other questions. Thank you so much and I know that— Actually, I do have one more. The PR [public relations] around everything going on with this Department and the changes that have happened—and I do not know if this is something you can answer or not—how are you guys addressing that at this time? That might be only industry-based discussion, but there have been some news articles from a variety of areas, so how are you handling that public relations of the change?

State Engineer Cacioppo:

I recognize that, and I have read maybe all those articles, and it is important information that they are putting out there. And me being new, again, coming from private sector, I am part of that. We had a State Engineer that is no longer there anymore. We recognize that good person, know him well, respect him. I am coming into a seat new, and really, how we address it, PR wise, is I think just getting back out there and talking to people and making sure people know— That has kind of been my mantra coming here; it is just coordination, collaboration, and making sure people know we are really not trying to work in a vacuum. We are trying to work with people, and basically, if you had issues, let me know. I want to address those. I want to understand what your concerns are, and I am going to do my best to make sure you know why we are here and what we are trying to do. And while we are not always going to come to an agreement on things, I think if the communication is happening and the information is there and people can understand why a decision was made or not made, I think that goes a long way and can help us get through it better than maybe what people perceived was happening before.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you so much, and thank you, Chair.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? All right. Well, thank you. I appreciate you joining us today and answering those questions.

State Engineer Cacioppo:

Thank you very much.

Chair Scheible:

All right. That gets us back to Agenda Item VI, assuming District Manager Wickham is here. Come on forward and go ahead whenever you are ready.

AGENDA ITEM X—DISCUSSION ON THE PUBLIC PROCESS FOR STATE AND FEDERAL MINE PERMITTING, AND MINING REGULATION AND RECLAMATION LAWS IN NEVADA

John E. Hadder, Executive Director, Great Basin Resource Watch:

Good afternoon, Committee members, and thank you very much, Chairwoman Scheible, for inviting me to come and speak. We are a nonprofit here in Nevada. We have been around since 1994. We work with communities regarding mining issues. Our structure is we work with communities. We also go out to mine sites. We talk to the industry; we talk to regulators; we talk to decision-makers as well. We do a lot of different things in our organization, including policy and also some technical analysis as well. ([Agenda Item X](#))

I wanted to preface this a little bit that we obviously live in a very extractive society, and we use the stuff from extractive society, but extraction does have consequences as well. And so, that is why I added this slide to remind us that there are consequences. And these are a couple of identified examples that we have got to be careful with what we do on our public lands, and it is not to say that— So, really the bottom line here is that we, the idea is our permitting process on mining should be careful, should be judicious. We need to think about

the communities that are directly affected by these projects. Obviously, we have talked a lot about how economies are affected and so forth, but there are also other effects. So, I just wanted to preface that a little bit. Going forward, I have three recommendations or requests for the Committee, and then I have a couple of statements I would like to read by Indigenous-led groups that were not able to come, today.

First of all, there is an issue that arose at Thacker Pass, and since you all went to Thacker Pass, many of you, I thought I would bring up a couple of issues that arose that I think that maybe the state could address. One of them is this issue of acidic mine waste. At the Thacker Pass project, they are using sulfuric acid to extract the ore. This is not uncommon. Sulfuric acid is used— In fact, it is going to be used at the Rhyolite Ridge site as well, very similar. What happens is you get the spent ore. Ore residue has what they call filtered tailings. Now what you may have heard is, you may have heard dry stack tailings from the company. I think that is a little bit misleading because the tailings are not completely dry. Yes, they press them, which is great. They may spend some time drying them, but there is still a little residual moisture in there, so they are not completely dry. Once you stack all those tailings up in a big facility, there is compression that recurs, and it is kind of like squeezing a damp sponge; a little liquid is going to come out. There is also precipitation. So, the residual acid that is on the tailings will find its way through the facility and will carry toxins out of the facility. This is an issue that we are going to see it more than once. It is not just Thacker Pass, but this came up in the Thacker Pass project.

There is a standard testing regimen to determine what is the water going to be like coming out, and that was done and it showed that it would be very toxic. So, Great Basin Resource Watch and the public commented, “Well, why do you not neutralize the residual acid in these tailings before they go out on public land?” The state’s response was this basically, yeah, we think it is a good precautionary measure. The Division agrees that neutralization of all tailings of the material prior to filtration is a more benign option. So, they kind of agree with us, but they said we do not have the authority to say you have to neutralize. And so, they say, well, since there is going to be a thick liner underneath that is going to capture the fluids, that is good enough to satisfy the zero-discharge requirement.

This is a picture if you see on the sort of columns with all the colors in there, that is the tailings that we are talking about before neutralization. All the colors—you see the red, the orange, the yellow—that is all the violation. That is above standards. If you look on the column on the other side, the three columns there, that is neutralized tailings. In the permit, the state permit, they did ask the company, can you do a study? Can you do an analysis on this? And that is the results. So clearly, the neutralized tailings is a much better thing to be going out on public land than the nonneutralized. Water is going to seep out over time.

So given the fact that the mine waste is going to be there indefinitely, yes, there is a liner underneath it; yes, it is an engineered facility of sorts, but this is a long time, this is forever. We think that every feasible measure should be put into place to avoid complications down the road. And so, our recommendation request to this Committee is to recommend that the state have authority to require neutralization. Now, they can have a discussion with the mining company, come up with options, but at least have the authority to say, yes, we feel in this case, you should do it. And like I said, this is going to come up again. The Rhyolite Ridge Mine is the same thing. They are doing a similar process. They are going to have acidic tailings. We are going to see it with other projects as well anytime, especially when you use acid.

The current regulation for tailings is this [Chapter] 445A, and you see there is language in there about inhibiting migration of contamination and so forth. That is all good. But what is contained in the regulation for what is called spent ore, which I believe really focuses on heap leach pads. So, this is the stuff that goes out. They put the ore on the pads and then they add cyanide and so forth and drain it. I think that this regulation on spent ore stabilization was designed for that, and it specifically requires a pH range, a neutralization, if it can be feasibly done, of course. So, we are saying, hey, let us apply at least the same standard to this other form of waste that is going to be on public land indefinitely that could have a similar type of liner. So that is one thing to consider.

Another thing that came up. In fact, they are passing this issue of state and federal permitting. As you know, whenever the federal land is involved, there is going to be a federal permit, and of course, there is numerous state permits and a public process that goes along with that. The state has numerous permits. The most encompassing in our view is what is called the Water Pollution Control Permit. So here they have to analyze everything about the mine site to make sure that there is not going to be degradation of the waters of the state. And unlike the federal process, the state does not approve the entire plan of operations. The federal government, they approve the plan of operations as a whole. That is part of their permitting process, but the state says we are going to approve what we think is okay, essentially, and so, it is a different process there.

What happened in Thacker Pass was that the federal permit was approved over a year before the state process was completed. This is not uncommon, and in fact, we have talked to the Agency about this before. It is like this disconnect between when the state and federal permitting happens. What happened with Thacker Pass, though, is that the federal government said, okay, we are going to approve your entire plan of operations, but the state said you cannot go below the water table because we see that there is a potential to degrade waters of the state, and the state said we do not really think your mitigation plan is good enough. We are not satisfied. At Great Basin Resource Watch, we are happy to see this because we were not satisfied either. We were happy that the state put some controls on it. But what that means is that you have got two different mine plans being permitted here. The analysis that the state was doing on the permit side really did not make it into the federal permitting process effectively because they had gotten way ahead of them.

Another thing that came out is that this tailings neutralization was also not discussed in the EIS. Had they waited till after the state permitting, that probably would have come up and maybe that would have been part of our revised plan of operations to include that, which we think would be better in general. So, the federal permit was issued well before and we kind of have two different mine plans.

The EIS, Environmental Impact Statement, which is supposed to cover everything, actually often does not incorporate certain aspects that are in the state permit. It should. And there is certainly communication between the state and the federal government, but a lot of times the federal process gets way ahead and that is what happened with Thacker Pass. It has happened in other sites too, but in this case, we have the consequences of things that got left out of the federal permitting process.

We heard earlier about how long the permitting process takes. I want to clarify that my understanding is that this sort of 29-year time frame, that includes nonpublic portions as well as public portions. For Thacker Pass, the public portion of the federal permitting was done in less than a year. And from our point of view, that is record time in terms of a public process for a mine of that complexity and scale. So, to avoid confusion, facilitate more complete discussion of the mine plan, we are recommending that the state open its MOU

with the federal government to include a section on permit timing and they can have a discussion on what makes sense. From our point of view, it seems like it would work better if all the state permits were pretty much lined up and ready to go, and then the federal process could start. Because then, if there are constraints on the mine plan, that could be incorporated into the plan of operation that goes to the federal government. Then the state and the federal government are permitting the same thing.

The other thing is there is a reclamation cost estimate, which was discussed today also. Now, our understanding is that the state and federal government have to come in concurrence with that. But the state really cannot get a solid number until they do their analysis, until they have almost pretty much completed the permit. They are ready to go. From our point of view, it makes more sense to get that done first, then they can have a good reclamation cost estimate to send to the federal government to get concurrence and then talk to the company about it. So that seems like that would be a better process instead of assuming.

Also, the Federal Land Policy Management Act requires concurrence with states. I mean, one might be able to argue that if Thacker Pass, the federal permit, is it really legal because they allowed something that the state would not. That is up to the judges to decide, I suppose, but the point is, that if we want to satisfy the federal law, also it makes sense to get all those state permits done because then you know you are clean.

The updated MOU. With an updated MOU, constraints, any constraints in the mine plan, can be incorporated into a new plan of operations that they would submit to the federal government. We think that will make for more consistent mine permitting and a better process overall and not confusion, because in Thacker Pass, the public was kind of confused about what was going on because of this process. It will also ensure any kind of mitigation analysis that would come out and the state permitting process gets included in the federal process. We think it makes it more complete. That is our second request for you all.

The third, it really relates to public process as well, and that is what we call community right-to-know, especially thinking about the communities that are directly affected. They should be apprised of what the nature of the project is, understand the consequences, and be able to have discussions about it and deliberate on it in ways that affect them. Right now, what is happening is the federal government is stepping back. For a NEPA process, for an EIS, there has been three comment periods for decades. Essentially, there is what they call the scoping at the very beginning, like, okay, what should we study? Number two is a draft EIS. Okay, here is our draft. Take a look at it. What do you think, public? What about the mitigation plans? Get comments on that and then the final; and each one of those comment periods is on the record. That is part of the public process. When it is on the record, that means the public has an avenue for redress, which is how this country was founded, in part, issues of redress.

Right now, what the federal government is doing is only one comment period, which is what we are seeing under the Trump Administration. The South Railroad project is the case example in Nevada. It is the first one that we know of where they are doing this new process, where they are only having one comment period. By statute, under NEPA, they have to have one. They have to have a comment. It does not say they have to have one, does not have to have two or anything. It just says you have to have a comment. You have to request comments from the public on an EIS. So they do, and only at the very beginning. So, the public will not be able to provide comments on the draft EIS. They are not going to be able to comment on the mitigation plan, any of that.

We would like to see— Can the state of Nevada do something more than it does now? And we have had a discussion with the state agency about this, and they did not say no. But how will you work it out? Can we have informational meetings prior to when the state publishes its draft permits? So now before the clock starts to help the public understand the nature of the project. What are the consequences? Can the state step in? The state does a lot of analyzing of the project. They understand a lot of aspects of it. Can we help out, the public understand these projects, especially when the federal government is stepping back. This is about transparency and understanding, so that is the third request. We think that especially for the folks that are directly affected, we owe that to them.

Here is Leslie Sonne, who is a citizen, who is in Smith Valley, and she talks here about how these things get thrown at them and they are at odds with it. They do not know, they do not have the information. Things move too fast. And so, this is part of what we are after here. We think communities have a right to know.

Those are my three suggestions, recommendations for the Committee on some process. Couple of things that came up with Thacker Pass but are not unique to Thacker Pass by any means, but they will be ongoing.

Then I would like to read these two statements. One is the people of Red Mountain who organized as a result of the Thacker Pass project, and they are entirely Indigenous-led:

The lithium mines will change the McDermitt, and surrounding areas more than we can expect. We are worried about the increase of MMIP, murdered and missing Indigenous persons, and the division between our tribal community. The environment and culture resources will also be impacted. The ecosystem will be fragmented into irreversible ecological damage, which will affect how our tribal people interact with the land, practice hunting, gathering, and teaching traditions, and most importantly, how we practice our religion and teaching the next generation. We are concerned about the water and air quality and increase in cancer in our community members, which ultimately affects our tribal people's quality of life. The land, our people, and all living things that trickle-down effect due to what they call green colonialism and fast-tracking of mines.

So that is that is that perspective coming from that group. Another group that deals with mines is the Western Shoshone Defense Project. They have been around for a long time. Their statement is that:

The original people of the Great Basin were the first stewards of the land in what is now called Nevada. Western Shoshone view the land is as our Earth Mother, something to be honored. Others see the land as a commodity to be exploited. In 1872, the newcomers decided mining was the best use of land but, best for whom? In less than 200 years we have witnessed this once land of plenty being downgraded to one of toxicity in the land, air, and water. Biodiversity is constantly being threatened and our waters most precious life source taken for granted by entities meant to uphold conservation values through stewardship and responsible mining. The consequences of drought and climate change are on the horizon. If we are being responsible stewards of this land, the protection of water must be the number one priority. When we protect water, we protect biodiversity and human life. If we are to uphold the values and are being responsible planners, we must uphold protect the land, air, water, and sun (LAWS) for the generations of all Nevadans. This can begin with open and meaningful conversations, like we were having, discussions and planning with original stewards, and federally recognized tribes as well as the traditional knowledge keepers of this land.

I thank you for your time and if there is any questions or comments.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you so much. Are there questions from the Committee? Starting with Assemblymember DeLong?

Assemblymember DeLong:

Thank you again, Chair. Thanks for the presentation. You made a statement that the state does not permit the entire project. I am wondering what part of a project is not permitted under the state's reclamation law?

Executive Director Hadder:

Thank you for the question. They do not really piece it out like that. And they look at aspects of it, and, I mean, there could be an aspect of the mine that the state, and you should ask this question, the state also, that they feel is they do not want a permit or they feel particularly dangerous, or like I said, degrades the waters of the state. That could stop the project potentially. They could say, well, that is a critical piece of that mine project. I think that is really rare; it is very rare. Usually, the issues are worked out between the operator of the proposal and the state. This was one case at Thacker Pass where that was not really worked out well enough and they said, no, we do not trust, we do not like the mitigation, so it is not— They have to, they look at pieces of it and how they are going to affect, particularly for the water pollution control permit, how it is going to affect the waters of the state and can they guarantee that it is not going to be degraded. I do not think they really piece it out in quite that way.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Follow-up, Chair? I am not quite sure what you just said there, but again, I will ask the question. What part of a mine project is not covered by the state's reclamation law, which includes a full bond on the entire project?

Executive Director Hadder:

Oh, it covers everything.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Okay, so to clarify then, now you are retracting your statement, and that you are now saying that the state does permit the entire project?

Executive Director Hadder:

No. So basically, because this— For example, in the case of Thacker Pass, because the state said we are not going to let you go below the water table, then any reclamation associated with that is also not part of the reclamation plan. That does not need to be because they are not allowing that part of the project to go forward. So the company presents a plan of operations to the federal government, and the federal government approves whatever is in there or not. The state says, okay, we will look at this. And actually, this piece over here we think is problematic, so either change it or let us talk about it. In the case of Thacker Pass, they said, well, this going below the water table is too problematic at this point. You have got to have a better plan for how you are going to deal with this. And so, any piece that the

state constrains then would not need to be part of the reclamation plan. For example, let us say the state said we do not like these acid plants you are going to build out there at Thacker Pass. We think they are too dangerous. Say they said something like that, then there is going to be no reclamation for them because they are not going to build them. That is my understanding.

Assemblymember DeLong:

I will leave it there for now, cause what I think I heard from you is that whatever project gets approved, the state fully permits it and bonds it. Now, what they may think about or discuss with the agencies or with their banks or anything, if it does not get approved, then it is not, that it cannot happen, and the state permits cover the entire project that has been approved.

Executive Director Hadder:

That has been approved by the state, not by the federal government. In the case of Thacker Pass, the federal government approved going below the water table and the state said no, so they did not approve that part of it. So, whatever is in the state permit that they approve, the reclamation plan has to cover.

Assemblymember DeLong:

Yes, and I believe we have been elected to the State Legislature and not Congress, and so we oversee what the state programs are.

Executive Director Hadder:

Absolutely.

Chair Scheible:

Other questions? Vice Chair Anderson.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you, Chair. The civics teacher in me is like this is so much fun with the federal balance of the three different levels, but I am not going to lie, the Legislator in me is like, oh my God. Okay, so I want to make sure though, what you are asking us to do is to consider on your slide under compensate for the lack of adequate federal public process, you are asking this body to consider expanding what the state's role is in that public process of discussion. Is that what I understand from what you are asking?

Executive Director Hadder:

Yeah, good question. The one question is this a rulemaking process? Is this an NRS process, or do we really need to do either? On one hand, if the Committee could recommend to the state and say, hey, can you kind of, within the authority that you have already, can you do some of these hearings and not have to— They may not necessarily have to amend any regulations, because right now, once the permit becomes active for comment, then the public can request a hearing on the permit. If there is community concern, the state usually does it. I mean it happened for Thacker Pass, for example. But what we are saying here is let us get out in front of that before there is that 30-day clock that is ticking on the permit when the public is under the pressure to understand the project. Let us do something in

advance of that. So that is not in the regulations to do that. That would be one possibility is to put it in there, but I think it would be good to work with the agency, to see how they would like to proceed with something like that because we have talked to them a little bit about this. So, it may be more of a resolution from the Committee, you are saying, can you work on this, how would you do this? Is it needed for every project? Probably not. Some of them are pretty simple and probably do not require it, but some of them are very complex. Thacker Pass was pretty complicated because it has got acid plan as well and most mine projects are. So especially new projects and especially in new areas where people are not used to mining, so there may be some issues there. So maybe it is more of a guidance that the agency develops internal at the request of the Legislature.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Thank you for that clarification and follow-up, if I may. Thanks. In the slide prior to that, you had mentioned an MOU to help improve state, federal communication. I think I already know the answer to this, but I am still going to put it out there. The MOU does not usually come in front of the legislative body. It usually is done through the agency. So again, you are asking us to go to the agency and ask them to renegotiate the memorandum of understanding? Am I understanding that correctly?

Executive Director Hadder:

Great question. Yes, same thing. Basically, the agency has the authority to negotiate under the statutes exactly. So, it is basically saying hey, we as a Committee feel like this is a good thing to do and help them to move forward with that. We have had some discussions with the NDEP [Nevada's Division of Environmental Protection] about this a couple of years ago, and they are thinking about it. So, the idea is, again, a recommendation to help try to move it, move that forward. We think that if they see that Legislators are interested in it, then maybe something can happen. Not to say anything negative about the agency, they have got a lot to do, but I personally think, at Great Basin, we think that this process will work better for them, but that is a discussion that we need to have. Thank you.

Vice Chair Anderson:

And they can do so without our input and then come to us later through the Leg Commission to approve or not approve the MOU.

Executive Director Hadder:

Absolutely.

Vice Chair Anderson:

Great. Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you for letting me clarify that process.

Chair Scheible:

Absolutely. Other questions? Okay, I think that covers all of our questions. Thank you so much for being here. Thank you for your presentation and also sharing with us statements from our native communities. We appreciate it.

Executive Director Hadder:

Thank you so much for your service to the State of Nevada. Appreciate it.

Chair Scheible:

Thank you. All right. If you could turn off the microphone before you leave the table. I believe that brings us to the end of [Agenda Item X](#).

AGENDA ITEM XI—PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Scheible:

We will move on to Agenda Item XI, which is our second opportunity for public comment. Is there anybody wishing to give public comment in person here in Winnemucca? I do not see anybody coming up to give public comment here in person so we will go to the phones please for any public comment.

AVH:

Thank you, Chair. If you would like to participate in public comment, please press *9 now to take your place in the queue. Caller with the last three digits of 478, please press *6 to unmute. You may continue.

Colette Kaluza, Volunteer with Wild Horse Education:

Thank you. The 1971 Wild Horse Act requires wild horses be preserved and managed humanely, not removed and stockpiled. Yet, most herds still lack required herd management area plans despite federal court rulings, calling BLM's delays egregious and unlawful. BLM's 2026 wild horse and burro population estimate report is presented as neutral data, but it drives funding toward removals and supports claims of overpopulation without examining how those numbers are constructed or who benefits. It will be used to shape how much money Congress allocates to the Wild Horse and Burro Program and to justify yet another push for lethal control options.

Saying that wild horses are overpopulated simply repeats agencies' numbers and appropriate management level, AML, targets without examining how those numbers are constructed, who benefits from them, and what actually happens on the ground.

Wild Horse Education has released an in-depth review of the 2026 report so that advocates, journalists, and lawmakers can see what is really going on behind those numbers. Independent reporting on BLM's own records show that livestock grazing on federal public lands and not wild horses, is the primary driver of range damage, yet horses are consistently framed as the problem while heavily subsidized grazing continues with limited oversight.

ProPublica has documented how wealthy ranchers profit from public lands and how political clout helps ranchers dodge oversight.

Here Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, likewise, reports that livestock are responsible for roughly two-thirds of nearly 57 million acres failing environmental standards, while less than a million failing acres are attributed to wild horses and burros. Yet federal policy keeps spotlighting horses and downplaying livestock's much larger footprint on the range. Mining operations add another enormous layer of impact on wild horse habitats.

For my hundreds of days observing helicopter roundups and tracking animals afterward, current practices are not humane. BLM's comprehensive animal welfare program standards were never formalized as enforceable regulations and are inadequate. BLM should be

required to complete HMAPs [herd management action plan] and to formalize enforceable humane standards through rulemaking with full public comments. ([Agenda Item XI A](#)) Thank you.

AVH:

Chair, your public line is open and working, but you have no more callers wishing to provide public comment at this time.

Chair Scheible:

All right, thank you so much. That brings us to the conclusion of public comment for today. Our next meeting will be on June 26; that is the last Friday in June. That meeting will be in Fernley. We will be providing additional details as they become available through our website and our mailing list.

I want to thank everybody who came today and participated. I want to also give a very special thank you to our staff, our incredible Legislative Counsel Bureau staffers here from the Policy Division, the Legal Division, AVH. The whole road show came just to make sure that the public had access via the YouTube stream that we could all see the presentations on this beautiful projector, and I cannot thank them enough. We also have Legislative Police Officers who travel all the way out to Winnemucca to keep all of us safe, and we very much appreciate your service to the state and you being here today. And of course I want to thank our hosts; Humboldt County has graciously invited us to meet out here. The Winnemucca Chamber of Commerce allowed us to use this beautiful space. None of this would be possible without all of these partnerships, and so we are very grateful to everybody who makes this happen. With that, unless I have missed anything, I will adjourn this meeting.

The following written public comments were submitted for the record:

- Annelise Day, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI B](#));
- Billy Anthis, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI C](#));
- Carolyn Molica, Resident, Las Vegas, Nevada ([Agenda Item XI D](#));
- Debra Clemente, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI E](#));
- Geraldine VP, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI F](#));
- Jaimie Crucitti, Resident, Las Vegas ([Agenda Item XI G](#));
- Laurie Gage, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI H](#));
- Lindsay Mann, Resident, United Kingdom ([Agenda Item XI I](#));
- Magali Boutin, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI J](#));
- Nikki Berti, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI K-1](#)) ([Agenda Item XI K-2](#));
- Pauline St Denis, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI L](#));
- Dr. Pete Foley, Pete Foley Innovation ([Agenda Item XI M](#));
- Shirley Weaver, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI N](#));
- Unidentified Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI O](#)); and
- Wendy Eberhardt-Petrick, Member of the Public ([Agenda Item XI P](#)).

AGENDA ITEM XII—ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Velazquez
Research Policy Assistant

Jered McDonald
Deputy Research Director

APPROVED BY:

Senator Melanie Scheible, Chair

Date: _____

MEETING MATERIALS

AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
Agenda Item II A	Scott Beckstead, Government Relations and Policy Director, American Wild Horse Conservation	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-1	Craig C. Downer, Wildlife Ecologist and Native Nevadan	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II B-2	Craig C. Downer, Wildlife Ecologist and Native Nevadan	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II C	Catherine Ryals, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item II D	Cheryl E. Abbate, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Written Public Comment
Agenda Item III A	Curtis Moore, Director, Natural Resources and Assistant County Manager, Elko County	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item III B	Martin (Marty) Plaskett, Vice Chair, Eureka County Board of Commissioners Jake Tibbitts, Natural Resources Manager, Eureka County	Handout
Agenda Item IV	Jeff Fontaine, Executive Director, Central Nevada Regional Water Authority and Humboldt River Basin Water Authority	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item V	Amanda Hilton, President, Nevada Mining Association	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
Agenda Item VII A	Jon Stansfield, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, United States Forest Service (USFS), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation

AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
<u>Agenda Item VII B</u>	Boyd Hatch, Ranger, Winnemucca Ranger District, USFS, USDA	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item VIII</u>	Robert Ghiglieri, Administrator, Division of Minerals	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item IX A</u>	Brandon Bishop, Program Manager, Conserve Nevada Program and Nevada Water Conservation Infrastructure Initiative, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item IX B</u>	Kathleen Steele, Program Manager, Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, DCNR	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item IX C</u>	Joe Cacioppo, P.E., State Engineer and Administrator, Division of Water Resources, DCNR	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item X</u>	John E. Hadder, Executive Director, Great Basin Resource Watch	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation
<u>Agenda Item XI A</u>	Colette Kaluza, Volunteer, Wild Horse Education	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI B</u>	Annelise Day, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI C</u>	Billy Anthis, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI D</u>	Carolyn Molica, Resident, Las Vegas, Nevada	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI E</u>	Debra Clemente, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI F</u>	Geraldine VP, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI G</u>	Jaimie Crucitti, Resident, Las Vegas, Nevada	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI H</u>	Laurie Gage, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI I</u>	Lindsay Mann, Resident, United Kingdom	Written Public Comment

AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
<u>Agenda Item XI J</u>	Magali Boutin, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI K-1</u>	Nikki Berti, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI K-2</u>	Nikki Berti, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI L</u>	Pauline St Denis, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI M</u>	Dr. Pete Foley, Pete Foley Innovation	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI N</u>	Shirley Weaver, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI O</u>	Unidentified Member of the Public	Written Public Comment
<u>Agenda Item XI P</u>	Wendy Eberhardt-Petrack, Member of the Public	Written Public Comment

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