

**TESTIMONY ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
MOUNTAIN CITY, RUBY MOUNTAINS, JARBIDGE RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

**July 28, 2016
Elko, Nevada**

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for providing this opportunity to speak before you. My name is John Baldwin, and I am the District Ranger for the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger District. The districts were administratively combined under one district ranger in 2013. We have two offices, one in Elko and the other in Wells, Nevada.

My testimony today will update the committee on the following five programs as they relate to Elko County and a small portion of White Pine County on the southern Rubys. Those program areas are:

1. Vegetation and Fuels Management
2. Minerals Program
3. Rangeland Management
4. Wild Horse and Burro Management
5. Recreation and Wilderness

First, I will provide a brief description of the District.

BACKGROUND

The Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger District is located in northeastern Nevada and offers some of the most breathtaking scenery in the state. The majority of the district is located in Elko County. A small portion of the southern Ruby Mountains is located in White Pine County. The district has about 25 fulltime permanent employees and another 10-12 seasonal employees. We also provide support to the Santa Rosa District north of Winnemucca.

The district contains about 1.2 million acres and has outstanding recreational opportunities, including camping, hunting, fishing, motorized and non-motorized Forest access, and wildlife viewing opportunities. The district has thirteen developed campgrounds, four developed day-use areas, and three designated wilderness areas. We have great wildlife viewing opportunities and high-quality mule deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain goat and sage grouse habitat. We have large areas of priority and focal sage grouse habitat. With that, I will go into more detail about some of the programs on the District.

VEGETATION AND FUELS MANAGEMENT

Our district priorities continue to include large scale, restoration type projects that provide both vegetation and fuel management benefits. We've recently completed the environmental analysis of a project located in the vicinity of Overland Pass, at the southern end of the Ruby Mountains. The project involves a partnership between the Bureau of Land Management, the Nevada Division of Forestry, the Nevada Department of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bald Mountain Mine. The project will treat about 18,750 acres of land in an effort to improve mule deer and sage grouse habitat and reduce the potential of devastating wildfire by reducing pinyon-juniper encroachment via mastication, hand thinning, prescribed fire, designation of green fuel-wood cutting areas, and/or chaining. About 13,000 of these acres are on Forest Service lands. We currently have a contract to treat 2,000 acres.

This year, we have the Bear Creek project in the Jarbidge area to reduce wildfire risk by completing a fuel break above the community and thin along the Jarbidge/Charleston road. Last year we day-lighted the Lamoille Canyon road where vegetation had encroached into the ditches, impeding drainage, and onto the highway. We also reduced fuel loadings around private special-use cabins.

After large fires we normally complete restoration efforts such as seeding. Post-Bull Run Fire seeding has been a recent success.

MINERALS PROGRAM

Northeastern Nevada hosts some of the largest producing gold mines in the world. Jerritt Canyon mine, the largest locatable mine on National Forest System lands in the nation, is located near Mountain City and is currently operating and producing gold. Although gold prices are lower, the district still receives a steady number of plans of operation for precious metals exploration, primarily gold, for the approval process and permitting. The minerals staff is currently processing nine plans of operation for small exploration drilling projects and one plan of operation for an open pit mine and two underground mines. In addition to processing locatable plans of operation, the minerals staff also continues to administer over 525 existing active plans of operation located throughout the forest.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

The district permits cattle and sheep grazing on 123 allotments. About 92 local businesses and ranchers have grazing permits. We strive to ensure our grazing permittees have successful grazing seasons and we address drought conditions with them on the ground on a case by case basis, or as conditions warrant. It's common for permittees to voluntarily adjust their turn on or turn off dates or adjust livestock numbers due to drought conditions based on utilization standards on the allotments. Drought is an ongoing concern and can affect periods of grazing use.

Restoration of burned rangeland is a priority for the district. About 7,000 acres of priority mule deer and sage grouse habitat that burned in the 2012 Bull Run Complex fire was aerially seeded as a result of a partnership between the Forest Service and the Nevada Department of Wildlife in 2013. About forty miles of fence was burned in the Bull Run Complex and has been replaced.

About 600 acres of rangeland and priority mule deer and sage grouse habitat was burned in the 2013 Smith Ranch Fire, in the vicinity of the Ruby Mountains. The affected area was aerially seeded with native forbs, grasses and shrubs; again a partnership between the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Forest Service.

WILD HORSE AND BURRO MANAGEMENT

The southern end of the Ruby Mountains has the Cherry Springs Wild Horse Management Area. An aerial census conducted by the BLM in 2014 indicated wild horse numbers were within the Appropriate Management Level of 48-68 animals. Numbers and conditions will continue to be monitored and management coordinated with the Ely and Elko BLM Districts.

RECREATION AND WILDERNESS

The recreation and wilderness programs provide the public high-quality, memorable outdoor experiences, and beautiful scenery.

We are into our fifth year with a concessionaire who manages the camping sites and picnic day use areas at our most popular and busy destinations, such as Lamoille Canyon, and South Ruby, Angel Creek and Angel Lake campgrounds. They have been successful in managing the large number of visitors that come to the district in the summer by providing information, and performing maintenance and improvements on our facilities. We also use a volunteer program for managing our Mountain City and Jarbidge developed and dispersed campsites.

In cooperation with the local Northeast Nevada Stewardship Group and the Great Basin Institute, 3.8 miles of the Lamoille-Talbot Trail was constructed. The Forest Service lacks easements through much of the private lands that would otherwise provide access to public land. We continue to work with NDOW and land owners to gain more access.

Our special use program continues to permit and administer outfitter and guiding business ventures for helicopter skiing, fishing, overnight backpacking, wildlife viewing, overnight stock pack trips, big game hunting, drop camps, game packing, upland bird hunting, trail rides, shuttle services, auto/bus interpretation tours, and snowmobile guiding.

CONCLUSION

This concludes my prepared comments. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for this opportunity to speak. I will be happy to answer any questions.

END OF TESTIMONY