

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

**January 27, 2012
Carson City, Nevada**

**MIKE CRAWLEY
District Ranger
Bridgeport Ranger District**

Introduction. Madam Chairwoman and committee members, thank you for providing this opportunity to provide testimony to the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Mike Crawley. I am the District Ranger for the Bridgeport Ranger District on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. I regret that I am unable to attend and deliver this testimony in person, or to be available for questions at this time. I would be happy to respond in person to any questions at a later meeting, or through a written response. My testimony today will update the committee regarding the following projects, programs, and issues on the Bridgeport Ranger District:

These topics will include:

- 1) Fire and Fuels Management
- 2) Bridgeport Ranger District Travel Management Plan Highlights
- 3) Sage Grouse Habitat Management
- 4) Noxious Weed Management
- 5) Grazing of Domestic Livestock

EXHIBIT M – LANDS
Document consists of 11 pages.
Entire Exhibit provided.
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- 6) Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep update
- 7) Minerals, Geology and Geothermal Resources
- 8) Secure Rural Schools – Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)

District Overview. The Bridgeport Ranger District is an area of approximately 1.2 million acres in western Nevada and eastern California. Approximately sixty-seven percent of the District, or a little over 800,000 acres, falls within the state of Nevada, in Douglas, Lyon and Mineral counties. The remaining 33 percent, or about 600,000 acres, of the District lies within Mono County, California. The District Office is located in Bridgeport, California, approximately 90 miles south of Carson City along state highway 395. The Bridgeport Ranger District is tied closely to northeastern Nevada economically as well as geographically. The Nevada communities of Carson City, Gardnerville, and Minden provide shopping, housing, and medical facilities that many of our Forest Service employees at Bridgeport utilize.

The Bridgeport Ranger District is also home to the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center where some 10,000 to 15,000 Marines annually receive training, preparing them for overseas deployments.

Fire Management. Although the current fire weather outlook for the first quarter of 2012 is expected to be “normal” through April for our portion of the Great Basin, the previous three months have seen anything but normal fire activity in the wider area for this time of year. We continue to be attentive to the occurrence and risk of fire and the effects it has on the lives and property of those we serve and who are our neighbors. Risk

Management, as discussed by Forest Supervisor Higgins in her testimony, is an integral part of our planning and implementation of actions taken on every fire of every size.

Bridgeport District fire resources, in addition to carrying out fire management, fire protection, and fire prevention programs for the District, provide fire management support both locally along the eastern Sierra Front (in both Nevada and California) and nationally as requested. Currently, the Bridgeport Ranger District is home to two Type 6 (light – approximately 200 gallon capacity each) wildland Engines, one Type 4 (heavy – approximately 750 gallon capacity) wildland Engine, and a Helitack Module that provides seasonal management of a Type 3 Light helicopter in Bridgeport and a Type 1 Heavy helicopter located at Stead. In addition, our skilled fire management leaders supervise as many as 30 seasonal firefighters on the District

Firefighting resources from the District continue to work with other federal, state, and local jurisdictions to provide mutual aid and operate initial attack on a “closest available forces” concept. My District continues to build its base of cooperative mutual aid fire agreements with fire departments in Douglas, Lyon, and Mineral counties. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management and the Nevada Division of Forestry remain major partners. As a whole, we are far stronger working together than individually.

Fuels Management. Over the past nine years, the District has treated or “reduced” over 5,000 acres of hazardous fuels on the Nevada portion of the District. These treatments have focused on:

- Wildland urban interface concerns;
- Sage grouse habitat improvement;
- Pinyon and juniper encroachment; and
- Water quality improvement in the East Walker River, specifically in the upland and riparian wildlife habitat at Rosachi Ranch.

Planned Fuels Management Projects for 2012:

- Approximately 170 acres of pinyon/juniper has already been cut, piled, and burned in the China Camp area both to improve sage grouse habitat and to reduce the threat of damage to valuable cultural resources – funded through a combination of appropriated dollars and grants supplied through Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW). More acres are planned this year with funding provided by both NDOW and from Title II of the Secure Rural Schools Act as authorized by the Lyon-Mineral Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)
- Continued prescribed burning of acreage on the Rosachi Ranch property, acquired in 1996, to improve water quality on the Walker River in upland and riparian wildlife habitat.
- Projects in the area of Sweetwater Summit and Long Doctor Spring will reduce the encroachment of pinyon/juniper onto sage/grasslands on approximately 1,000 acres. Funding for project implementation is being provided through the Lyon-Mineral RAC.

- A Gardnerville Boy Scout troop has been, and continues to be, active in providing small “cards” on fences to help prevent injury to sage grouse during flight, and to further remove small pinyon and juniper trees from sage grouse habitat.

Travel Management. In Forest Supervisor Jeanne Higgins’ testimony, she outlined for you the status of the Forest’s travel management planning efforts. I’d like to highlight a few of the features of our 2010 decision on the Bridgeport Ranger District.

- Out of approximately 650 miles of unauthorized, user-created routes, 220 miles were designated as National Forest System roads.
- Cross-country motorized travel is not allowed. We are continuing our education and outreach efforts to individuals and groups to help us maintain existing routes, and not add new routes that would cause additional resource damage.
- The District recognizes that motorized outdoor recreation is an important activity to local citizens in many areas of the District in Nevada, as well as those who come to Nevada from nearby states. We have some truly spectacular locations that are accessed by four-wheel drive vehicles, ATVs, motorcycles, and UTVs. Activities range from driving for scenic appreciation to ATV tours and endurance motorcycle rides. Locations of these activities are often home to fragile and sensitive plant species. It is important for us to maintain access to these sites, but to do so requires users to stay on existing routes and trails to prevent damage to these sensitive ecosystems.
- In 2012 the Bridgeport Ranger District will open a dialog with the public, seeking input on our Travel Management Plan to determine if there were mapping errors

or if information exists that was not considered previously. This dialog will continue into November of this year. Maps will be available at the district office for the public to view and discuss with me and my staff. This is part of the Forest's ongoing effort to update and improve our travel management process. In addition to this focused effort, new information is always welcomed at any time.

- Motor Vehicle Use Maps are available at the district office in Bridgeport and at the Supervisor's Office in Sparks. This map displays designated routes available for use by Forest visitors.
- The District manages a congressionally designated winter recreation area near Sonora Pass on our California side. We recently approved the location of a snowmobile crossing of the Pacific Crest Trail to access the Bridgeport Winter Recreation Area from Highway 108. Many snowmobilers from western Nevada come to this area for the high quality snow found here and enjoy recreating on the Bridgeport Ranger District during the winter.

Sage Grouse Habitat. The sage grouse has become a species of intense interest lately. No one knows this better than those who live and work in the state of Nevada. Sage grouse habitat is found throughout the sage/grasslands of Nevada. The Bridgeport Ranger District is home to two of several Population Management Units (PMU) for the Bi-State population found up and down the eastern Sierra in both Nevada and California. Several past, present, and future projects on the Bridgeport Ranger District actively address the goal of improving habitat for sage grouse. These projects are designed to reduce pinyon encroachment into sagebrush habitats. Excessive pinyon

reduces the availability of water that can be used for sustaining sagebrush communities. When Pinyon pine dominates an area, it gradually replaces sagebrush (habitat and breeding grounds), which in turn minimizes sage grouse use of the area. Increase in pinyon/juniper trees also contributes to greater predation of the grouse by raptors that use the trees as hunting perches.

Projects previously mentioned in the Sweetwater Summit, Long Doctor Spring, and China Camp areas, while providing reduction of fuels and potentially preventing damage to historic and cultural sites provide major benefits to sage grouse habitat. Many of our projects are planned to accomplish multiple benefits for resources.

District representatives continue to participate in local and regional committees and efforts focused on widely shared interest in improvement of sage grouse habitat.

Part of our current travel management strategy is to protect the sage grouse by closing key habitat locations to cross-country motorized travel, particularly those areas containing active “leks” or breeding grounds.

District resource specialists apply the latest science as well as state and federal guidance on sage grouse to evaluate project proposals and to mitigate, where possible, actions on the land that might otherwise have adverse effects on sage grouse numbers and habitat while trying to accommodate other uses.

Noxious Weed Management. The focus of our Noxious Weed Program is to treat noxious weed infestations along the East Walker River. Noxious weeds are not widespread on the District. The problem area is concentrated on and near the Rosaschi Ranch along the East Walker River. The ranch is a well-known and well-used year-round wild trout fishery that is popular with anglers from around the West, especially by fly-fishermen. As with noxious weeds on other rivers in Nevada, like the Truckee and Carson Rivers, we are seeing weeds establish downstream of the source on private and public lands.

In an ongoing effort to eradicate noxious weeds, the Bridgeport Ranger District is pursuing the following actions:

- For the past several years, we have contracted with the Walker River Cooperative Weed Management Area to inventory and treat noxious weed populations along the East Walker River.
- The Mason and Smith Valley Conservation District was approved for 2 years of funding by the Lyon-Mineral County RAC. This funding is designated for noxious weed treatment on both the East and West Walker Rivers in Lyon County, Nevada on National Forest System land (NFS) and private lands in 2012 and 2013.
- We collaborate with the Walker River Cooperative Weed Management Area to help with funding, equipment, and project design strategy to reduce noxious weeds at Rosaschi Ranch and along the greater East Walker River.

- Part of our strategy is to use prescribed fire on the former ranch property, prior to herbicide treatment, to maximize the effectiveness of noxious weed removal.
- Treatment of salt cedar populations along the East Walker River began in 2010. The treatments seem to be effective. Several more years of treatment, with continued monitoring will be necessary.
- The Bridgeport Ranger District is also a member of the Early Detection Rapid Response Group. This 12-member group is comprised of individuals from the Walker River Cooperative Weed Management Area, the Nevada Department of Agriculture, the state of Nevada, and local community members. The Early Detection Rapid Response Group meets bi-annually to share noxious weed location information and strategies to address known outbreaks.

Domestic Livestock Grazing. The Bridgeport Ranger District administers grazing of domestic livestock on 55 allotments in both Nevada and California, and two Wild Horse Territories. Thirty-two of these grazing allotments are partially or wholly in Nevada. These allotments provide 23,000 Animal Unit Months (AUM) of forage, with some being grazed during the summer season and others used as winter range.

The two Wild Horse Territories administered by the Bridgeport Ranger District are Powell Mountain and Montgomery Pass. Powell Mountain has an AML of 29 animals. Recent history includes gathers in 2003 (32 head removed) and 2007 (80 head removed). The herd population is thought to be 25 head at present.

Montgomery Pass Territory encompasses portions of the Bridgeport Ranger District, Inyo National Forest, Carson City BLM and Bishop BLM. The Inyo National Forest is the lead agency for the management of this territory. A recent count of the Montgomery Pass herd resulted in an approximate herd size of 286 animals. The Montgomery Pass herd has no set AML. The herd seems to be increasing at a higher rate over the last 6 to 7 years, possibly from horses migrating in from other territories.

Domestic Sheep Grazing in Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Habitat. Domestic sheep grazing has been suspended for the 2011 and 2012 grazing seasons on three allotments on the Bridgeport Ranger District due to their proximity to the federally listed endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep populations. The District is considering a proposal to convert the three sheep allotments to cattle allotments.

Permitted domestic sheep grazing was canceled on one allotment in 2010. The Bridgeport and Carson Ranger Districts are working with the displaced permittee to find alternative grazing allotments.

Minerals, Geology, Geothermal Resources. The Bridgeport Ranger District continues to process requests and proposals for minerals and geothermal projects. As already discussed in previous testimony, a large portion of the area currently being analyzed under the Geothermal Leasing on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is on the Bridgeport Ranger District. We currently have one other geothermal leasing issue we are pursuing, a gold mine expansion, a clay mine proposal, and several more applications for minerals projects pending. Locations of leasing, exploration, and possible development of geothermal energy sources on the District will be influenced by state and federal requirements for sage grouse habitat maintenance and restoration.

Secure Rural Schools – Resource Advisory Committee, The Lyon-Mineral Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) was officially formed in early 2011, following extensive outreach and recruitment efforts to find and involve interested citizens in communities within Lyon and Mineral counties.

Thirteen members were approved by the Secretary of Agriculture and seated on the RAC. Our first meeting was held in April; by the end of August the committee had met to organize, solicited project proposals, met twice to evaluate the proposals, and recommended over \$500,000 in projects. Their level of interest, work ethic, integrity to purpose, and follow-through is highly commendable. We look forward to continued

association with these interested citizens of Nevada in the implementation of these specific projects and others in the future.

Conclusion. I would like to thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and committee members, for this opportunity to present testimony for your information and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding my testimony at any time in person, by phone, or by email.

-END OF TESTIMONY-