

Charlie Myers

County Commissioner

Elko County Nevada

**House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**

March 12, 2012 Testimony

Currently the USFS is in the process of implementing the Humboldt – Toiyabe National Forest Travel Management Plan (TMP) in Elko, Nevada. The FEIS has been prepared and published and is pending a record of decision. Elko County has numerous concerns with the four alternatives and the preferred alternative as written. We believe that the four alternatives and preferred alternative will create severe negative impacts to our economy, wildlife and wildlife habitat. We also believe that the Travel Management Plan as proposed is in direct violation of the NEPA process and requirements. We believe that the USFS did not and has not provided the best scientific data and information to support all of the limitations and prohibitions as written in the proposed actions of the Travel Management Plan.

Elko County was initially told at a County Commission meeting in January 09 by the FS District Ranger that “no” roads would be closed. Then the next month the other FS District Ranger told the Commission there would be 800 to 900 miles of roads closed. During the initial public process the maps were wrong, mislabeled and did not correctly capture all roads that were to be considered. Elko County has spent countless hours and many thousands of dollars attempting to coordinate and cooperate with the United States Forest Service in their planning efforts to implement the Forest Travel Management Plan. We have met with the FS District Rangers, State and local officials in our efforts to provide additional pertinent scientific data and information. We have 104 documented encounters with the US Forest Service concerning Travel Management. These encounters were direct meetings with the Forest Service, meetings with Forest Supervisor Ed

Monieg, County Commission meetings, several County Hearings and written requests that were submitted to the Forest Service for information. Elko County wants the opportunity to review the scientific data used to justify the closing of any road or trail and documented damage to the Forest Service land by users in our county. We had an economic impact study prepared by a qualified and experienced professional that was provided to the USFS prior to the development of the FEIS. We feel that we have made every effort to apply ourselves as cooperating / coordinating agency during the NEPA and USFS planning process. This has been ineffective as the USFS does not appear to be interested in addressing the issues that we believe will cause severe negative impacts affecting our economy should the Travel Management Plan be implemented as proposed.

Seventy-five percent of the lands used for outdoor recreation in Elko County are managed by the Federal Government (7.5 million ac.). The total economic impact of outdoor recreation to Elko County is almost \$165 million. This equates to \$22 per year per acre of Federally Managed Lands. The Personal Income from outdoor recreation to local employment is over \$40 million or \$5.39 per year per acre and local tax revenue of .90 per year per acre. These three combined incomes represent \$28.30 per year per acre to the Elko County economy for outdoor recreation. What is concerning is the FS Economist in the Record of Decision determined that the economic impact of the TMP was minimal or not significant.

Our economy revolves around three major components, mining, agriculture and tourism. Elko County and many of our local entities have spent many years promoting Elko County as a recreation destination, due primarily to the accessibility of our remote and vast areas of our county. The three components of our economy rely heavily on the ability to access and utilize public lands.

Elko County has for many years been the hunting mecca for the State of Nevada. We have the majority of big game that is hunted in our state (elk, sheep and mule deer). Travel Management will certainly have a negative impact on hunters coming to Elko County which in turn will be a significant loss of revenue for our county and local businesses. NEPA requires that an action such as prohibition of motorized vehicle use must be based on the best available commercial scientific

data. Elko County has asked the FS on four different occasions for the scientific data used for the ROD determination and the last request for this data was through the Freedom of Information Act. We have yet to receive any data.

The Travel Management Plan as proposed will become the law; it will make criminals of the law abiding citizens, due from lack of knowledge or from utilizing places that they have historically accessed and used for many years. The penalty for being on a closed road whether “marked or not marked” is up to a \$5000 fine and up to 6 months in jail or both once the Forrest Service Travel Management Plan is implemented (36 CFR 261.13). It will severely and negatively impact our economy forever.

Elko County asks you for your help and intervention into this National agenda of prohibition of multiple uses and motorized uses on our public lands. I continually wonder why there is a “No Action” alternative when it is never used and certainly in my opinion would be the right alternative in this case

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