

**Testimony of Shaaron Netherton  
Executive Director  
Friends of Nevada Wilderness**

**Hearing on H.R. 1107 “Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act”  
May 23, 2017 10am**

**Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives**

Dear Chairman McClintock and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of Friends of Nevada Wilderness on the Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act (H.R. 1107). My name is Shaaron Netherton and I am the Executive Director of Friends of Nevada Wilderness. Friends of Nevada Wilderness is dedicated to preserving all qualified Nevada public lands as wilderness, protecting all present and potential wilderness from ongoing threats, educating the public about the values of and need for wilderness, and improving the management and restoration of wild lands. Friends of Nevada Wilderness has been working on wilderness protection and public land legislation since 1985.

I would like to express appreciation for Congressman Amodei’s support for local efforts to resolve issues on public lands. His unwavering backing of the Pine Forest Working group in neighboring Humboldt County, whose stakeholder-driven work led to the passage of the Pine Forest Range Wilderness, had universal support in rural Humboldt County, across the state and the complete support of the entire Nevada delegation.

Much has been said over the years about the Nevada Model of crafting legislation on a largely county-by-county basis where stakeholders work together to find solutions to local public lands issues, and we appreciate Congressman Amodei’s leadership in these efforts. Nevadans know how to come to the table in good faith and work together to develop comprehensive bills that enhance economic development, conserve public lands, improve recreation opportunities, and preserve Nevada’s rural way of life.

As a long time Nevadan who has lived in both rural and urban parts of the state, working on public lands bills across the state has given me a deep appreciation for the broad spectrum of

people that call Nevada home. Working together with county commissioners, ranchers, landowners, sportsmen, miners, exploration geologists, recreationists and townspeople has helped me understand that that while we all have differences, we share more in common than what divides us. In general, Nevadans care deeply about their public lands. Through recreation and work these lands help shape who we are as Nevadans. We care about quality of life for ourselves and our kids and grandkids, we care about having good habitat for our diverse wildlife, and we care about the wide open spaces and want to see these lands managed well.

Nevada has a solid history and track record of stakeholders and lawmakers working together to find common ground on our public lands. The process leading up to the Pershing County bill resulted in protections for some spectacular landscapes, but also agreements to forgo protection for lands that may have been important to other stakeholders or for other uses. By listening to each other and finding a path forward, each of the groups working on this process were able to make gains but were also willing to give things away to end up with an outcome that was supported by all major stakeholders.

I have served as executive director of Friends of Nevada Wilderness for 17 years and before that had a career with the Bureau of Land Management for 22 years. In my role with BLM I spent much of my time working in the wilderness and recreation program across Nevada but also served as a Field Manager in central Oregon. I think my background brings a balanced perspective to the work that Friends of Nevada Wilderness does for Wilderness and other protected lands in Nevada.

### **Background of Wilderness in Pershing County**

In the 1980's the Bureau of Land Management identified five Wilderness Study Areas within Pershing County: Selenite Mountains, Mt. Limbo, China Mountain, Tobin Range and the Augusta Mountains. The Augusta Mountain WSA (now named Cain Mountain) spanned three counties and H.R. 1107 deals only with the portion in Pershing County. There are no lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service within Pershing County.

Next, during 2004 through 2006, Friends of Nevada Wilderness participated with Pershing County and other stakeholders in the Pershing County Checkerboard Committee process to look at potential wilderness designations and other lands issues, including how to resolve and consolidate the public/private checkerboard land ownership pattern along Interstate-80. While this process didn't result in legislation, it did result in a good place for taking up the effort again in 2015.

Using those 2006 wilderness recommendations as a starting point, the Pershing County Commission, with various stakeholders, initiated a process in 2015 to work on a Pershing County Public Lands Bill. Meetings continued through 2016, and during that time, there were many formal and informal meetings with various stakeholders about wilderness and other portions of the bill. We had extensive contact with the ranchers reviewing detailed boundaries, access needs for water developments and other ranching needs.

In order to create the strongest wilderness proposal possible, Friends of Nevada Wilderness reached out to the ranchers who had grazing permits within the wilderness proposals. This included multiple meetings at their ranches, field tours (driving, foot and horseback riding) and then checking and rechecking maps to ensure the boundaries and access routes were correct. After extensive meetings, ranchers had a good understanding of how wilderness designation could impact their operations. I will share one of those stories with you.

#### Grandfathers' Wilderness Story

The entire Tobin Crest supports the productive sustainable rangeland and the critical watersheds that adjacent ranches depend upon. The crest is laced with cold, clear springs which in turn are the heads of a series of steep, rugged and beautiful watersheds. There are a number of important ranching outfits on the west flank and the Saval/Bufalo Valley ranch along the entire east flank that thrive because of these waters. In addition, the Saval ranch and the Siard ranch have rich historic roots that span a century of wild western history.

These ranchers helped draw the wilderness boundary for the Tobin Crest. The idea to re-name the Tobin Crest area to "Grandfathers' Wilderness" was brought forward by them. We fully support this name change as a way to honor their grandfathers who started ranching at the base of this mountain crest 100 years ago. The name also honors the lasting legacy and living heritage of the ranching way of life in Nevada. By preserving this area under the name of "Grandfathers' Wilderness" we also honor all of those who came before, living in the wide open spaces of Nevada.

#### **Wilderness in the Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act**

H.R. 1107 would:

- Designate seven areas as wilderness totaling about 136,000 acres. These wilderness areas would be managed under the provisions in the 1964 Wilderness Act.
- The wilderness language in H.R. 1107 is the Nevada language that has been used for all

public lands bills within the state.

- Adjust boundaries of WSAs to resolve longstanding management concerns and conflicts.
- Allows Pershing County to settle the long-standing WSAs once and for all.

These seven areas represent a cross section of some of the most beautiful lands in Pershing County. They offer great wildlife habitat, breathtaking vistas of the expansive Nevada scenery and little known places to get away. As development continues in Pershing County, these wilderness areas will retain their wild character for future generations.

For more information on each of the wilderness areas please refer to the supplemental testimony information presented that includes photos and descriptions of each one of these areas.

<i><b>Wilderness Name</b></i>	<i><b>Acres in H.R. 1107</b></i>	<i><b>Original WSA Acres</b></i>	<i><b>Acres Released from WSA</b></i>
<b>Cain Mountain</b> (Formerly Augusta Mountain WSA)	12,339	24,489 (In Pershing County*)	12,200
<b>Bluewing</b>	24,900	0	N/A
<b>Selenite Peak</b>	22,822	32,041	9,100
<b>Mt. Limbo</b>	11,855	23,702	13,100
<b>North Sahwave</b>	13,875	0	N/A
<b>Grandfathers'</b> (Includes portions of China Mountain and Tobin Range WSAs along with Tobin Crest)	35,339	10,358 (China Mtn WSA)	2,200 (China Mtn. WSA)
		13,107 (Tobin Range WSA)	12,000 (Tobin Range WSA)
<b>Fencemaker</b>	14,942	0	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>136,072</b>	103,697	48,600

\* 64,883 acres of the Augusta Mtn WSA remain as a WSA in Lander and Churchill Counties)

## **Wilderness Study Area Released in the Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act**

H.R. 1107 would:

- Release about 48,600 acres of Wilderness Study Areas in portions of the Augusta Mountain, China Mountain, Mt. Limbo, Selenite Mountains, and Tobin Range wilderness study areas.
- Release the lower slopes of the ranges where most of the cherrystem roads, range developments and weed infestations are located.
- Eliminate lower value wilderness study area acres, reduce conflicts and management concerns and focus protection on the higher value wilderness.
- Offset some of the released wilderness study area acres for the higher wilderness value areas of the Tobin Crest (Grandfathers' Wilderness) and the inclusion of North Sahwave, Bluewing, and Fencemaker, areas identified for wilderness during the Pershing County Checkerboard Land Process.

### **Why are there areas being considered that are not wilderness study areas?**

During the Checkerboard Lands Committee process sponsored by Pershing County Commission over the period of time from 2004-2006, wilderness was one of the topics addressed. After a series of meetings and field trips, the Checkerboard Committee recommended to the Pershing County Commission that North Sahwave, Bluewing, Fencemaker, and Tobin Crest areas be considered for wilderness. The compromises made at that time were agreements to completely release the Selenite WSA and well as large portions of Mt. Limbo WSA and the Tobin Range WSA. This proposal was then adopted by the Pershing County Commission on March 1, 2006.

When the Winnemucca Bureau of Land Management began working on identifying resource inventory information as a part of the Winnemucca Resource Management Plan (RMP), the BLM included the four non-WSA areas identified by the Checkerboard Lands Committee as having wilderness values since they were identified through a public process sponsored by the Pershing County Commission. When the Winnemucca BLM RMP was finalized, North Sahwave, Bluewing, Fencemaker, and Tobin Crest (now Grandfathers') were included as part of the final Record of Decision for the management plan.

When the Pershing County lands bill process started up again in 2014, these recommendations were brought forward as the starting place for new discussions.

The end result is legislation that resolves longstanding land tenure issues, promotes economic development, enhances recreation, protects some of Pershing County's wildest lands, and

preserves Nevada's rural way of life. Nevada's counties which are made up overwhelmingly by public lands and over and over again across the state diverse stakeholders have come together to develop comprehensive county based legislation done the Nevada way. Sometimes these processes create new friendships, develop trust and result in better ways of working together across other issues.

I would like to close this testimony with an expert from the opinion piece crafted by myself, Debra Struhsacker from Pershing Gold Corporation, and Vance Vesco, owner of the Vesco Ranches. I think this provides a good summary of why this locally-driven, stakeholder collaborative process used to develop the bill was so successful. This is truly a model process of democracy at work.

"Getting to this point was not easy. Everyone had to compromise, and no one got everything they wanted. But the end product of this give-and-take has broad support and advances all of our interests.

This is how the process is supposed to work. It's the Nevada way— a grassroots effort in which neighbors rolled up their sleeves and worked together to solve problems in a way that helps everyone. We applaud the County Commissioners', Senator Heller's, Senator Reid's and Congressman Amodei's vision and leadership and look forward to working with them as the bill advances through Congress. "

Friends of Nevada Wilderness appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of the a Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act look forward to this bill moving swiftly through the committee and passing the House. We are working with Nevada's senators on a companion bill that – like all other bills before them and hopefully all future legislation for Nevada – is crafted using the Nevada model.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before your subcommittee on Federal Lands.

Sincerely,



Shaaron Netherton  
Executive Director  
Friends of Nevada Wilderness