

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Statement

STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD BRYAN
before the
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
May 3, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to testify today on S.439, a bill I've sponsored to adjust the boundary of the Toiyabe National Forest in Douglas County, Nevada.

S.439 would amend the National Forest and Public Lands of Nevada Enhancement Act of 1988 by making a minor boundary adjustment to the Toiyabe National Forest for the purpose of facilitating a land exchange with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The land exchange, known locally as the "Lincoln-Douglas exchange," involves the disposal of up to 16,377 acres of BLM land in Lincoln County, Nevada, and the acquisition of conservation easements on approximately 2,000 acres of privately owned agricultural land in Douglas County, Nevada.

The Lincoln-Douglas exchange provides the BLM with the opportunity to assist two Nevada communities on opposite ends of the state in their common effort to manage growth and development more responsibly.

The federal government currently controls 98% of the land base in Lincoln County, the most of any county in the State of Nevada. Not surprisingly, Lincoln County is one of the poorest counties in the state. There is a desperate need for federal land to be transferred into private ownership in order to provide for economic expansion and diversification. The resulting expansion of the local tax base will also serve to lessen the county's reliance on the under funded Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program to provide basic government services.

The BLM lands which will be made available for private ownership through this exchange have been carefully identified through a public process which has transpired over ten years. The NEPA process that is part of this exchange will ensure that no important public values are lost in disposing of these federal lands.

In Douglas County, a much different scenario is unfolding. The scenic beauty, rustic lifestyle and overall quality of life shared by those who live in the Carson Valley is no longer Nevada's best kept secret. Over the last several years, the dramatic increase in the population of the Minden-Gardnerville area and the accompanying development throughout the Carson Valley has presented difficult challenges for community leaders. Fortunately, Douglas County officials, conservationists, developers, and other residents have united in their effort to preserve the open spaces that have come to define the character of the landscape in the Carson Valley. A community based planning effort is currently underway to identify options for better managing growth in the valley. The Lincoln-Douglas exchange is viewed as a key component of that effort.

The agricultural conservation easements to be acquired by BLM will limit subdivision, non-farm development and other uses that are inconsistent with commercial agriculture. A significant component of the exchange from the perspective of Douglas County is that the easements will permanently protect important farmland while keeping the land in private ownership and on local tax roles. Broader federal interests are also served by preventing development in the floodplain of the Carson River and protecting the view sheds of the Carson Valley and surrounding Sierra Nevada and Pine Nut Mountains.

The boundary adjustment legislation I have sponsored to facilitate this exchange does not involve the transfer of any public land from the Forest Service to the BLM; the adjustment only affects private land. It would simply enable the private landowners in Douglas County to work with one federal agency, the BLM, in acquiring the easements.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to testify today on this important piece of legislation for the State of Nevada.

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