

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health U.S. Congressman Jim Gibbons June 17, 1999

Madame Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for having me here today to discuss an issue that is very important to the people of Jarbidge, Nevada.

As you may know, Jarbidge is a small, rural community in Elko County. Known historically for its contribution to Nevada's mining industry, this community is surrounded by National forest lands and the Jarbidge Wilderness Area.

Within this area is a small cemetery, under administration of the Forest Service, where generations of residents of this historic community have been laid to rest.

The earliest tombstones are dated in the very early 1900's and some members of the Jarbidge community claim that this land was used as a cemetery long before it was designated as Forest Service land.

Since 1915, the Jarbidge Cemetery has been operated under a permit to Elko County by a Special Use authorization which runs periodically for 10 and occasionally 20 years.

In an effort to remove the uncertainty about the continued existence of this cemetery and to resolve the operational responsibility, the residents of Jarbidge have long expressed an interest in having two acres, containing the cemetery, conveyed to the county so they might have a permanent, private cemetery.

Madame Chairman, that is why I have introduced H.R. 1231, a bill that would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately two acres of National Forest lands to Elko County, Nevada, for continued use as a cemetery.

Unfortunately, it is my understanding that the Forest Service opposes H.R. 1231. They feel that these two acres should be sold at fair market value.

I believe that if this is in fact true, the Forest Service should hand their heads, these people are asking for a cemetery not for land to build commercial or residential enterprises.

Please understand that the residents are asking for conveyance of this land because they, and I, feel it is ludicrous to pay for the graves of our parents and grandparents.

Many of those buried at Jarbidge are miners and their families, in fact, are founders of the small Elko County community.

Given the hundreds of thousands of acres administered by the Forest Service in this region and their oversight of the Jarbidge Wilderness, conveyance of **TWO ACRES**, -- not 200 acres not even 20 acres, -- for the purpose allowing these residents to privately own the resting place of their relatives, seems both rational and fair.

Keep in mind that we are talking about a cemetery - the final resting place for ourselves and our loved ones.

--- We are not talking about a utility company's power line crossing public land.

--- We are not talking about a concessionaire's lease at a marina.

--- We are not talking about an outfitter's use of land for a base camp or any other typical forest service use permit.

Madame Chairman, let's think logically about this legislation. I believe it's our governments **civic duty**, the duty to do what is right on behalf of America and our constituents, to convey these two small acres.

I am sure that if we payed for a national poll a vast majority, if not all Americans, would agree that the conveyance of this land, free of charge, would be in our public interest and a good use of our public lands.

Therefore I would ask that you and this committee assist me with passage of this bill. Thank you for your having me here, and thank you for listening on behalf of the people of Jarbidge.

I will now yield for any questions you may have concerning my legislation.

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