

Statement Before the U.S. House of Representatives
House Committee on Natural Resource
"Improving Federal Land Management and Use to Better
Serve Las Vegas Valley Communities" Field Hearing
North Las Vegas City Hall
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Chairman Bishop, Congressman Hardy and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and thank you for coming to Las Vegas to hear the needs of our community related to public lands in Nevada.

My name is Steve Parrish. I am the General Manager and Chief Engineer of the Clark County Regional Flood District. The Clark County Regional Flood Control District was established in 1985 by the Nevada Legislature to fund and coordinate the planning, construction and maintenance of flood control facilities within Clark County operated by our six member entities. To date we have constructed 91 detention basins and more than 600 miles of flood control channels and storm drains, investing over \$1.7 billion in the safety of our communities' homes, businesses and residents, as well as the millions of visitors to this area each year.

While we do live in the desert, our limited rainfall often comes quickly and in large amounts creating flash flooding.

Today, I'd like to address a concern of the District, which is shared by Clark County, all of the Valley's cities and other public agencies serving our residents.

Much of the urban Las Vegas area is surrounded by federally owned lands. During the height of our growth from the late 1980s to the early years of the new century, many public agencies, including the Regional Flood Control District, relied on federal lands to construct and operate critical community facilities needed to ensure public safety and to provide the infrastructure required for our residents in one of the fastest growing cities in America. Most of these lands were and still are acquired through the BLM either under a federal right-of-way grant or through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act established by Congress.

The facilities include schools, fire stations, water treatment plants, reservoirs, parks, roadways and, for our needs, flood control facilities. We are grateful for our partnership and the working relationship we have nurtured with the BLM in acquiring these lands to meet our community's need.

When an application is approved and a lease granted, the BLM imposes certain conditions or stipulations on the use of the land. These conditions often create

operational obstacles for the local entities. They can vary widely from lease to lease even for identical uses. But more troubling, the stipulations often restrict the public agency from being able to operate the facility as it was intended. With some, BLM approvals for minor programmatic or simple management changes are required. This places a costly and unnecessary burden on the staff of the BLM and the public agency or city.

I'd like to give just a few examples from the dozens that exist:

- A City of Las Vegas wastewater treatment plant is prohibited from storing on site the chemicals needed to treat the water. These materials must be stored off site and brought to the facility as needed.
- In the City of Mesquite, a special event complex sits on two different tracks of land, one of which is part of a BLM lease. Whenever the City sponsors a special event where there is a charge for parking, they have to alter their arrangements to shift all of the parking onto the city owned property because the conditions of the BLM lease will not permit them to charge a parking fee on BLM land.
- And an example from our agency, when our desert flash floods occur, a significant amount of sediment and debris washes in to the detention basins, limiting the basins' capacity for future flood events. Some of our leases require us to go through an onerous and lengthy process with the BLM before those materials can be removed. This limitation on the basin's capacity is a significant public safety issue.

These and other concerns would be eliminated if the various local governments owned the land under their public facilities. We believe the transfer of these lands occupied by public facilities to the local governments will enhance our ability to provide public services and save costs. The costly oversight requirements imposed on the local agencies and the BLM to monitor adherence to these conditions, would be eliminated and the local governments would be able to self-determine how to most effectively operate these important facilities for the public good.

The Regional Flood Control District has taken the lead, in partnership with all of the agencies impacted, to seek legislation from Congress authorizing the complete transfer of fee ownership of the individual parcels where schools, parks, fire stations and detention basins, etc. have been constructed to the public agencies and cities operating those facilities. There is really no reason for BLM to maintain ownership of these lands being used for a public purpose in urban Las Vegas. We believe real savings and increased public benefit will occur if the government agencies in Clark County owned the land where they have spent significant tax dollars to construct these public buildings and needed infrastructure.

We are currently gathering from each local entity the number and size of the parcels to be conveyed from federal ownership to the local governments under the proposed

legislation. Just as an example, the flood control district has 35 facilities sitting on approximately 1800 acres which would be conveyed to local ownership. I should note that 28 of these 35 facilities are within a BLM disposal boundary already set by previous legislation. Our legislation will seek the transfer of lands currently utilized for a public purpose. We believe this is a responsible, common sense approach to the transfer of federal lands to local governments.

We have met with delegation staff and we appreciate their early encouragement and support. As this bill will be assigned to the House Natural Resource Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to inform you of our efforts during this field hearing. We will keep our delegation, their staffs and the staff of the committee apprised of our progress going forward and, Mr. Chairman, we look forward, at the appropriate time, to a full hearing before your committee on this legislation.

That concludes my prepared testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.