

Committee on Resources

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Testimony for the hearing on December 4th, 2003 by the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands in Las Vegas Nevada.

Background

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Mr. Trippet has a BA from Colby College, a MS from the University of Southern California and has held positions with Hughes Aircraft, Hewlett Packard Co. Mr Trippet owned North Tahoe Motorsports (a dealership selling and servicing personal watercraft, snowmobiles, ATVs, motorcycles and snowblowers) in Incline Village, NV for 4 years before pursuing a career as a financial planner with Professional Financial Advisors, Inc.

Mr. Trippet started racing off road motorcycles in the early 1970s in the Southern California desert. He was politically active during the debate and passage of the California Desert Conservation Area in the 1980s. He continues to be active in Northern Nevada.

Mr Trippet recently was appointed to a second term on the Bureau of Land Management's Northwest Sierra Front Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) based out of Reno/Carson City, Nevada. Mr Trippet serves in the Public-at-large seat while his focus is on OHV recreation and access to public lands.

Testimony

I would like to thank the members of this committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit testimony on this topic.

As I understand the purpose of this hearing, the subcommittee is considering amendments to the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) which will allow for alternative uses of the money raised from the sale of federal land in Clark County, Nevada. Currently, the Act provides for purchase of "environmentally sensitive" land outside of Clark County, but within Nevada. The land sales in Clark County have exceeded expectations with respect to revenue generated, while purchases of land have been more difficult to achieve.

I applaud Congress's willingness to look at this issue.

I first want to comment on some discussions I have had at RAC meetings. I do not speak on behalf of the RAC, nor for the BLM in Nevada, but simply relate some feelings and opinions discussed by some of the RAC members.

Three years ago, our RAC was involved in commenting on potential sites for purchase with SNPLMA funds. It was the first such "round" of purchases. Several of us asked about money to make improvements or to manage and maintain the land once purchased. An example of improvements might be like this: Some land was purchased along the Carson River to provide public access and prevent major development. Improvements might be considered for better parking, signage, picnic facilities, toilet facilities, etc. These all might be appropriate improvements to better manage the land that was acquired. SNPLMA does not provide for this. It should!

Similarly, we asked about funding for on-going management of the acquired land. SNPLMA does not provide for this. It should!

What SNPLMA does is provide for acquisition of land with no money to properly "set it up" for use or to properly manage it over the long run. This is a terrible oversight! This is true regardless of the purpose of the acquired land: protected, recreation or other.

Other comments from some RAC members focus on the percentage of the state of Nevada that is under

federal control. Nevada has the highest percentage of federal ownership than any other state. When I joined the RAC 3 years ago, I agreed with the sentiment that there should be NO NET GAIN in federal land ownership in Nevada, and that preferably, that percentage would actually decrease.

However, the consequence of the SNPLMA is that the percentage of federal land ownership in Nevada is/will grow. From my understanding of the success in selling parcels in Clark County, the BLM is taking in huge amounts of money for a small number of acres. If that same money were used to buy land outside of Clark County, the number of acres would be HUGE. In my opinion, this is a very NEGATIVE consequence of SNPLMA.

Of course one of the effects of private lands being acquired by BLM/USFS is the reduction in tax revenue to the counties and state. Nevada is already struggling with the following:

- the low price of gold has caused the mining towns economies to suffer
- environmental regulations have further squeezed the mining businesses and communities
- endangered species issues and environmental regulations have hurt the ranchers and livestock production
- Congressionally designated lands (in particular the High Rock Black Rock Emigrant Trail Conservation Area)

has precluded potential alternative energy development and reduced grazing opportunities. To acquire and set aside more land would continue to harm Nevada's economy.

With these 2 points in mind, I strongly encourage Congress to find alternative uses (other than acquiring land) for the proceeds of land sales in Clark County.

What might be some alternative uses?

My interest and background are centered around recreation. Although my specific background and interest is in motorized recreation, I believe my comments apply to all forms of recreation. By including all forms of recreation, I want to ensure that the resources (land) are shared by all. Most areas should be kept as "multiple use" thereby allowing ALL forms of recreation (motorized and non-motorized). This does not preclude some areas designated for exclusive use for some forms of recreation. Hikers and equestrians already get exclusive access to Wilderness areas.

Why recreation? It brings visitors from other states to Nevada to recreate. Nevada has some outstanding resources for all sorts of recreation and access to wide open spaces and solitude. Allowing SNPLMA funds to benefit statewide recreation on federal land would be a great economic benefit to Nevada and provide for appropriate management of activities to promote resource stewardship and land use ethics.

I am involved with land use issues at the Sand Mountain Recreation Area (SMRA) in Northern Nevada. This is about 4000 acres set aside for OHV (and other) recreation. However, concerns about a blue butterfly, and it's host plant the Kearney Buckwheat, along with fears over the heavy hand of the Endangered Species Act, have caused the BLM to restrict travel in this area. It is well known that about 80-85% of the visitors to SMRA are from out of state, California. These visitors provide an economic benefit to the surrounding communities of Fallon, Carson City and Reno.

The number of annual visitors to SMRA has increased every year since it was established. This is due to the population growth in Nevada along with the constant closures of land to OHV recreation in California. The demand for OHV recreation continues to grow. Use of SNPLMA funds can help meet that demand and help minimize the impact to public lands.

With additional funding from SNPLMA, trails could be planned, engineered and constructed to provide for a better recreational experience while providing protection for the butterfly. Existing trails that would get used extensively could be maintained through the purchase of appropriate equipment and manpower to do the work.

Once again, let me reiterate that I support all forms of recreation. I use OHV examples because I most familiar with that.

Another area that could benefit from additional funding is Peavine Mountain outside Reno, Nevada. The Washoe County Backcountry Coalition is a diverse group of interested parties working together to ensure access to Peavine Mountain, which is part USFS and part BLM. They have been very successful in gaining

support from the City of Reno, Washoe County as well as several developers. Were it not for their efforts, access points to public land would have been blocked by development.

Additional funding could be used for:

- effectively designating and signing areas for multiple use or specific use
- maintain roads and trails
- plan, design, engineer and build new or alternative trails

Although I generally oppose the acquisition of more land by federal agencies, Peavine Mountain is an example where it does make sense. There are inholdings of private land that if acquired, would provide recreational opportunities, open space, and habitat protection.

The Nevada Commission on Tourism is already marketing Nevada as a wild place for all sorts of recreation possibilities. Since so much of Nevada is federal land, it is the federal agencies that will have to manage this influx of wild recreational tourism. Clearly additional funding from SNPLMA activities could help provide for effective management of these activities. I personally think this is a pretty good marketing campaign for tourism. It should bring needed revenues outside of the draw of the gaming industry. However, the federal agencies need the resources (money) to properly manage it. CLOSING THE LAND, PREVENTING ACCESS, RESTRICTING USEAGE IS NOT THE ANSWER! Proper planning and management to meet the demand is the best approach....and that takes money.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony as you consider amendments to SNPLMA. I hope that some funding can be directed toward recreation to meet the increasing demand and to ensure the resources are well managed by the federal agencies.