

Local

Laxalt: Interior's 'Grouseketeers' violated law in sage grouse ruling

🕒 04.06.16

CARSON CITY – Attorney General Adam Laxalt is asking a federal court to rule in favor of the state's and Elko County's lawsuit over sage grouse, claiming that Department of Interior officials who called themselves "Grouseketeers" illegally met with environmental groups after the agency's public comment period ended.

In a release Tuesday afternoon, Laxalt's office announced that the plaintiffs, which include nine counties as well as mining and ranching interests, had requested a summary judgment in the case involving land-use restrictions.

"The state's motion explains how the federal government has disregarded public involvement and other requirements in violation of federal law," stated the release. "For example, internal documents released by the federal agencies as part of the administrative record in the case have revealed that three U.S. Department of the Interior officials — who dubbed themselves the "Grouseketeers" in internal correspondence — met with environmental groups after the public comment period had ended to gauge how those groups would agree to amendments created under the land-use plan."

The motion accuses unidentified officials of ignoring the concerns of staff who wanted a supplemental environmental impact statement, socioeconomic impact analysis and further scientific data to support the proposed land-use restrictions.

"The federal government's plan withdraws almost 3 million acres that Nevadans depend on for their economic livelihood," said Laxalt. "Before such a momentous decision is made, federal law clearly requires that the agencies carefully consider the concerns raised by the state and by the citizens of Nevada — not just special interest environmental groups. As we have shown in our briefing, the record demonstrates this was not done. The self-appointed federal 'Grouseketeers' mock all Nevadans and show their true agenda."

The suit was originally filed by Elko and Eureka counties last September. Laxalt joined the suit on behalf of the State of Nevada in October.

In February, federal judges agreed to allow three environmental groups into the lawsuit: The Wilderness Society, National Wildlife Federation, and Earthworks.

Department of Interior officials were unavailable for comment late Tuesday afternoon.



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