

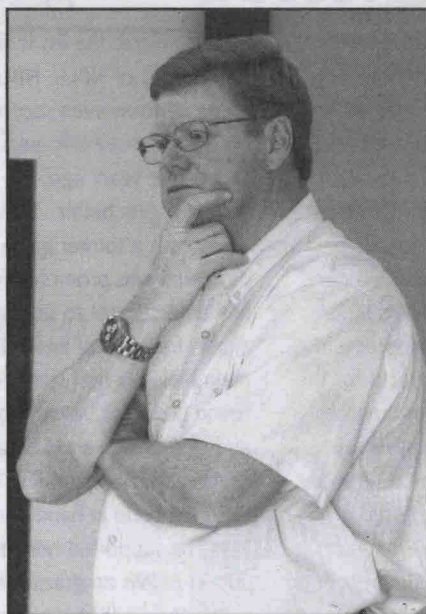
Amodei holds 'Agriculture Town Hall' in Battle Mountain

Sage grouse, wildfire sources of public concern

By Jolyn Young
The Nevada Rancher

BATTLE MOUNTAIN, Nev. — Roughly 40 people attended Representative Mark Amodei's town hall meeting in Battle Mountain on March 22. Seeking to encourage public feedback on regional agricultural issues, Amodei set an informal tone by wearing jeans and a windbreaker and speaking without a microphone. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) officials were also present.

Touching on the big national issues first, Representative Amodei said that he hopes Congress will pass a new Farm Bill within a few months.



JOLYN YOUNG, The Nevada Rancher
This was Representative Amodei's second town hall meeting. The Congressman plans to hold them quarterly.

"I expect that we will pass a Farm Bill hopefully by June," he said.

Moving on to immigration, Amodei acknowledged that foreign workers are a big part of the agriculture industry; the fact that they don't pay union dues is beside the point. Amodei said we haven't had immigration reform in 40 years, and everyone on both sides of the aisle agrees the system is "broken." Amodei said he "wants to get something done this year. I know this sounds incredibly quick for Washington," but the issue is that important.

Sage grouse once again proved a reliable regional subject. Ted Koch, Nevada State Supervisor for the USFWS, attended the meeting and answered questions.

"I do not want to see sage grouse listed. That's not my goal," said Koch. There are currently 40 species in Nevada listed with the Endangered Species Act, and Koch said listing the sage grouse would consume excessive staff time and funds. Koch said

the listing program is completely driven by court decisions the USFWS has lost all control over listings.

Koch said one obvious solution to conserving sage grouse is to kill more predators. "If you want more sage grouse, kill more ravens, kill more coyotes," he said. "Sage grouse were born to get eaten. They're going to get eaten by something. Sage grouse have always been exposed to high levels of predation."

Ravens are a major predator, and their numbers have increased 600% in recent years. Half of all sage grouse chick mortality is due to predation.

Koch reported that the Gunnison Sage Grouse were recently listed as endangered in a USFWS proposed rule. Decisions for both the Greater Sage Grouse and the Bi-State Sage Grouse will be issued by fall of 2015.

Orovada rancher John Falen said that at a recent meeting between a local fire fighters' group and the BLM, the BLM officials said local first responders are no longer allowed to fight fire until BLM firefighters arrive on the scene. Falen and other local ranchers were enraged at this new development. He said that local first responders have often put out wildfires before BLM firefighters arrive.

Raul Morales, Deputy State Director for the US Bureau of Land Management's Nevada office, told Falen "I'm surprised to hear what you're saying happened at the meeting the other night. That doesn't sound right and I'll look into it."

Representative Amodei plans to hold town hall meetings around his district on a quarterly basis. ♦

Representative Amodei, flanked by officials from the Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management, listens to rancher John Falen's concerns regarding local fire suppression efforts.

JOLYN YOUNG
The Nevada Rancher

