



County declares the raven a nuisance



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ELKO — Ravens are now formally considered a nuisance in Elko County.

County commissioners voted unanimously Wednesday to adopt a resolution declaring the common raven “a nuisance and threat to the health, safety and welfare of the people of Elko County.”

Spring Creek resident Neil Whitmer, who submitted the resolution, spoke to commissioners about the effects ravens have in the county.

“It’s important we do everything we can to protect not only the sage grouse, but the livestock of our community,” Whitmer said.

According to a 2013 scientific study cited in the resolution, depredation accounted for 82.5 percent of nest failures of sage grouse. Of those, Whitmer said, 46.7 percent are caused by ravens.

“Just one raven in 10 square kilometers results in almost a 7.5 percent increase in nest failure,” Whitmer said.

The resolution also mentions that ravens spread diseases in humans, livestock and wildlife such as West Nile Virus, fungi and Mad Cow Disease.

Although commissioners adopted the resolution, there are limits to what it actually does.

“We’re limited in what we can do because the raven’s protected,” Whitmer told the Free Press. “We’re trying to send the message ‘we need to help’ if we’re going to have any chance of saving the sage grouse.”

Commissioner Jeff Williams said The Devils Gate Ranch owner Ken Bowler told him he was able to secure raven permits for agricultural reasons. The ranch is a pilot project in the county. Commissioner Charlie Myers said the county is hoping to get its own permits for the Devil’s Gate ranch.

The commission also discussed ways to eliminate ravens once permits are secured. Besides using a toxin in eggs, which must be induced by another agency, the regulations on how to kill ravens are specific. Williams said ravens can be killed using a shoulder shotgun of no larger than 10-gauge. Furthermore, calling devices, decoys and blinds cannot be used to entice the bird to come within range.

“If we’re that limited in the way we can do it, it makes it almost impossible,” Commissioner Grant Gerber said. “... We need to figure out a way to do it.”

Gerber said the commission is also looking for raven permits at the South Fork Band Reservation, the county’s other pilot project.

Jonathan Dahl with the Elko County Farm Bureau told commissioners the bureau supported the resolution. Dahl said in his experience as a ranch owner, he has seen ravens increase in number.

“The old-timers would say, the one creature that could survive an atomic bomb are woodpeckers and ravens,” Dahl said. “I don’t know why they are protected.”

The commissioners agreed they would also send a copy of the resolution to other counties in the state.

Also at the meeting, the county’s comments on the sage-grouse Draft Environmental Impact Statement were approved. The comments were prepared by Assistant County Manager Randy Brown.

Gerber said although he did not believe the county’s comments will truly be considered, it was important to submit them to the Bureau of Land Management. Others agreed.

“Realistically, this bird is going to be listed and hopefully, this is going to be resolved in courts,” said Commissioner Demar Dahl.

Commissioners reviewed what occurred at several sage-grouse centered meetings last week. Gerber expressed concerns about comments made by Ted Koch, state director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

“I’m concerned that the public is being fed the lie that this has not had any economic effect on us yet,” Gerber said.

Whitmer said he knew of several local projects that were affected by the proposed listing.

“It’s really shut down a lot of projects, shuffled a lot of projects indefinitely,” he said.

Finally, the commissioners determined they would send a letter to Sens. Harry Reid and Dean Heller declaring the county does not support their drafted sage grouse management legislation.

“It’s so loosely written that it could mean a lot more than it says on its face,” Gerber said.