



Elko County Board of Commissioners

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Commissioners

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Sara Benoit

January 8, 2014

Dear Senator Heller,

Hopefully by the time this email reaches you that you will have publicly withdrawn your name from the Reid Wilderness bill that masquerades as sage grouse protection. If you oppose the bill it can be stopped.

I have started work on an op-ed article for distribution to the media. If you have not withdrawn your support I will reluctantly include you as a supporter of this wilderness bill that will cost Elko County hundreds of millions of dollars and cost thousands of existing jobs and prevent the development of thousands of future jobs.

In the mid 1980's I developed a coalition of over seventy Nevada organizations to oppose Congressman Reid's Wilderness Bill. I was then asked to expand the coalition nationally. By 1991 the coalition had grown to over 220 organizations that included the American Farm Bureau, National Rifle Association, National Mining Association, American Motorcycle Association, American Forest Products Association, National Cattlemen, American Petroleum Institute, etc. Attached is the list of coalition members and information on the last National Wilderness Conference that I developed. I am still the Chairman of the Wilderness Impact Research Foundation.

Reid's Wilderness Bill passed and has caused great harm to Elko County. As one example, there will never be a ski resort in the Ruby Mountains as a result of his bill.

Following is the first draft of the article.

REID WILDERNESS BILL MASQUERADING AS SAGE GROUSE PROTECTION

Senator Reid is proposing a wilderness bill that masquerades as sage grouse protection. The bill has sixty two references to wilderness and only nine for sage grouse. Reid has been working to have as much wilderness designated as possible for the entire time he has been in the United States Senate. Besides this thinly veiled plan to have present Wilderness Study Areas designated Wilderness the bill opens the door for much more land to be designated Wilderness.

"Inventoried Roadless Areas" are also to be considered for Wilderness. And the first time



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"Inventoried Roadless Areas" are mentioned there is no connection to BLM lands. In 2012 the Forest Service closed hundreds of miles of roads and eliminated ALL off road use on the Forest Service. The BLM is presently working up their plan for Travel Management that is expected to follow the Forest Service model.

The proposed Reid wilderness bill provides for the Secretary of the Interior to "assess conservation fees for development" of \$750 per acre for Priority Sage-Grouse Habitat and \$500 per acre for General Sage-Grouse Habitat. Research done by Assistant Elko County Manager Randy Brown establishes that there are 5,897,900 acres designated by the Federal Government, in conjunction with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, as Priority Sage-Grouse Habitat and 1,974,200 acres designated as General Sage-Grouse Habitat for a total of 7,872,100 acres. That is over 71% of Elko County that is now under the Interim Management Plans of the BLM and Forest Service. Those plans were implemented in 2012 without notice and without hearings. Those BLM and Forest Service plans have already cost Elko County tens of millions and now Senator Reid is proposing a bill that will solidify the damage already done by the BLM and Forest Service and wreak even more havoc. Elko County has been under the thumb of the Federal Government, but now the Federal Government will have a way to extort even more money from Elko County and its citizens under the guise of protecting the sage grouse. To appreciate the vast scope of Reid's bill it is imperative that you review the BLM map designating Priority and General Sage-Grouse Habitat. The Elko County Commission has placed a copy of this map in the back of the Elko County Commission chambers and it is also available at the County Offices. Over 71% of the County will be under this draconian assessment for any development that occurs on that 71%. But that is not the end of the damage to be wreaked on Elko County. If the sage grouse is listed the US Fish and Wildlife can and will designate private land at their whim as Critical Habitat.

Following is an example of how this assessment may work. Assume Wells Rural Electric desired to build a new twenty mile power line to a residence, ranch or mine. The local BLM would make a subjective determination on how much acreage would be developed. The assessment would run in the millions. For any entity, county, mine, ranch or residence to build a road the assessment could be higher than the cost of the road.

Then add to this the BLM and Forest Service plan to limit the disturbance of any square mile of BLM/FS sage grouse habitat (and remember this is 71% of Elko County) to 3% of the land. And this is to be computed on a large scale. Thus, this will diminish the value of the adjoining private land because the private land will be factored in to the determination of the disturbance.



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And where would the assessment money be used? Fifteen percent would go to the State of Nevada and would presumably be spent by NDOW. The Secretary of the Interior would have wide discretion on how to spend the remainder.

The multi millions these assessments would raise can be expected to be wasted. The best example is the huge boondoggle of the millions raised in Clark County for the supposed "protection of the desert tortoise."

Very Truly Yours,

A. Grant Gerber

County Commissioner