

MEETING NEVADA'S RESOURCE NEEDS

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Meeting Nevada's resource needs is an awesome responsibility and challenge. My staff and I in the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources are attempting to give proper consideration to all facets of natural resource needs and demands, including recreation and wildlife.

Let me assure you that the welfare of wildlife always receives full consideration in all of our plans. This is only natural, since we expect great developments to come in the future from the use of our recreational resources. Wildlife is a natural resource and we plan to make as much use of it as possible. Nevada was among the first of the states that submitted a satisfactory plan to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to qualify for land and water conservation funds.

The State had the services of qualified wildlife specialists in the preparation of this plan, and the plan fully recognized the present and future of wildlife. We are proud of our plan, not so much because of its excellency but because of its objective treatment of all resource interests.

A study of the Humboldt River Basin has been completed by a Department of Agriculture field party and the State of Nevada under section 6 of the Small Watershed Protection Act. A similar study is under way in the central Lahontan Basin. This Basin comprises the drainage basins of the Truckee, Carson, and Walker Rivers. As you can well imagine, these studies, since they are financed by the Department of Agriculture and the State of Nevada, lean heavily toward the preservation and enhancement of the natural resources of the areas. We in Nevada consider our recreation

and fish and wildlife resources among our prime natural resources.

We feel that Nevada has a natural setting and a climate that makes it a bit different from other western states. Most of the state lies in the Great Basin and has surface drainage into about 100 apparently closed basins. We are finding that some of these basins, which we formerly thought to be really closed have below-the-surface outlets through underlying beds of old limestone.

All of Nevada, except about the southern third lies in the Great Basin and has a climate characterized by low precipitation, warm summers, cool to cold winters, and a wide daily range in temperature. Some dozen or more north-south trending mountain ranges divide the state into a series of mountains and valleys. Mountain spurs and alluvial divides cut across the valleys to form the basins mentioned previously. The southern third of the state drains toward Colorado River or Death Valley. The climate is similar to that of northern Nevada but is drier and warmer.

More than half of the average annual precipitation of about 9 inches comes in the winter season in the form of snow. Precipitation increases with elevation, hence, the mountains are relatively wet and the valleys dry. Incidentally, much of the water supply of Lake Tahoe and Truckee River, Carson River, and Walker River originates in California. Most of the water which flows down from the California mountains is used to irrigate land. Before the coming of the white man, the Truckee River discharged into and maintained Pyramid Lake at a relatively high level. Walker River flowed into Walker Lake, and Carson River debouched to Carson Lake and Swamp lands in the vicinity of Fallon. Reservoirs for irrigation and domestic uses have changed the natural conditions as you well know.

About 87% of the land of Nevada is owned or controlled by the Federal Government. In 4 of our 17 counties, 98% of the land is Federally owned. The Bureau of Land Management is the big landlord. The Forest Service controls the land on many of our mountains. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has about 1.1 million acres and 2.9 million acres are owned and managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Atomic Energy Commission, which works largely for the Army, has a large area set aside for its use.

You can well imagine that with nearly 87% of our land owned or controlled by the Federal Government, we are vitally concerned with the deliberations of the Public Land Law Review Commission. This Commission is scheduled to report its findings and recommendations to Congress in 1970.

Presumably, a law to replace 7,500 existing laws and regulations under which the Federal lands are managed will be recommended to Congress. Since even the slightest modification of the present land laws would have a profound effect on the uses now being made of our range lands we are naturally much concerned with the activities of the Public Land Law Review Commission.

Because of this interest, the Nevada State Legislature, in 1965, established a State Committee on Federal Land Laws. It was created to work with the Federal Commission and was charged "to represent and to enunciate the State of Nevada's position on Public Lands with other western states and before the Public Land Law Review Commission." The Committee, by direction of the Legislature, is made up of the following user groups:

1. Banks and Savings and Loan Associations
2. City and County Governments
3. Woolgrowers
4. Livestock Raisers
5. State Board of Fish and Game Commissioners
6. Mining
7. Agriculture
8. Education
9. Recreation and Conservation
10. Railroads
11. General Public

The enabling legislation requires that the Director of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and one of his two Assistant Directors serve as Chairman and Secretary of this committee.

With such a diverse group of interests sitting at a conference table, one would think bedlam would reign. The opposite has happened. Each interest has a real logical position and the most interesting thing to observe has been the way each special interest user has been eager to learn the position of the other interests. The thread which has pulled the entire committee together has been knowledge of each others problem. The woolgrowers, livestock, and mining representatives immediately recognized the need and importance of recreation and wildlife. They are willing to work and live with recreation and wildlife but feel that each segment must accept its fair share of responsibility to the resource and to other interests. The mining interest is willing for recreation to be the prime surface user in mineralized areas, which possess high recreational values providing underground operations may be used to remove the minerals.

This attitude of the special interest users is most encouraging. Each is

willing to share, but each has obligations and responsibilities to shoulder to make this method work. The committee feels that this is truly in the best interests of the State.

The current position established by the State Committee on Federal Land Laws was expressed through assembly joint resolution No. 10 at the last regular session of the Legislature. The main theme of this resolution could be summarized as Multiple Use by all interested groups. Also the committee feels that the key for all resource demands before the Public Land Law Review Commission is moderation, whether it is for wildlife, livestock, recreation, or mining. We in Nevada State Government concur in multiple use and moderation of demands.

The State Committee has been supported by the last two sessions of the Legislature, and we think will continue to be supported.

The climate of Nevada and the nearly universal use of the rather scant and widely dispersed water supplies for the irrigation of forage crops renders the environment rather poor for small game birds. Birds like the imported chukkar which eats the seed of the bronco, or cheat grass find the environment to their liking. They do reasonably well, but suffer from an inadequate or poorly distributed water supply. Springs and wells are usually developed for domestic livestock, but the welfare of birds is kept in mind. Watering troughs are fitted with ladders so that the birds and small mammals can drink without danger of drowning.

The interest of migratory water fowl is considered in the best possible manner with our scant water supplies.

The native sagehen, once widely distributed in Nevada, has almost disappeared. It is protected and other efforts are being made to bring it back. In a few places the sagehen seems to be increasing in numbers and there are open seasons for hunters. How far this bird may come back under present use of the range lands by domestic livestock remains to be seen.

A fact not fully understood everywhere is that the forage on the range lands of Nevada is fully allotted for domestic livestock use. Efforts by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management on behalf of forms of wildlife that are competitive with domestic livestock are limited by the established rights of domestic livestock. Also, the surface water supplies of Nevada, except those floods that escape to lakes and playas and are lost by evaporation, are fully appropriated. They are recognized in law and by the courts as private property rights and can be sold and

transferred as such. Appropriated water have values that must be recognized whenever any agency, whether Federal or State, plans any development which involves their use. Even underground waters are subject to appropriation and can become private property. With more land than can be served by the waters available, surface and ground, Nevada is much interested in any project by which water may be transferred from Columbia River or the far north to Colorado River. Much of such water will be used for recreation purposes.

Illustrative of the situation regarding the limitations on the use of the forage resources of the Public Lands is the effort of Congress to set aside a place for the mustang in Nevada. The mustang is a feral, or introduced, animal and is not a true native. Individual horses escaped from the Spanish owners and later from the Indians. They found the environment of Nevada to their liking and thrived mightily. At one time thousands of these animals roamed the open ranges of our state and competed with domestic livestock for forage. The activities of wild horse hunters has reduced the numbers of animals to a few hundred head. Unfortunately, the herds of wild horses quite frequently contain saddle horses and work horses that belong to ranchers. These animals escape from pasture or ranges adjacent to the ranches. Once joined to a herd of mustangs the mares are not allowed by the herding stallions to leave.

Wild horses travel a lot, and are most destructive of the open range.

About ten years ago, Congress passed a law which denied wild horse hunters the right to use airplanes in rounding up these animals. Sometime later Congress set aside an area of land in central Nevada as a reserve for the mustang. However, the Bureau of Land Management, acting under the authority of the Taylor Grazing Act, had allotted the forage resources of the reserved area for domestic livestock use. Wild horses and cattle use about the same kinds of forage, hence, a conflict between the two types of animals, and their owners, arose. This conflict of interest is still present and very much alive.

There has been a continuing argument about the use of grass by deer. This big game animal requires browse for winter forage and the lands that produce suitable browse are located on the higher mountains. The number of deer that an area can support, therefore, depends on the amount of winter range available, and that range in Nevada is very limited.

In the deer country of Nevada there are many acres of sagebrush land where the production of grass is now very low. Many of these lands are suitable for reseeding and could be made to produce many times as much grass as they are now producing.

The conversion of sagebrush land to grass land by eliminating the sage and the planting of grass or the discouragement of the sage by spraying with a herbicide and the consequent encouragement of the grass can be accomplished reasonably quickly. An increase in production of forage for winter feeding of domestic livestock on the commensurate, or dependent, irrigated ranch lands takes much longer and costs more money. Also, experience in the northeast Elko Soil Conservation District, which is in the better deer country of Nevada, indicates that the potential for the production of usable forage on the range lands exceeds the production potential of the ranch lands.

The Northeast Elko Soil Conservation District is the pilot Soil Conservation District selected to work out relations between the owners of private lands, usually the irrigated ranches, and the Federal land administering agencies. In this district the reseeding and other revegetating operations on both private and public range lands has proceeded at a rapid pace. There has been enough grass for both the domestic livestock and the deer so that whether the deer eat grass has been a moot question.

One item not fully foreseen or evaluated in the beginning of this work was that with ample grass available on the lower elevations the domestic livestock tend to stay on the lower ground and do not go to the higher elevations to the same extent that they formerly did. Thus more of the forage resources of the high land is left for deer. Generally this land is rough and not well suited for domestic livestock use.

The question of how to keep the sagebrush from invading the reseeded areas is being solved in the N.E. Elko District. The land is being fenced into pastures; watering places, either springs or wells, are being developed in each pasture, and salt is being distributed in a reasonable manner. The vigor of the grass is being maintained by a system of rotation and deferment of grazing. The system of deferred-rotation grazing works, but the cost of fencing and water developments is high.

As more grass grows on the range lands and as additional and better distributed watering places are provided, the habitat for all forms of wildlife improves. In the N.E. Elko Soil Conservation District there are more birds and small mammals than was the case before these improvements were made.

There is only one pilot Soil Conservation District in the State, but all of the 37 districts in the State have the same ideal, which is the highest use of the land and its related resources, including recreation and wildlife.

In the past, irrigation and fish have not gotten along together very

well. One could point to instances where creeks and rivers have been dammed and their waters diverted for irrigation to the detriment of fish. Presently the value of this wildlife resource is being recognized in each new undertaking. Developers might point out the many times that the building of a reservoir, for instance, has created an environment much more productive than the one destroyed. To do so would be to create argument and controversy and in our opinion would be pointless.

We cannot undo what has been done, but we can work toward the future, with the objective of leaving for future generations the natural resource heritage which has made our nation the strongest and most prosperous nation the world has ever known.

That is what the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is trying to do.