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## **IN THE OUTDOORS: Taking public land from hunters stirs local consternation**



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How would you feel if you went into a grocery store and found most of the aisles where your favorite foods are found are off limits to all but a select group? What if you are forbidden to get close to those foods because you don't meet the store's new and narrow definition of a customer? Or what if you are allowed to shop in those aisles, but you have to carry everything in your hands or on your back because shopping carts are forbidden?

I suppose it wouldn't be so bad if they allowed pack horses in those special aisles, but then you would have to be one of the few who could afford either to own horses or pay a shopping guide to pack you in. Unfortunately, most of us don't fall into either category.

Then again, perhaps we can hope some of those items we would like to purchase somehow might get off the shelves and wander down the aisles to a point where we don't have to carry them too far.

What if this happened to you and you were part owner of the store?

That's what has happened to Nevada's hunters. During the past five years, more than 1.7 million acres of publicly owned lands in Nevada have been made off limits to all but a select group. This has been accomplished through the creation of 45 new wilderness areas in Clark, Lincoln and Nye counties on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service.

While a wilderness designation won't change much on lands managed by the Park Service, it significantly will alter the management philosophy on lands administered by the BLM and the Forest Service. No mechanized means of transport are allowed in these areas, and that includes everything that utilizes a wheel -- even a deer cart.

Perhaps Anthony Headlry summed it up best.

"Friends of mine went on a cow elk hunt a few weeks ago. When they came back, they said both sides of Cave Valley was a wilderness area and (they) had no access to go any place to hunt without walking at least five miles," Headlry wrote in an e-mail. "People we

talk to are very mad, to say the least. There is talk about not hunting in Nevada and going to Utah or some other state. ...

"We understand that you can hunt in a wilderness area, but how many men do you know that can walk five, 10, 15 miles or more and then haul out a 200-pound deer or a 600-pound or larger elk?"

He has a point. Hunters who have contacted the BLM office in Ely were told they would have to plan their hunts better. I translate that as meaning buy a horse, hire a guide or get in shape. We probably all should do the latter, but many will have to hunt the edges of the wilderness and hope something stumbles into you -- kind of like waiting at the end of those closed aisles in the grocery store.

The White Pine County Conservation, Recreation, and Development act of 2006 and the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development act of 2004 are two of the bills that created the wilderness areas. Hunters long have led the way when it comes to conservation efforts, but now the recreation component of what they do is limited to that select few who either own horses or can hire a guide to pack you in.

Harry Reid and John Ensign, Nevada's U.S. senators, co-sponsored both bills and the Clark County version in 2002.

Two readers, Layne and Lori, who long have fished and camped North Creek Road, are concerned the bills will prevent people from learning about the area's rich history.

"Many of the roads in this area have mining history, ranching history, cattlemen history and Basque sheepherder history at the end of them," they wrote in an e-mail. "Now all of this will be kept from the public so that most people will not even know that this area under the strictest rule does not even qualify as a wilderness area."

Rob Buonomici, chief game warden for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, posed this question: "What do you think would happen to all the customers if a store closed down some of its aisles and limited you to only a few where the groceries weren't quite as good?"

Anyone with sense knows it won't be long before you lose your best customers. Nevada's wild lands and wildlife can't afford that.

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