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## **EDITORIAL: New wilderness?**

### **Not so fast, say some Northern Nevadans**

Over the past six years, Nevada's U.S. senators, Harry Reid and John Ensign, have successfully pushed public lands bills which facilitated the sale of tens of thousands of acres formerly managed by the federal government in Clark, Lincoln and White Pine counties, allowing additional room for growth in Southern Nevada.

So far so good.

On the down side, the bills also designated more than 1.7 million new Nevada acres as federally "protected" wilderness, stymieing the objective of a net reduction in the 90 percent of Nevada still controlled from afar by the bureaucrats of the Potomac.

Now, similar plans are afoot in northwestern Nevada, where environmentalists are pushing a proposal to newly label as "wilderness" nearly 700,000 acres in Lyon, Mineral and Esmeralda counties.

But this time, northern Nevadans appear to have seen them coming.

Meeting halls were packed with opponents during several public discussions in March and April. More than 700 people crowded into Smith Valley High School in Lyon County -- most to oppose any new wilderness. County commissions in all three counties have OK'd resolutions opposing any new wilderness designations.

"Basically, the commission has said we don't want wilderness, we don't need wilderness," explains Mineral County Commissioner Jerrie Tipton, adding that she and others are worried changes could affect mining, recreation and military training, all important to the local economies.

"There's a fear here over what government is going to do to us and not for us," Jim Sanford, a 50-year resident of Yerington, explained to the Reno Gazette-Journal. "The feeling here is we don't trust them."

But the targeted land is composed of beautiful slices of rural Nevada that provide critical habitat for wildlife, justifying "special protection," supporters say.

"What wilderness does is keep a part of Nevada's wild heritage there," explains Shaaron Netherton, executive director of Friends of Nevada Wilderness. "It's a place for wildlife to go, it's a place for people to get away."

Actually, while the solitude of the whistling wind can have its charms, Ms. Netherton sounds like she's preparing to sell someone a stuffed jackalope. Much of these tracts are desert, jackrabbit habitat for which the prime economic uses have always been -- likely always will be -- mining and grazing. And few people can "get away" into an arid designated wilderness without risking the fate of the Donner Party, because motor vehicle access is blocked, as is the ability to hunt for food.

"Wilderness" rangers don't blaze new roads and hiking trails -- they block off the old ones.

John Wallin, director of the Nevada Wilderness Project, laments that the opposition is premature, unnecessary and "fear-based." He said critics have misrepresented the level of government control on activities such as grazing and mining that can occur within a wilderness.

Really? We're supposed to believe government rangers and the eco-theocrats are so anxious to see the cattle industry and the ranching way of life sustained that they're going to issue new low-cost permits to allow cattle to graze away the fire-hazard dried brush and grasses from additional millions of acres here in the West?

The residents of the northern counties are smart to raise a ruckus now, loud and long. "We are not going to force a lands bill down the throats of any county," vows Sen. Ensign. "If they don't want a lands bill, we won't do a lands bill."

Good.