

## **Two Cents Worth: Reid pledges to preserve agriculture, too Senator will also honor our wishes opposing lands bill**

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U.S. Senator Harry Reid's office pledged again this week to honor the wishes of the Lyon County Commissioners in opposing wilderness and an all-encompassing lands bill. Senator John Ensign and Congressman Dean Heller have followed suit.

A spokesman for Senator Reid's office responded to several questions I submitted to him this week. "We were hopeful that we would be able to identify all the positive benefits that would have been available to Lyon County under a lands bill, but since that didn't occur, we will honor the wishes of the commissioners," wrote communications director Jon Summers.

And, local proponents of the Wovoka Wilderness were very disappointed. but declared their efforts "formally dead"--thanks to a well organized local campaign in Smith and Mason Valleys, and due to strong opposition from the County Commissioners.

That doesn't necessarily mean wilderness is dead, however. Cameron Johnson, Northern Nevada outreach director for the Nevada Wilderness Project, told the Nevada Appeal newspaper it was "unfortunate that places like Wovoka and East Sister will not receive wilderness protection."

He also said his organization would continue to advocate for their protection and seek other means in the interim.

"Wilderness is the strongest and most ideal designation because it does require an act of Congress," Johnson said.

"It's much more collaborative and is an opportunity for everyone to come to the table. But in the meantime, there are opportunities for administrative protection and other channels by working with the agencies."

In other words, let's try an end-run around the public and Commissioners and approach the BLM and U.S. Forest Service to designate a wilderness study area or a roadless area.

Continue to be vigilant.

Reid pledges ag preservation

Let's turn our attention to the Walker River Basin Project once again.

Senator Reid's communications director in Washington, D.C., this week also said the Majority Leader "has made two pledges--to preserve and restore Walker Lake and to find solutions to do so while preserving the agricultural communities in Lyon County.

"They go hand-in-hand, and should not occur at the expense of the other," he said (See related story in this week's MVN.).

To be honest, the Senator has said that before, but somehow this comment seemed more direct this time. We need to take note of it.

What is difficult for everyone involved is not knowing how taking water from upstream and delivering it to the lake will actually affect us all. There has been no definitive study to indicate it will work without significant collateral damage somewhere along the line.

It's fear of the unknown that sometimes carries the day. Surely, everybody can understand that.

Proposed legislation for the Walker River Basin Project is expected this summer and Senator Reid and others have pledged an open process, with plenty of chances for the public to provide input. This week, Summers called for anyone with ideas to help in the resolution to contact the Senator's office NOW.

I want to thank Jon Summers from Senator Reid's office for his responses.

WRID trip positive

Officials from the Walker River Irrigation District made a trip to Washington, D.C., last week and report meetings to be "positive."

Of course, what they discussed primarily was the District's proposal for a water leasing/banking program, hopefully funded with federal dollars.

I thought I'd toss something out here"Â|something that certainly is not new, as greater minds than mine have considered it. Here goes: Is it possible to cap the federal dollars presently going to purchase upstream water rights and shift what's left of that money to the banking/leasing proposal?

There has been every indication that a second \$200 million appropriation may be forthcoming from Congress, with some of that money going for acquisition of water. Could that include funding for the WRID program?

The WRID proposal should receive serious consideration as at least part of the Walker River resolution.

Word has it that over on the Walker River Paiute Tribal reservation at Schurz, farmers are being paid \$900 an acre not to grow a crop and save the water presumably for the lake.

Mineral gets water meeting?

Mineral County Commissioners still have not adopted a resolution opposing any lands bill, although there is supposed to be such a proposal on their May 7 agenda. The heat is on over there.

Now, the move is on apparently to delay any action on that resolution until after a May 21 meeting with Senator Reid's staff concerning proposed Walker River water legislation.

No such meeting has ever been held with Lyon County Commissioners. Perhaps that is because Mineral County is a party to the lawsuit.

Oh, horrors of all horrors

Somebody from either Senator Reid or Senator Ensign's office (or perhaps those trustworthy wilderness people from Alaska and Colorado) has planted the seed that my commentaries might not be totally truthful.

A off-handed comment was made this week during the Nevada NewsMakers television program. At least Congressman Heller said he felt I know as much about the subject as anyone.

We've all seen it before: If you can't successfully battle the message, then attack the messenger.

I know very well how that works. I've been hammering our U.S. Senators pretty hard recently"Â|to the point where one local told me he thinks my weekly tirades are a childish vendetta. The truth is in the pudding"Â| sometimes it works.

The real truth here is that our tiny local media (the Mason Valley News and radio station KSVL) have kept plugging away and has been successful in getting information out to the public that the feds would just as soon never saw the light of day.

It is so much easier for government (at any level) to do what it wants when the public is not really involved. Government likes to think it knows what is best for us and hates it when we don't agree.

Now some of the state's larger media are getting involved because this lands bill/wilderness issue has taken on a life of its own; and little old Lyon and Mineral Counties have had the audacity to stand to our U.S. Senators and tell them to leave us alone, although it is beginning to look like Mineral County's Commissioners may yet fold under the withering crossfire and special deals being offered.

You simply are not supposed to tell government you know what's best for yourself.

In this case, the public took a proactive role, rose up and pushed back hard enough to make wilderness a political hot potato--so hot, the feds had to back off.

That's exactly how democracy is supposed to work, but it angers them when the public actually does get involved, especially when the public lines up on the opposite side of one of their schemes. If we line up on their side, they welcome us with open arms.

All we (as local media) did was provide the information. You, the public, did the rest.

Remember when someone writes an editorial, that actually is just one man's/woman's opinion. Obviously, in this case, there were plenty of people out here who agreed.

Will Lyon stand alone?

When all is said and done, we (Lyon County) may well stand alone in turning away wilderness and a lands bill. When next approaching other counties, proponents are now so much better prepared, thanks to fighting with us; and they will approach other Nevada counties with "carrots" that potentially others may not be able to ignore.

For us, the key now is whether or not our Congressional delegation takes a vindictive approach to any help for Lyon County on other issues in the future.

There are plenty of things they can assist with that don't require a lands bill to accomplish...water pipeline easement, jail/juvenile detention facility dollars, BLM land sales, industrial infrastructure funding, etc.

BLM land for schools has been purchased without a lands bill; back in the 1980s, the present Fernley High School site was purchased for \$2.50 an acre.

Lyon never said it didn't want to partner on those other issues. We simply opposed the lands bill and accompanying wilderness designations.

Will there be any olive branch of peace extended--both ways? Or will Lyon County now be persona non grata, or the target for the "payback is hell" mentality?

It won't take long to find out which approach our Senators will take.

I am a true volunteer commentary writer for the MVN. Haven't received one penny. Haven't asked for any.

I got involved to provide information and comment on the Walker River Basin Project; and since the feds said that legislation would be included in a lands bill, I was drawn into the wilderness issue as well.

I've learned more than I ever thought possible about these issues over the past few months, and getting to write again has rejuvenated me in a lot of ways. I want to again thank the MVN for allowing me to get involved. It's been good for me--not so good for our Congressional delegation perhaps.

But someday, they may hold a party when this "Poison Pen" (I've been called worse) hangs up his keyboard and truly retires.

I'll most likely receive 'Thank You for Quitting' cards from all around.

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