

Mineral criticizes lands bill process, vows to continue to fight wilderness and wants to renew trust with Reid

BY JIM SANFORD • SPECIAL TO THE MVN • MAY 30, 2008

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While criticizing the process that rushed wilderness designations and a lands bill proposal on an unwilling populace and vowing to continue its fight against wilderness, the Mineral County Commissioners called on U.S. Senator Harry Reid to renew a bond of trust under which they feel he has provided "outstanding" efforts on behalf of the county in the past.

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"I am still critical of the process the way it evolved," said Commissioner Richard Bryant.

"Senator Reid has been outstanding for the county, but I feel the bond has been violated."

Neil Kornze, Sen. Reid's Senior Policy Advisor for Public Lands, agreed "the process could have gone a lot better"»there could have been a better process."

Commissioner Jerrie Tipton added, "We felt blind sided. We got the maps the day of the commissioner meeting. It felt to me like it was a done deal."

"I think we all wish this had unrolled differently," said Kornze.

Commissioner Ed Fowler said, "You all have been led astray. There is a group here that is a private club. You were thinking you were working with Mineral County. You were working with the Walker Lake Working Group and they do not represent Mineral County"

Mary Conelly, Reid's State Director, responded, "We did not discuss a lands bill with them.: And, Tracy Hartzler-Toon, Counsel for the Majority, Committee on Indian Affairs, said they had spoken to the county's attorneys and "we appreciate the work that group has done but we did talk to Mineral County."

Bryant wants to rebuild trust

"We are not talking about an imminent lands bill and we need to learn from communication errors," Bryant continued.

"I hate to see things go south with Senator .Reid," Bryant added. "Can we agree we are not ready for a lands bill today?"

Mary Conelly, the senator's State Director, responded, "We really, really appreciate you continuing to talk to us. We have great regret over the process. Lyon County stopped the process. All we ask is to stay in the process."

"We have regrets we did not get to this point in Lyon County," Conelly added, "because that could have been incredibly positive for Lyon County."

Bryant said he hoped some trust could be rebuilt between the county and Sen. Reid because he felt the senator had provided a tremendous amount of help to Mineral County over the years and he hoped that could continue.

During the discussion, Bryant pointed to the fact that Mineral County did not find out about the wilderness proposal until February of this year. "We were blind sided," he said. "We had not requested a bill, had never discussed a lands bill."

Bryant went on to single out the two resolutions the commissioners had adopted, saying, "We do not want wilderness and we rejected a lands bill. We should hat have had to do those resolutions," he continued.

The Mineral County Commissioner said there was obvious concern over the definition of wilderness "and there was very little that fit that role".

"The distrust in the community was unnecessary (had the proper process been followed)," Bryant said. The commissioners were asked by the public to restrict discussions with the congressional delegation's representatives to open meetings "because people felt like private deals were being made."

"Other areas had up to five years (to prepare a lands bill). We were told we had until June," he explained.

"At some point we are going to have to do a lands bill. But we are not ready for a lands bill now; and we don't want wilderness," added Bryant who drew audience applause over the last statement.

"When we finalize our research, then and only then will we be ready to seek a lands bill," he told the four delegation representatives at the meeting. "I don't know how to make that any clearer. We are not ready. I don't understand why we have to have it now when we didn't ask for it."