

Mineral 'not ready' for lands bill

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

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The Board of Mineral County Commissioners has reaffirmed its opposition to wilderness designations and has told U.S. Senator Harry Reid's staff "we are not ready" for a lands bill at this time.

ADVERTISEMENT Those pronouncements came last Wednesday at a meeting in Hawthorne featuring Reid's State Director Mary Conelly, analyst and legal counsel Tracy Hartzler-Toon, Senior Policy Advisor for Public Lands Neil Kornze, and Regional Representative Matt Tuma.

The commissioners also tabled an agenda item seeking to rescind a previous motion rejecting wilderness.

"I am afraid if Mineral County is ever to have a say, it has to be done through a lands bill-type process," said Mineral County Commissioner Jerrie Tipton.

Tipton also asked if any action on a future lands bill could be delayed until the county has time to complete inventories of assets and needs, and likewise requested six months to a year to complete those inventories.

"We are not ready," she said, adding, "Can Mineral County come to you and ask if and when we're ready?"--a question to which she received an affirmative response.

Tipton continued, "When the time comes, we can cover all the bases. Will the burden of proof be us as to why something is not wilderness?"

Kornze responded, "If you want to explore these things, we can come back and look at what's out here. That's a process we can do together."

Responding to a question from Commission Chairman Ed Fowler about how broad a plan to use funds returned to the county as part of BLM land sales can be, Kornze added, "That will depend on what specifically you want."

"At some point we are going to have to do a lands bill," interjected Commissioner Richard Bryant.

"We are not ready for a lands bill, and we don't want wilderness. When we finalize our research, then and only then will we be reading to seek a lands bill. I don't know how to make that any clearer.

"We are not ready."

There was still some concern that a lands bill would have to contain wilderness designations to make its way through Congress.

"The only part I'm really afraid of is the wilderness portion," said Bryant, who added, "We are not going to give in to the wilderness people, period."