

Prime wildlife habitat area goes publicBy Susan Voyles svoyles@rgj.com

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More than 17,000 acres of prime wildlife habitat in the Granite Range, Buffalo Hills, Twin Peaks and Poodle Mountain wilderness study areas in northern Washoe County now belong to the public, using money from public land sales in Southern Nevada.

After a five-year process, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management purchased the land for \$7.25 million from Todd and Sam Jaksick of Reno. State BLM director Ron Wenker called the 17,493-acre acquisition one of the largest and most important wildlife initiatives under the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, with more than 100 parcel involved. He said the bureau will be able to safeguard "what many consider to be the healthiest mule deer and California bighorn sheep herds in Nevada as well as critical sage grouse breeding grounds and the only known home of the endangered Wall Canyon sucker fish." Jim Nelson, president of the Reno chapter of Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, said the purchase will preserve the state's most important herd of antelope. He said hunters, hikers, photographers, bird watchers will benefit. "Our family spends a tremendous amount of time in northern Washoe County," said Todd Jaksick. "We're honored to be a part of protecting these lands for future generations." The Nevada Land Conservancy in Reno was a partner in negotiating the land sales and began work on the project in 2003. The land ranges from high alpine meadows to sagebrush lowlands and has a spring, wet meadows or a stream to support wildlife for hundreds of square miles, said Alicia Reban, conservancy executive director. She described the Granite Range, which towers over Gerlach at 8,973 feet, as an "amazing oasis of water and wildlife. On one side you have the Black Rock Desert and on the other side of Smoke Creek Desert." The holdings also include the Buffalo Hills that rise to the west of the Smoke Creek Desert. To the north is Poodle Mountain and Wall Canyon and east of the Buffalo Hills is the Twin Peaks area near the California border. Katy Simon, a conservancy board director and Washoe County manager, said the wild lands represents "one of the last magnificent landscapes of the West."