



December 19, 2008

## Two Cents Worth: USFS to monitor Humboldt-Toiyabe vehicle use; Federal dollars could help farmers with transition \* Lawsuit challenging constitutionality of Walker River Basin Project?

Okay, folks. Is it time for a brand new lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Walker River Basin Project legislation? Would anything worthwhile come from such action? How much would you be willing to donate to such a cause? The idea is floating around here.

Let's see, just how long did litigation tie up the Truckee River project?

### USFS Forest Management Plan

If you've ever packed a picnic lunch, loaded the family in a four-wheeler and headed out to an area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, your plan may be severely limited in the future if you sometimes travel off designated roads to reach a favorite site.

The U.S. Forest Service is undertaking a "Travel Management Project" for the forest (which in this area, often never looks anything like a pristine eastern mindscape of a "forest"); and that project requires designation of roads, trails and areas that are open to monitor vehicle use in national forests.

Only NFS roads and NFS trails can be designated for motorized vehicle use.

Important to area outdoor enthusiasts, but a scoping document public meeting in Smith Valley last week drew only around 55-60 people--far fewer than the number involved during the wilderness project proposals.

This project addresses motorized travel on the 1.2 million acre Bridgeport Ranger District, which recently completed an inventory of unauthorized routes on NFS lands and identified about 800 miles of unauthorized routes. This proposal is considering the addition of about 300 miles of "existing informal (user-created) roads and trails. "

The Forest Service feels "there is a need for regulation of unmanaged motorized vehicle travel by the public."

The SV meeting was run in an "open house" format, with maps of different parts of the forest displayed on six tables for viewing. Forest Service employees were available at each table to respond to questions. This format makes it difficult to assess the crowd's sentiment because there is no formal presentation, nor open comment period. (By the way, I fear this format will be used in June, 2009, when UNR/DRI present the results of their 10 research projects on the Walker River Basin Project. It's a different version of the "divide and conquer" approach.)

What about enforcement?

But those listening did hear comments ranging from, "Why do any roads need to be closed?" to, "This is in my backyard," to, "This deprives us of freedom." to, "All roads in the forest are there for a purpose, so why should they be closed?" to, "No longer will cross country travel be allowed." to, "Once

this project is completed, the only place one can operate any type of motorized vehicle will be on Forest Service authorized roads."

One particular comment involved enforcement of the Travel Management Plan; as the public can attest, there is little enforcement of current closures. The Wilson Canyon site was provided as an example; and no answer was provided by the USFS.

A public suggestion called for creation to a designated site for use by off-roaders who don't stick to the roads (some motorcyclists and ATVers) away from a main highway and in a secluded area. The USFS apparently is reluctant to do this because it would create a liability problem for them.

There may have been some "pro-road closure" attitudes expressed; but, if so, they were unheard.

It was indicated that in some cases, permits can be acquired for travel over unauthorized roads; but some residents were quick to point out the USFS track record in issuing, and taking away, permits for such purposes leaves a lot to be desired.

Many folks noted, and complained, that the road to the top of Bald Mountain will be re-designated as "ATV Only." Project Manager David Loomis explained that the designations placed on many roads at this point in the process are "not cast in stone," and that public comments will be given due consideration. It was indicated this particular "ATV Only" designation was most likely a mistake and should be changed to an "All Vehicles Authorized" designation; and a commitment to making that happen was provided.

The overall perception coming from this meeting was that the vast majority of the public would prefer that the USFS not close any roads--something that is an unlikely option due to a "no action alternative" in the scoping document.

The level of displeasure within the general public on this issue appears much less than it was with the wilderness issue; but the frustration is still obvious, as citizens, more and more, feel government (including the USFS) is ever less responsive to public concerns.

Citizens for Public Access plans to prepare a comment document prior to the December 31 deadline, and the public is invited to have its comments included by contacting CPA via its website ([cfpa-nv.org](http://cfpa-nv.org)); or comments can be emailed to the USFS at [comments-intermnt-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermnt-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us).

We need Senators' help now

The general economic picture in America today, and the powerful political positions of Nevada's two U.S. Senators, could actually translate into a greater opportunity to acquire federal dollars to assist Mason and Smith Valley agricultural interests in making a suggested switch to alternative crops which use less water.

Isn't it ironic? After months and years of fighting with Senator Harry Reid over the Walker River Basin Project and its potentially devastating lifestyle and economic disasters created "when" (most likely not "if") water is taken from our two valleys in an effort to save Walker Lake, now could be the time Reid and Senator John Ensign could be of help to us.

In other words, the Walker River Basin Project might get the federal government to open its wallets once the water theft is accomplished, by providing a window of opportunity for grant assistance.

That was part of the discussion surfacing during the Economic Development Working Groups meeting in Yerington last week sponsored by the University of Nevada, Reno.

Eleven residents and 10 university reps gathered to hear presentations, which included a community assessment overview, discussions of the purpose of working groups, a teff crop overview, a specialty crop overview, and a wine grapes and winery overview--plus open discussion. This marked the fourth economic impact/development meeting here.

Dick Bartholet, Director of Research Development for the Nevada Small Business Development Center, conducted the session and explained the working groups can help bring resources directly to Mason and Smith Valleys.

A Community Assessment (like one done recently in Wells after the earthquake destroyed much of that rural Nevada town) attempts to answer three questions:

- (1) What are the biggest challenges here?
- (2) What are the biggest resources/assets already here?; and
- (3) What projects would we like to see in 3-5 years?

#### Attitude change needed

That discussion led to the assertion by Lyon County Commissioner Phyllis Hunewill that responding to such questions is difficult because "we do not yet know where we will be. How do we dream? It's hard to do. There are a lot of unknowns."

The session drew some of the expected comments involving the "fear" and "danger" associated with change, and the assertion that machine changes to incorporate alternative crops are "do-able."

But that discussion soon changed when SV farmer Gary Garms asserted, "The overall attitude has to change. It is not good for the economy if nobody wants to do it. It comes down to what you like to do, and your profit and loss tells you that."

Garms explained that some sort of financial safety net or guarantee--featuring some serious dollars to sell this program--needs to be considered.

Hunewill agreed, telling the project reps, "We need a federal program to assist farmers with changes."

But when she suggested the UNR research study report include such a recommendation, the audience was told the idea could not be "proposed" by UNR, but could certainly be "supported" by UNR in a separate economic development document.

By the way, the 75-page draft report does make mention (Page 39) of \$20-\$25-million "that could be a source of grants and low interest loans to farmers in the region."

The phrase "locally driven" when referring to economic development was repeated over and over, but Bartholet pledged to continue to assist with the process well after the December 31, 2008, funding deadline for the Walker River Project.

"We want to bring forward the local people and resources for economic development," he concluded. "Tell us what you want and where you want to go."

Garms offered one more comment: "This country needs to appreciate what is done and what is grown here. That takes a change in attitude."

Rick Lattin of Fallon added, "We need to explain how important alfalfa is to the world."

"»A lost cause as long as city dwellers believe milk, fruit, vegetables, meat, and all the other food commodities we eat come from the grocery store. So many have no concept at all"»to them animals are found in a zoo, except perhaps for an occasional dog, cat, rat, or cockroach.

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