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## Two Cents Worth: We're not alone in rejecting lands bill Is it possible we hayseeds don't know what's best for us?

MAY 16, 2008

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Environmentalists and proponents of wilderness would have us believe that little ole Lyon and Mineral Counties are the only areas in the entire U.S. that have turned thumbs down to wilderness designations.

ADVERTISEMENT Not true.

Early on, we reported that our neighboring state of Utah had a resolution passed by its legislature opposing wilderness designations without unanimous support of the legislature and Congressional delegation.

Esmeralda County in Nevada is caught on the horns of a dilemma over wilderness; and a letter from a Nye County Commissioner to the Esmeralda Board saying, "We should not allow special interest groups to come in and change our lands bills and turn them into what they would like to see."

Letters, like the one from the Stewards of the Sequoia, offer support to the Lyon resolution to not support the lands bill and commends them "standing up to the special interests who want to lock the public out of their own public lands".

If you keep your ear to the ground, you can hear voices of dissatisfaction over the way lands bills turned out in a couple of other Nevada counties. In all fairness, you can hear from others who think it's the best thing since sliced bread.

Take another example: The effort made when the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA) rolled into Las Cruces and began trying to sell the idea of created wilderness on 302,000 acres of federal land in Dona Ana County.

Western Livestock Journal's March 24, 2008, edition contains a lengthy letter which outlines how residents formed a public access group called People for Preserving Our Western Heritage, which demonstrated conclusively there was no consensus for wilderness designation.

A rancher wrote the letter and said stakeholder meetings indicated "there were valid concerns surrounding the issue beyond those of the ranching community, including local law enforcement and off-highway recreation groups, Homeland Security, the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, sportsmen, and a growing coalition of business and organizations."

Issues included planned economic and population growth, continued access for all segments of the public, enhancement of wildlife and rangeland health, and a "true fidelity" to historical wilderness concepts and law. These lands must be available for the greater general public, not simply the 5 percent of the American public who can actually afford to use wilderness.

It was pointed out that "generally, people want open space preserved, but they also wanted a mechanism for the town to grow against the choke hold of federally owned lands that surround the town."

Sounds somewhat like Hawthorne's predicament under the Nevada Wilderness Project proposal.

Wilderness Act hijacked?

"The Wilderness Act has been hijacked and the creation of wilderness bears little resemblance to its founding characteristics of 5,000 or more contiguous acres of lands largely untrammelled by man and where man is but a visitor," the Journal letter states.

In Dona Ana County, New Mexico, they prepared an Open Space and Rangeland Preservation Area designation and sent it to the New Mexico Congressional delegation for resolution of the debate there.

Their proposed Open Space and Rangeland Preservation Act provides for a new designation "which will protect the lands, and also protect the rights of Americans who have become disenfranchised by federal land management agencies through litigation and political atrocities imposed by environmental groups."



Jim Sanford

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The same thing may be needed all across the West, where this same theme is being played out under the guise and rhetoric of "saving" lands, reads the letter.

"It is time to embrace his (man's) presence, rather than to hasten his departure," it concludes.

While Lyon and Mineral county have not proposed a designation of their own, the battle raging here sounds all too familiar to the fight in New Mexico.

Each and every county in Nevada will now take a closer look at future lands bills that include wilderness designations--thanks to Lyon and Mineral Counties.

Mineral County says no, but"».

Speaking of Mineral County, its Commissioners voted last week for a resolution declining a lands bill, as it is "not prepared" for such a bill at this time.

However, they also issued a statement indicating that they reserve the right to rescind the resolution if circumstances warrant it. And, the Congressional delegation was to be advised there could be no more one-on-one meetings between the board and staff from the Congressional delegation, as the public is demanding more openness.

Seems to me that an elected board can rescind any motion without reserving the right to do so.

Mineral County is treading water until they hear from Senator Reid's rural representative, Mary Conelly, about the Walker River/Walker Lake water issue on May 21. It's that cut and dried.

Are we all just stupid?

Have you noticed the letters to the editor in the Reno Gazette-Journal since the Lyon Commissioners turned down a lands bill and wilderness specifically?

Make no mistake: These "shock and awe" letters are strategically planned and scheduled to keep the issue in the forefront. Each says about the same thing, as the writers express shock that anybody would oppose wilderness. Several have been written by members of, or supporters of, wilderness groups in Nevada.

Each and every one accuses opponents of misrepresenting the facts in an effort to shoot down their proposal.

Some have bordered on labeling all opponents as less intelligent than proponents.

Others have said the public should have no say on such issues.

In other words, proponents (some of whom don't even reside in Nevada) should enjoy the only decision-making right on such issues. If that isn't an elitist attitude, then I don't know what is. And, I thought this was still the USA.

Hogwash! It's tough to swallow defeat, and they lost this round. They'll be back.

Hicks from the sticks often misunderstood

The Las Vegas CityLife publication pretty much tried to paint those of us out in rural Nevada as poorly educated, easily fooled morons in a story published recently on the wilderness issue.

Writer Andrew Kiraly told his readers that the effort to acquire "chunks of Lyon, Mineral and Esmeralda counties" seemed destined for approval "until miscommunication, paranoia and fear took over."

Fact is, it never had any shot at approval once the Nevada Wilderness Project maps came out. Even local supporters of the Wovoka area will tell you the enlarged proposal doomed their smaller effort.

The writer labels the battle here "The Great Lyon-Mineral-Esmeralda County Wilderness Freak Out," and he pointed to the "culture clash between cowtown residents and conservationists."

The city still pictures rural Nevadans as hayseeds wearing bib overalls, boots, checkered shirts, a baseball cap, and leaning up against a corral fence talking with a hay straw in our mouths. We cannot think for ourselves and need guidance from smarter city dwellers.

A local wilderness proponent is quoted in this particular story as saying, "A lot more were for it than anyone realized. I'd like to say it was a silent majority. From my perspective, a lot of good people were misled."

It seems like it always comes back to the picture they paint of just how stupid we all are if we can't see what they see"»..why we can't recognize what's good for us. They are the only ones who could possibly be right.

The fact remains supporters of wilderness accept everything they are told as truth. We do not.

And I guess I am one of the stupid hayseeds who is so easily misled. I have the boots, checkered shirt, and baseball cap"»all I need is a pair of bib overalls, and finding a piece of hay to stick in my mouth is easy thanks to the beautiful agricultural valley in which I live.

Lyon Commissioner Phyllis Hunewill and I were both quoted in the story. I could tell exactly which quotes of mine the writer would use because I could hear him typing on his laptop as I spoke. There was very little doubt he would quote me about not trusting wilderness people or our Congressional delegation and the fact that I felt the wilderness process was handled "ass-backwards."

In this case, he probably quoted me correctly. But then I'm a hayseed and most likely can't remember what I did say.

Strange"»I'm always a little suspicious of people who think milk comes from cartons and meat from the grocery store.

Poor county leadership?

The CityLife story also said wilderness proponents haven't "stopped wilderness activists who are now considering other strategies to protect lands in these rural counties"».the same counties that just said no thanks.

And, Nevada Wilderness Project Director John Wallin is credited with saying the problem isn't with wilderness, "it's with bad leadership at the county level."

"I don't really understand what the confusion is when they've initiated the federal lands bill process twice with the delegation, knowing that wilderness was going to be part of the equation, and then they kind of set themselves up for failure by stoking the flames of misinformation," Wallin said.

Lyon started to work in cooperation with the Congressional delegation several years ago, and actually sought a positive outcome. But those negotiations changed over time, and the Commissioners ultimately decided there were more negatives to a lands bill than there were positives.

Then, along comes the public, which is not supposed to question its own Congressional delegation, even though two of the three were in the pocket of environmentalists.

Everything changed when we started asking questions and demanding answers.

Ultimately, Lyon and Mineral Counties were forced to consider lands bills because Nevada's Congressional delegation said over and over again that the Walker River Basin Project resolution legislation would be included in a joint lands bill.

It was Senator Reid who said the water issue had to go into a lands bill instead of being looked at separately, as it should have been.

That has since changed with rejection of any lands bill, and Walker River water legislation is expected to be drafted by this summer.

It's obvious with statements like those made by the Nevada Wilderness Project director, the Nevada Wilderness Project and Friends of Nevada Wilderness plan an end run around our Commissioners because they could hardly expect a favorable vote now.

If the counties said "no," and the Congressional delegation stands to its pledge not to force anything unwanted onto those counties, that leaves a behind-the-scenes effort--most likely involving regulatory agencies rather than anything involving public participation.

We have to remain vigilant"».the war is not over.

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