

**TESTIMONY OF SUE SILVER
MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
COALITION FOR PUBLIC ACCESS**

**BEFORE THE NEVADA LEGISLATURE'S
SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SENATOR DAVID R. PARKS, CHAIR**

IN SUPPORT OF THE SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 2

MARCH 5, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Sue Silver. I am a member of the Coalition for Public Access and a resident of Mineral County. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SJR2.

The idea of having areas of land in America set aside because of their particular beauty and unique nature is noble and right. Setting aside vast areas of lands not unique in character or quality to satisfy the desires of a particular sect of individuals just because they are able to get Congress to do it, is not right.

Yet in most instances these days, that is exactly what is done when Congress designates such places as Wilderness Areas through the process of land bills.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 provided for designating certain qualifying lands as Wilderness Areas, preventing private ownership, as well as restricting motorized access and use. Senator Ensign's representative informed us last year that wilderness can now be anything they – Congress or the advocates - want it to be and the definition established in 1964 no longer really matters.

Last year Wilderness came to Mineral County, but only after the same wilderness advocates had requested from local residents a tour of the countryside the previous fall. It was almost as if they couldn't select the lands for their proposal without seeing it first and the impression was they had never been in Mineral County before. They could hardly have selected the nearly 600,000 acres to include in their proposals without this tour. These areas weren't selected because they'd been there before the tour and felt the land needed protecting. They were included in the wilderness proposal simply because they could be.

These were areas of Mineral that since 1860 have been traversed by prospectors, used for mining, grazing, woodcutting, road building, and other facets of life that were necessary in the early settlement of the state. In our county, they are some of the best areas for hunting and recreation of all kinds. The evidence of past occupation and development is found virtually everywhere within them.

They are beautiful areas to visit. What they are not is high quality, unmolested or unique areas that are better suited to restricted use and non-motorized travel for the benefit only of a select group.

Wilderness areas will FOREVER prevent the development of any resources of any kind. There is no Congressional mechanism for the release of lands within designated Wilderness Areas.

Without the use of the public lands for mining, alternative energy, hunting, grazing, and water resources, much of Nevada's economy stands to suffer. Mining was once the state's number one industry. Today we are told that Nevada has a wealth of alternative renewable energy sites. But if the lands are designated as wilderness areas, all potential is nullified.

Last year's proposal for wilderness areas in Mineral would have deprived citizens and residents motorized access to the vast majority of the lands in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest within the county. It also included the Gabbs Valley WSA which the BLM long ago determined is not suitable for wilderness area designation.

A large number of springs were also included in the areas proposed. Wilderness designation would have blocked future development of those resources should they ever be required. The wilderness proposal was a dangerous and frivolous concept and we were fortunate to have fought it off. We likely will not be as lucky the next time. And there will be a next time.

Our neighbor counties in California – Mono and Inyo – also received wilderness proposals and a land bill last year that residents believed they had an acceptable agreement on. Once it got to Washington, it grew and changed by leaps and bounds. The wilderness advocates have the funding to pay lobbyists to ensure that all their demands are met, even after the fact of an agreement. Our counties do not.

It is important for Nevada to protect its interests in the use of the public lands. Land bills too often CREATE wilderness areas where there are no qualified lands meeting the definition expressed by Congress in 1964. The utilization of lands bills preclude the requirement that these areas be studied and discussed by federal land managers before going to Congress and, instead, they sail through Washington, voted on by other state's representatives who have no concept of what our life in the West is all about. This is the tool the wilderness advocates have found to fill their desires – a loophole in the process that best meets their need.

This is not the first time the Nevada Legislature has discussed and adopted resolutions to Congress about the use of the public lands in the state. Nevada must determine if it finds it acceptable for Congress to lock lands away from the general public for no better reason than because a group of people wanted it that way. If this is not acceptable, then Nevada must continue to communicate its views to Nevada's Congressional Delegation and the U.S. Congress.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully ask the Committee to support approval of SJR2.

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