

**TESTIMONY ON CURRENT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
ON THE
CARSON RANGER DISTRICT
HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST
FOR THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS**

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Genny Wilson
District Ranger
Carson Ranger District

Introduction. Madame Chairwoman and committee members, thank you for providing this opportunity to speak before the Legislative Committee on Public Lands. My name is Genny Wilson, and I am the District Ranger for the Carson Ranger District on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Following is a quick overview of the Ranger District and the major programs and projects we are currently working on:

District Summary. The Carson Ranger District is approximately 370,000 acres of National Forest System land that straddles the Nevada/California Stateline with about half of the district in Nevada and half in California. We work with several Counties which include Douglas, Carson City, and Washoe in Nevada and Alpine and Sierra Counties in California. There are three wilderness areas on the District; a ski area, seven campgrounds and hundreds of miles of hiking trails. We have 80 permanent employees, more than half are firefighters. I have been the District Ranger stationed in Carson City for the past four years.

Travel Management. The Carson Ranger District published a revised motor vehicle use map in 2008 in compliance with the Travel Management Rule. The Carson Ranger District had previously published a travel map in 1994 and over the years has completed several travel planning processes to update our road system and map. We are currently working on updating

the north end of the district in Sierra County and on the south end of the district in Alpine County, both in California.

Land Acquisition and Boundary Administration. The Carson Ranger District has benefitted greatly from the land acquisition program funded through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA). Since the program began, the district has submitted land acquisition proposals in each nomination round. We have acquired close to 2,500 acres of land and are currently working on acquiring two additional parcels that have been approved in Round 12, by the SNPLMA Executive Committee. And assisted landowners with submitting two additional parcels for Round 13 Request for Proposals. This past fall we completed land exchanges with Carson City in accordance with the TITLE III of the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009 (H. R. 1105—208). This bill allowed for the Toiyabe National Forest to acquire lands within the exterior boundaries of the Forest in exchange exchanging lands owned by Carson City, Nevada. This exchange allowed Carson City to own more open space at lower elevations that adjoin city limits and the Forest Service to acquire higher elevation lands from Carson City to provide for a more contiguous land base.

The District has also been busy completing National Forest boundary surveys. The primary reason for these surveys is to assure that private property is protected when the Forest Service treats forest fuels projects in the wildland urban interface. In the past two years, we have surveyed more than 40 miles of Forest Boundary, primarily in Washoe and Douglas Counties. A consequence of identifying these boundaries is the discovery of private encroachments onto National Forest System land. Our surveyors estimate that for every one mile of boundary surveyed in our wildland urban interface they discover an average of one encroachment. These encroachments include roads to private residences, garbage and debris dump sites, fences,

landscaping, and even houses that are partially built on National Forest System land. We are now in the process of notifying landowners to remove these encroachments from the public land. The majority of those notified have quickly responded to our request and removed the encroachment, while, more permanent structures such as roads or residences are not so easily rectified. We will continue to work with the landowners to ensure they comply with public land policy.

Forest Fuels Reduction. The 2006 White Pine County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act (Public Law 109-432) amended the use of SNPLMA Special Account expenditure categories to include three comprehensive, ten-year hazardous fuels and fire prevention plans for the Spring Mountains, the Lake Tahoe Basin, and the eastern Sierra in Douglas and Washoe Counties, and Carson City.

This 10-year interagency plan was completed in 2008, and since that time the Carson Ranger District has made application to each SNPLMA nomination round to complete hazardous fuels reduction work in the Wild Urban Interface along the Sierra Front. Completed work includes approximately 2,500 acres of fuels reduction along Washoe Valley and Mount Rose corridors in Washoe County; 500 acres of treatment in Jacks Valley and 200 acres around the Jobs Peak Ranch area in Douglas County; 300 acres in Clear Creek and King Canyon in Carson City County. Contract work is beginning this spring on 1,800 acres of National Forest System land in the Galena and Mt. Rose Tract areas and planning efforts are underway to reduce fuels west of Reno in Thomas Creek/Caughlin area. Further south we are also in the initial planning stage adjacent to the Nevada State Park. This will connect with fuels reduction work the Nevada Division of Forestry has recently completed and this next year we begin work around the town of Genoa.

The availability of SNPLMA funds has allowed the Carson Ranger District to make tremendous progress in reducing hazardous forest fuels. This in combination with the work being completed by our partners, namely Nevada Division of Forestry, Washoe County, and Nevada Fire Safe Council, we are making a huge difference to protect the National Forest and private lands from wildfire.

Fire Management. Due to the complexity of the wildland urban interface, the Carson Ranger District currently has the largest staff of firefighters for the Forest Service in Nevada. We have six fire engines stationed along the Sierra Front with one engine in Stead, two on the west side of Reno at our fire station off West Fourth Street, one in Jacks Valley in Douglas County and two in Markleeville, California. We have four fire prevention technicians who patrol the District. These technicians focus their efforts on public education and making contact with Forest users to prevent wildfires. The district hosts the 20 person Black Mountain Hotshots, a highly specialized crew of men and women that have solid reputations as multi-skilled professional firefighters. that leads the management of the Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center in Minden.

As we witnessed with the recent and Washoe Drive Fires, cooperation is essential among our fire agencies when battling wildfire in the wildland urban interface. Wildfire on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in recent years has been limited. Until the recent activity, we have had very slow fire seasons since I became District Ranger in 2008. The Forest Service is anticipating much drier conditions for this next fire season.

As I just stated, much of our success on the Sierra Front is due to the cooperation among the local, State and Federal fire suppression resources. The local Sierra Front Interagency Incident Management Team, made up of the Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Western Nevada Agency Bureau of Land Management Carson City District, CAL Fire, Carson City Fire Department, East Fork Fire Protection District, Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Nevada Division of Forestry, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District, North Tahoe Fire Protection District, Reno Fire Department, Sierra Fire Protection District, Sparks Fire Department, Storey County Fire Department, Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District, U.S. Forest Service Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, and Tahoe National Forest is able to respond quickly because the team is composed of personnel from local agencies. Again, we witnessed this quick response even in the “off season” when the Sierra Front Team was able to take command of Caughlin and Washoe Drive fires within the first 12 to 24 hours of ignition. I cannot stress enough how critical cooperation is among our firefighting resources, especially as we are all being faced with declining budgets and reductions in staffing.

Recreation. While most Forest Service units are experiencing a reduction in recreation facilities, the Carson Ranger District recreation program is growing. This growth is directly attributed to partnerships with our local County and State Governments and non-profit associations. Two of our current most successful partnerships are:

Galena Visitor Center: We opened the new Galena Visitor Center on Mt. Rose highway in August of 2010. This visitor center was built on National Forest system lands through a partnership with Washoe County in which both the Forest Service and Washoe County contributed funds. The Center is being operated by Washoe County under a special use permit

from the Forest Service. Washoe County hired the Great Basin Institute to manage the day to day operations. Great Basin Institute has developed an outstanding program in outdoor education that are conducted at the Galena Visitor Center. Our hope is that this program will continue to grow and allow for all elementary students in Washoe County to attend an outdoor field study program. As you can imagine, this effort will take substantial funding on an annual basis; we are currently working with Great Basin Institute and Washoe County to establish an interpretive association that will help raise funds for outdoor education and the day-to-day operations. Currently, the Forest Service is relying almost exclusively on contributed resources to operate the center.

The Visitor Center is located adjacent to Galena County Park. The County and Forest Service manage these facilities in partnership; we share trail systems, reservations systems for picnic areas, special events authorized through special use permits and law enforcement efforts.

Rim to Reno Trail and the Genoa-Foothill Trail: The Tahoe Rim and Carson Valley Trail Associations are very strong partners on the Carson Ranger District. Both associations applied for funding under the 2002 Conservation Bond Program (Assembly Bill No. 9 of the 17 Special Nevada Legislative Session), also known as the Question 1 program, and was granted these funds to build two new trails systems on the Carson Ranger District. Construction of these trails was completed last fall. The Rim to Reno trail provides a connection between Mt. Rose and Relay Peak over to Thomas Creek trail in the southwest area of Reno. The Genoa Foothill Trail traverses the mountains west of Carson Valley. We are currently working with Carson City to create a trail system to traverse the mountains west of Carson City. Urban trails are extremely popular along the Sierra Front. The majority of trail users are local residences looking for day hikes. Open spaces are very important to our urban residences; access to the outdoors

is one of the major draws to the Reno-Carson-Minden area. The Mt. Rose Summit Trailhead and the new Washoe County trailhead at Hunter Creek are visited by an overwhelming number of hikers every weekend. Trail use on the Carson Ranger District is growing exponentially. Douglas County is currently working on a developed parking area for trail access in Genoa to manage the use of the new trails in that area. The Carson Valley Back Country Horsemen maintain many of our trails by clearing trees from our trails. Our trail program would not be possible without the hundreds of hours of donated time from these volunteer groups.

Special Uses. Because of our close proximity to the wildland urban interface, there is a demand for the public to use our natural resources and landscapes. The Carson Ranger District has a very large special use permit workload and include permits for recreational events such as bike and running races; cell phone and radio communication sites on Peavine and Slide Mountain; military exercises, utility corridors, and many, many more. Two of our current proposals you may have heard about include:

Mt. Rose Ski Area Expansion. We were recently approached by Mt. Rose Ski Area for their Atoma project to expand their special use permit on National Forest System land north of Mt. Rose highway to build a new ski lift and add about 100 acres of additional ski terrain. We will initiate the environmental planning process this spring/summer to review the proposal. Currently, about half of the Mt. Rose Ski Area is on National Forest System land managed under a special use permit.

NV Energy Bordertown to Verdi Transmission Line. The Forest recently initiated the environmental planning process on a proposal from NV Energy for a 120kv transmission line that would run from the Bordertown substation north of Reno to the Verdi Substation west of Reno. This 20 mile line would provide a back-up energy source for Northwest Reno. The public

comment period just closed and we are now working with a consultant to prepare an environmental impact statement that will be released early next year.

Conclusion. In addition to the projects and programs I have mentioned, the District also manages traditional uses of the National Forest including livestock grazing, timber harvest, and wildlife habitat. Invasive species are likely our biggest challenge in the coming years as medusahead and tall whitetop are now becoming much more prevalent at the lower elevations of the district.

Madame Chairwoman and committee members, thank you for providing this opportunity to speak today about the Carson Ranger District. I will now address any questions you may have about the District.

END OF TESTIMONY