

July 26, 2017

Congressman Mark Amodei
Care of: Stephanie Walker, Legislative Director
332 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Via Email: Stephanie.Walker@mail.house.gov

RE: Request for Wildlife Mapping in Areas Identified for Disposal by the Bureau of Land Management and Checkerboard Land Along the Interstate 80 Corridor

To the Honorable Mark Amodei,

This letter and attached information is in response to an inquiry from your previous Legislative Director Jason Riederer. In a May 4, 2017 email to Commissioner Jeremy Drew, Mr. Riederer requested that the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners (Wildlife Commission) “...identify areas of critical hunting habitat or hunting areas within those areas [BLM lands identified as potentially suitable for disposal in their existing RMPs as well as BLM checkerboard lands along I-80] that the Board would be opposed to being transferred”. Since receiving the above-referenced email Commissioner Drew has been in touch with both Mr. Riederer and Ms. Walker about engaging the Wildlife Commission in addressing this request during its regularly scheduled meetings. Commissioner Drew has also coordinated with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) about providing their needed technical support to develop maps to meet this request. This item has been discussed at the following Wildlife Commission meetings:

- May 12 and 13: Commissioner Drew read Mr. Riederer’s email request under the Commission Member Items agenda item as The Wildlife Commission did not have time to formally agendize the request as an Action Item.
- June 23 and 24: Draft maps were developed by NDOW and presented to the Commission for input and direction in proceeding with development of final maps. At that time, the Wildlife Commission directed Commissioner Drew to work with NDOW and your staff to update and finalize the map, and to develop a cover letter to send to you. Minutes of this meeting can be provided at your request and a video archive of the Wildlife Commission’s discussion and public input can be viewed online.
- August 11 and 12: Updated maps and a draft of this cover letter were approved by the Commission for submittal to you. Minutes of this meeting can be provided at your request and a video archive of the Wildlife Commission’s discussion and public input can be viewed online. Formal written correspondence received by the Wildlife Commission specific to this agenda item has been attached for your reference.

The approach to filling your request was to utilize the Critical Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT) developed by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The CHAT was developed as a broad-scale planning tool for quick assessment of potential impacts of a given project on wildlife resources. Additional information on the data that is included in CHAT has been provided to your staff and can be viewed online at: <http://www.wafwachat.org/data/metadata/nevada>. In addition to the CHAT data, NDOW also include water development sites (guzzlers), which indicate past sportsmen investment in developing water in what is assumed to be a priority area.

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The attached maps show areas of “Most Crucial Habitat” (CHAT combined ranking of 1 or 2 out of 6) in dark blue, as well as areas of “Crucial Habitat” (CHAT combined ranking of 3 or 4 out of 6) in light blue. These areas as well as water development locations (yellow) are denoted on the maps along with BLMs “Potentially Suitable Disposal Lands” (pink).

In a general and broad-scale sense, the Wildlife Commission would certainly have concern with any areas where “Potentially Suitable Disposal Lands” overlap with either the most crucial habitats, crucial habitats or water development sites. While the maps developed by the Department provide a good general sense of where conflicts with wildlife habitat occur, they do have some notable limitations.

Limitations include, but are not limited to:

- The general inability to depict public access to surrounding public lands and how disposal of identified lands would impact such access;
- The inability to depict popular hunting, fishing or wildlife viewing areas to a parcel-specific scale; and,
- The inability to identify site-specific conservation and/or connectivity values for wildlife that utilize these areas or migrate / cross these areas.

In order to address these limitations, the Commission would strongly encourage direct engagement with local stakeholders for any proposed land disposal. Key stakeholders include:

- The Nevada Department of Wildlife;
- Appropriate County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife (CABMW) and County Commission; and,
- State and/or local Sportsmen-Conservation and Conservation Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The Wildlife Commission feels strongly that these groups should be engaged early and often in any potential land disposal process or legislative proposal.

While the Wildlife Commission appreciates the continued dialogue on this subject, it would like to reiterate the following point previously conveyed:

1. The Wildlife Commission does not support large-scale transfer of public lands as it is virtually impossible to adequately address the potential impact to wildlife and wildlife-based recreation;
2. The Wildlife Commission believes that any land disposal process or legislative proposal should be developed through a rigorous locally-driven process that includes expertise provided by NDOW, CABMWs, County Commissions and NGOs;
3. The Wildlife Commission will oppose any transfer, regardless of the scale, that results in a loss of critical wildlife habitat, loss of access for wildlife-based recreation or loss of access to adjacent public lands;
4. The Wildlife Commission believes that a lands bill process at the County-scale makes the most sense, provided adequate time and input is taken to ensure no net loss of public lands access or wildlife resources are realized; and,
5. The Wildlife Commission believes that such bills should emphasize a goal of no net loss of public lands (i.e. land exchanges versus land sales or conveyances) and/or re-investment of dollars derived from such sales to improving wildlife habitat on public lands, and improving access to public lands.

The Wildlife Commission hopes this letter and the attached maps provide you with a better sense of where conflicts may occur, and would encourage continued dialogue in terms of any advancement of state or local lands bills.

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Thank you,

TBD, Chair
Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners

TBD:jld

CC: Brian Sandoval, Governor
Nevada Congressional Delegation

Attached: NDOW Maps depicting Crucial Habitat and Potentially Disposable Lands
Correspondence Received by the Commission in Regard to this Agenda Item