

State takeover of federal lands

By Larry Hyslop



Demar Dahl is chairman of the Nevada Land Management Task Force

Demar Dahl is an Elko County Commissioner and chairman of the Nevada Land Management Task Force. The Nevada Assembly passed Assembly bill 227, which created this task force and charged it with developing a strategy and process for transferring control of public lands from federal authorities to the state of Nevada.

The task force has 17 members, consisting of one county commissioner from each Nevada county. They have held four monthly meetings, with eight more planned. They will present a report to the Legislative Committee on Public Lands by September 1, 2014, with the land takeover planned for June 30, 2015. The previous meetings were held in different towns but they had a series of video problems, so all future meetings will be held in Carson City. (Video-conferencing allows more people to attend the meetings.)

Demar wants the task force to gather information by listening to different viewpoints while showing respect for all opinions. They have delayed voting on aspects of their report until they obtain more needed information

Federally-managed lands that would not be part of this takeover would be national parks, wilderness areas, military areas, and tribal lands. The goal would be to maintain the access to all state lands as good if not better than current access. The task force would also recommend that this access remain free. Demar feels state control would allow more of a common sense approach to access issues such as travel management.

One question that always comes up is the sale of state lands. The only lands currently considered for sale are lands already designated for disposal by federal agencies, lands that never seem to make it through the process. Also, the square mile lots within the railroad checkerboard that are so hard to manage. A strong consensus would be needed for any other state lands to be sold and that county's commissioners would need to agree to the sale. Demar recognizes the concern of people about any future, large land sales.

The task force has looked at studies that say the state could pay for the management of all these lands. Nevada has very little state land to compare to, but studies of other states show their state lands pay for their own management.

Ranchers would continue to pay grazing fees to the state. The rate would likely be higher than the current federal rate but Demar says the rancher would pay for fewer improvements and would face fewer regulations.

Most mining regulations already come from state agencies like the Nevada Department of Minerals. The Nevada Department of Environmental Protection regulations are as strict if not more strict than the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The state would need an agency like the BLM to manage state lands and Demar admits this agency would probably grow to become a bureaucracy. He feels a state agency would have more success addressing problems like wildfires, since he feels too much federal management comes from the national level. State management would allow counties to have more say in land management and would not need to go through the NEPA process on projects.

A basic question is always why would the American people simply give their public land to the state of Nevada? Demar's answer is that whatever the American people did on Nevada's public lands, they will still be able to do on state lands.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 12/28/2013

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