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14 Pages

Grazing task force tells of Toiyabe cattle decline

By Mike Antrobus

The number of cattle grazing on the Toiyabe National Forest in central Nevada has been drastically reduced, according to a report presented to U.S. Rep. Barbara Vucanovich, R-Nev., by the Elko County Grazing Task Force.

The number of grazing permittees on the Toiyabe National Forest was disputed two weeks ago by Nevada Assemblyman John Carpenter, R-Elko, and Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor Jim Nelson during an Elko County Commission meeting.

Nelson told commissioners there were currently about 80 permittees on that forest, while Carpenter contended there were no more than six.

A check of forest service records showed the entire Toiyabe Forest, which includes more than four million acres scattered from the Austin area to eastern California, allowed 68 permits on 82 grazing allotments,

but livestock permittees in central Nevada number very few.

Gene Gustin, chairman of the Elko County Public Land Use Advisory Commission and a member of the grazing task force, presented a map of grazing allotments in central Nevada between Austin and Tonopah to Vucanovich when she was in Elko July 8.

The map shows allotments situated on the east slope of the Toiyabe Mountain range, and on the Toquima and Monitor Mountain ranges.

Gustin said the map focused on this area because ranchers there have suffered some of the most severe grazing reductions in the state and because the grazing permits held on allotments there will expire Dec. 31.

Those permittees now run only a fraction of the cattle they once grazed upon national forest land, he said. The Clifford Ranch, for exam-

ple, which once ran 1,000 head of cattle year-round, now runs 10 head during the spring, 31 during the summer and 23 during the winter.

A 1976 forest service map showed there were 33 grazing allotments in this region. Now there are only six: the Francisco C&H and Pablo/Wall Canyon C&H in the Toiyabe range, the Moores Creek C&H in the Toquima range and the Saulsbury C&H, Stone Cabin C&H and Horse Heaven C&S in the Monitor range.

Tony Valdes, the USFS's Tonopah district ranger, said that in addition to those six allotments now being considered for permit renewal, there are four inactive allotments in the area: two in the Monitor range, one in the Toquima and one in the Toiyabe.

According to a scoping document put out by the forest service on permit renewal for the six allotments, Valdes "will decide whether to authorize livestock grazing as proposed.



Above are the six grazing allotments on the Toiyabe National Forest in central Nevada up for renewal Dec. 31: the Francisco C&H, red, Pablo/Wall Canyon C&H, blue, the Moores Creek C&H, magenta, the Saulsbury C&H, cyan, Stone Cabin C&H, grey, and Horse Heaven C&S, yellow. The Elko County Grazing Task Force said the area has seen the most drastic reduction in livestock in the state, down from 33 allotments in 1976.

eliminate grazing use or authorize a change in grazing use." He noted that at least one of the allotments is facing a possible 75 percent reduction.

The district ranger said while the emphasis on the forest was shifting from grazing to wildlife, including a growing elk herd and recreational use, "we're not out to end livestock grazing."

He said allotments now in non use eventually will be returned to grazing, probably in five years.

"The right operator with the appropriate grazing method will be successful," he said, "but if they want to operate the same old way as 50 years ago, they will not be successful."

Valdes added, however, that ranchers who are burdened with a lot of debt could go bankrupt not matter how well they run their operation.

Gustin suggested that the determining factor of whether many ranching operations in Nevada will survive is not what grazing methods are used but rather how they are influenced by federal management of the public lands.

He said the livestock industry in central Nevada began a tremendous decline in 1986 when Supervisor Nelson arrived on the scene and began implementing a grazing management method based upon forage utilization.

Nelson was named supervisor of the Humboldt National Forest in addition to Toiyabe supervisor last year, and now utilization standards are used to determine when cattle are removed on both forests, Gustin said.

"Jim Nelson has been down in the Toiyabe National Forest for several years, and since he's been down there, we've seen drastic cuts in allotments and AUMs [animal unit months], he said. "History will repeat itself [on the Humboldt forest] if left unchecked."