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Miller wants public land to stay in federal hands

Gov. Bob Miller says he opposes Nevada taking over control of 48 million acres of federal land.

A proposal being considered by Congress would transfer to states as much as 270 million acres now managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Nevada has the most BLM land of any state — 67 percent of its acreage.

Miller press secretary Richard Urey said Miller "has very profound concerns about the fiscal impacts — fires, prevention of erosion, reforestation, agronomics, public security and enforcements. The costs are enormous."

"The federal government has borne those costs," Urey added. "To shift those responsibilities to the state casts a shadow of mounting costs on state taxpayers."

Contrary to the governor's assessment, a study conducted by Eureka County indicated Nevada would net \$150 million a year if it were handed control of public lands.

Urey's comments coincided with release of a BLM report showing the federal agency made direct payments of \$15.2 million to Nevada last fiscal year and invested another \$58.4 million in services to the state.

A breakdown of the \$58.4 million in services include fire-fighting, mineral leases and upkeep of recreational facilities.

BLM chief Mike Dombeck said the combined \$73.6 million in direct transfers and services compares with \$39.1 million in revenues from BLM-managed lands in Nevada in 1994. The revenues include fees for recreation, mining, livestock grazing and

timber sales.

"The BLM's report makes clear why Nevada comes out a winner when the public lands are held in trust and managed by the BLM," Dombeck said. "The reason is simple: Federal taxpayers across the nation — not just the citizens of Nevada — pay for the BLM's stewardship of the public lands within Nevada's borders."

Dombeck also said the pending congressional proposals to transfer public lands to individual states doesn't restrict the state's management, and states could keep or sell off the lands.

He added the legislation doesn't compensate taxpayers for the loss of revenue from the commercial activity on public lands, the loss of assets on the land or the land itself.

The Eureka County study, conducted by Resource Concepts Inc. of Carson City, said that while the federal government loses money on land management, states that do so make money. Arizona had a profit of \$45.5 million on the management of nine million acres there in 1993. Idaho saw a profit of \$25.7 million on the 2.4 million acres it manages. New Mexico saw a 1993 profit of \$134.7 million on the management of 13.2 million acres of public land; and Utah, which manages 3.7 million acres, turned a profit of \$18.7 million that year.

RCI said that while the BLM managed to lose \$28.5 million during 1992 on public land in Nevada, proper management of that land would yield a profit for the state of from \$100 million to \$200 million. — By Associated Press and Free Press staff.

Rhoads, Carpenter fight public lands amendment

Two of Elko County's state legislators, Sen. Dean Rhoads, R-Tuscarora, and Assemblyman John Carpenter, R-District 33, tried to prevent Elko County from submitting a draft legislative request to amend the state public land laws Friday morning at a special county commission meeting.

The meeting was called to approve the county's six Bill Draft Requests for the 1997 legislative session.

Rhoads said the Public Lands and Natural Resources committees would be considering several requests for modification of the state's 1979 public lands law, Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 321.

County Commissioner Lee Chapman expressed concern that the amendments, proposed by Ruby Valley rancher and lands activist Cliff Gardner, would create additional costs to the state and additional revenues would have to be found to fund the changes.

The proposed amendments set up state management of public lands with preference given to county rule that would answer to a 17-member state board of commissioners; assigns revenue generated from the public lands to the county managing the lands; makes it a crime if federal, state or local government officials will not enforce NRS 321; strengthens the state's claim to ownership of the lands; and names the Supreme Court of the United States as the only court to hear any challenges to the law.

Carpenter said the county was asking for specifics in the law when it should be approving of the concept.

Rhoads said the county's request would add more bureaucracy to the system, which is in need of radical changes without more bureaucracy.

Argument over the bill request ended when Ed Presley reminded commissioners that they had already approved sending the request to the legislature at their last commission meeting in Jarbidge and that Friday's meeting was the final meeting approving the language of all six of the bill drafts.

The other bill drafts would:

- Create road maintenance districts that would allow property owner groups to petition the county for special assessments specifically to maintain local roads.

- Raise the minimum cost of a contract requiring the county to pay workers the prevailing wage for counties with less than 100,000 population.

- Seek to abolish the Nevada Department of Wildlife and replace it

with the Nevada Fish and Game Commission.

- Drop the state-imposed assessment going toward the China Springs Youth Camp from Elko and all other counties that participated in the funding of the regional Detention Center in Elko.

- Include medical directors of publicly operated ambulance services to fall under the definition of "immune contractor" for malpractice insurance.