



(Mike Antrobus/Free Press)

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BLM manager Rod Harris announces his retirement

By Mike Antrobus

Rod Harris, Elko district manager for the Bureau of Land Management, announced today he will retire at the end of the month after 35 years of service with the agency.

Harris said he and his wife, Kaye, who works for Newmont Gold Co., will remain in the Elko area, but he has made no other plans past retirement. He noted, however, "I don't want to sit around."

Harris explained he decided to take advantage of a retirement "buy-out" offer made by the agency. Government agencies and private companies use such buyouts as incentive to encourage employees at the top of the pay scale to retire.

"I've enjoyed the opportunity I've had to work with various people in the community and to learn from them," Harris remarked. "I've enjoyed working with BLM personnel over the years as well."

During his 16-year tenure in the Elko office, the area manager witnessed and participated in dramatic changes in both the Elko area and the BLM. And the most remarkable changes came in mining activity in the Carlin Trend, he said.

When Harris took over the helm here in January 1979, "there was just a little mining activity," he said.

Now, the local area is the top gold producer in North America.

The BLM also saw a shift in management priorities towards environmental concerns during his career, he said. Locally, the biggest environmental concern has been Lahonton Cutthroat trout, a fish protected under the Endangered Species Act.

"Since 1984, my major goal has been to protect LCT habitat," Harris said. "I felt if we could improve enough aquatic habitat, we could delist that thing."

And towards reaching that goal, he has worked to obtain real estate important to the listed species. He said the most important trade was the Mary's River land exchange finalized in 1992.

The BLM manager estimated the BLM had traded about 100,000 acres of land in Elko County during his stint as district manager.

He said a majority of all land in Elko County associated with LCT habitat was currently "in some stage of mitigation." The BLM already manages about half the LCT habitat in the county.

Harris said the BLM had seen a dramatic increase in interest in public land since he joined the agency. And that interest involved a wide spectrum of uses.

The retiring manager first joined

the bureau in 1960 after graduating from the University of Idaho with a degree in forestry with a range management option.

He was first assigned as a range conservation manager in Monicello, Utah, where the BLM oversees about 4 million acres. He worked there six years before becoming area manager in Burly, Idaho.

In June 1973, Harris was appointed to the BLM's range staff in Washington, D.C. There he helped work on an Environmental Impact Statement for livestock grazing on BLM land across the nation.

A lawsuit filed against the agency by the Natural Resources Defense Council, forced the BLM to complete more than 200 individual grazing EISs, he said.

In August 1976, Harris became associate district manager in Albuquerque, N.M.

The oil embargo during the mid-1970s triggered an increase in fuel mineral exploration during that time, especially coal, he said. The BLM also saw an increase in oil and gas production on public lands and he spent a lot of time working to "investigate, study and mitigate the impacts" of that exploration.