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Wendover Swap, Victim Of Sage Brush Rebellion?

A proposed land exchange between Wendover and the federal government could become a casualty of the Sage Brush Rebellion, said West Wendover City Manager Janice Fox.

The proposed exchange of up to 70,000 acres of privately owned ranch land in rural Elko county for up to 8,000 acres of federally owned land in West Wendover, Nevada could open up thousands of acres for development in the housing strapped city.

Until this year the practice of exchanging private land located in a rural part of Elko County with federally owned land in and around cities had been almost an automatic process, Fox said. But with the growing strength of the Sage Brush Rebellion and the movement's questioning the principle of federal ownership of public land, that

practice can no longer be considered 'business as usual,' Fox explained.

"What we should be concerned with is the possibility that the philosophical debate of who owns or manages 'public land' over shadowing the merits of this particular land exchange itself," Fox said.

Although three of the five county commissioners Lee Chapman, Barbara Wellington and Mike Nannini previously expressed strong support for the Wendover exchange, Fox's fears that the commission will shift politically and nix the exchange are not unjustified.

Wellington is retiring this year and will be replaced by Tony Lesperance who is running unopposed. Lesperance has strong ties to the Sage Brush rebellion and

is considered much more conservative than Wellington.

Lesperance will also join Roberta Skelton, perhaps the strongest voice for local control of public land on the commission leaving the remaining commissioner Royce Hackworth as the swing vote on the five seat county commission.

But even if the commission stays its course and continues to support the exchange, the swap is not without its local West Wendover opponents.

This August a contingent representing most of the principle land owners in West Wendover lambasted the swap and persuaded the city council to oppose the deal it had until then endorsed.

The deal, local land owners argued, had the

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