

Editorials...

BLM shouldn't be allowed to hold Wendover hostage

Controversy over the exchange of land between the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Big Springs Ranch is a good example of why the BLM has earned the derisive moniker Bureau of Land Mismanagement.

Wendover needs land to grow; and the land it needs is controlled by the Bureau of Land Management. The solution is fairly simple: the land should be turned over to the City of Wendover as the first step toward getting it into private hands where it can be developed for the benefit of the city and county.

The second-best option would be to offer the land for sale to the highest bidder, eliminating the need for the city to act as a middleman. The problem with this approach is it puts money into the BLM's pocket, which is something that would be avoided under the first option. And it's not as if "fairness" requires an exchange of value for the BLM to relinquish its hold on this property. The BLM didn't risk any money to acquire the land as an investment. The land was acquired by the United States and placed in the BLM's hands for disposal.

But that simple concept has been corrupted over the years as the central government realized maintaining control over these federal lands meant maintaining control over the West itself, and all its inhabitants. From the perspective of a federal bureaucrat with socialist inclinations — and they all have them, or they'd be working elsewhere — the people of the West can be better managed when they live in occupied territories, as opposed to sovereign states, equal to the original 13, as required by the U.S. Constitution and a number of court decisions.

So instead of Wendover acquiring the land it needs from the BLM, the BLM holds the land hostage, unwilling to relinquish this small portion of its empire unless sufficient tribute is paid. Which brings us to the exchange process. In order for Wendover to gain 7,000 acres of land, the BLM is demand-

ing 70,000 acres of land elsewhere, in addition to a block of the state's water rights.

It's a pure power play. The BLM certainly has no need for another 70,000 acres of rangeland; and there is no conceivable use to which it could put those water rights. But it's another 70,000 acres taken away from citizens and placed in the BLM empire; and that much less water for citizens to use.

Naturally, the BLM process has pitted residents against each other. Those who have already purchased land in Wendover — at prices inflated by the fact the BLM has created a scarcity — argue the exchange places too low a value on the BLM land and would cut their property values. The corporation working with the BLM on the exchange counters the land can't be auctioned, as it already has spent large sums of money jumping through the BLM's regulatory hoops — including walking up and down the highway looking for arrowheads, and other equally "essential" tasks.

Elko's Public Land Use Advisory Council was correct to recommend this land exchange be rejected. It violates county policy and state law which rightly prohibit the foolish transfer of water rights to the central government — which has no use for them other than to keep citizens from using them. And it's just a poor way to handle the growth needs of Nevada's cities.

As was the case with the recent Internal Revenue Service hearings in Washington, the real culprits are our congressmen. It is in the nature of the BLM to fight for more power and a bigger empire. And it is the duty of our representatives to keep the agency in check. A logical action along those lines would be reforms to allow cities to get the land they need, without having to turn to outside corporations willing to come up with a deal that satisfies the BLM.

Unless our congressmen agree that the cities of the West should be controlled by central planners in Washington, they ought to be pushing such legislation.—DS