

May 3, 1993

Rodney Harris
District Manager, BLM
Elko District Office

Dear Rod,

Even though I presented comments at last night's scoping meeting pertaining to the possible elk expansion program for the Wells Resource Area representing myself, I do want to take this opportunity to make further comment representing the Elko County Home Rule Coalition.

I was quite impressed with much of the testimony presented at last night's meeting, particularly that presented by Demar Dahl, Von Sorensen, Loyd Sorensen, Mike Gerber, Harvey Dahl, and Thad Ballard. These men raised some very critical questions, questions that need to be answered before you go forward with an elk expansion program.

I was pleased to, that Von Sorensen and Thad Ballard both called for the completion of a complete and comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement before an elk expansion program is implemented. It is high time that the Federal Land Management Agencies follow the mandates of NEPA and take responsibility for assessing all possible adverse effects that their proposed plans, or planning processes may have on local communities and resources, prior to implementation.

I am particularly interested in the requirement under sections 1500.2 and 1502.1 of the regulations that were written pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, 40CFR parts 1500-1508. These policies state "...impact statements shall be concise, clear, and to the point, and shall be supported by evidence that the agencies have made the necessary environmental analyses."

Critical issues that need to be addressed are as follows:

All available feed has been adjudicated.

Demar Dahl and Loyd Sorensen both raised the issue over adjudicated feed. When the BLM instigated the adjudication process for the purpose of allocating all available feed here in Elko County, we were told repeatedly that there was not enough feed available for all the livestock that had been run in the past. As a result most of us had a good part of our allotted AUM's "suspended". In other words most ranchers in Elko County have received cuts in permitted grazing because the BLM determined that there was not enough feed available. Now it appears that Bureau personnel are saying there is a lot of extra feed available and if the public so wishes, a great many elk can be introduced into the county. In any analysis completed pertaining to an elk expansion program, please explain this double standard.

Agencies have never before kept their word, why would they begin now?

Ralph Vance and Loyd Sorensen both related experiences in New Mexico and White Pine county, where target numbers of elk were set but never respected; that elk numbers were allowed to increase by many times that agreed upon; causing great harm and hardship for many ranching families. I too have been witness to other instances where elk were allowed to increase far beyond agreed population levels. In other words, the resource management agencies have destroyed their own credibility. We would like you to address this problem in your analysis. Isn't it time that the various resource management agencies establish guidelines that will reestablish their credibility?

Increased burdens and cost of maintaining range improvements.

Ralph Vance told of the destruction one elk caused at the Warm Creek Ranch, which he now has leased, when the elk ran through and tore down about 40 yards of fence. In any analysis completed, all increased costs brought on by the introduction of elk into new areas, such as increased cost of maintenance of fences, watering facilities, etc., needs to be estimated.

Destruction of property values.

Ralph Vance testified to the nearly complete destruction of the value of his Uncles ranch in New Mexico, when elk numbers were not controlled. Harvey Dahl too related how his daughter and son-in-law lost an entire seasons income when agency imposed elk management practices disrupted their ability to control and manage their cattle.

If your agency plans to impose new management practices that will destroy the value of people's property either in whole or in part, you must, as mandated by both Executive Order 12630 and NEPA, thoroughly assess and identify all reasonable alternatives that will avoid or minimize all adverse effects on the human environment.

Disrespect for civil-property rights.

Harvey Dahl explained very well, the evolution of increasing disregard for property rights that has evolved in recent years. Where property owners do have the right to exclude persons from their properties, no longer do rural property owners have the right to address in an effective way, animal trespass.

Recent legislation passed by the Nevada Legislature does not provide solution, for ranchers must still deal with NDOW in order be compensated for out of pocket cost, and to do so can be more costly and troublesome than the original elk depredation itself.

Until such time as these kinds of public relations problems are resolved, it may be impossible to resolve or minimize many adverse impacts. Public Relations are critically important to the success of any program. We ask that you address the Public Relations problem in any analysis completed.

Reductions in other wildlife values because as a result of elk introductions.

Mike Gerber did an excellent job of explaining the importance of assessing impacts on existing wildlife values as elk are encouraged to encroach into new areas. It is well accepted by many wildlife experts, that whenever elk are introduced into new areas other wildlife decrease in direct proportion.

In any analysis completed, every effort should be made to assess all possible adverse effects elk may have on other wildlife. As an example, Elko County has long been known for its quality Mule Deer hunting; important to both the local economy and area sportsmen.

The BLM has never effectively managed wild horses. Why should we believe they would do any different with Elk?

Loyd Sorensen called attention to the fact that the BLM has not responsibly managed the wild horses brought under its charge. How can anyone expect that they will do better with elk? Loyd is absolutely right. Anyone familiar with what is going on with wild horses is fully aware of the resource destruction that is now occurring because of over-grazing by wild horses. Just a few days ago, BLM personnel did a utilization study on the East Side of Ruby Valley; on lands that have not been grazed by livestock for several years because of too many wild horses. They estimated that wild horses had already consumed 80 % of the feed. And this is in face of mandates found within the Public Rangelands Improvement Act that require that rangelands be protected from overgrazing by wild horses.

There were thousands and thousands of wild horses that died of starvation all across Nevada last winter because of such mismanagement. They starved to death, slowly and painfully, over long periods of time; terrible suffering, and with hardly anyone wanting to recognize the truth of what was happening.

There can be no other definition of this situation other than gross negligence, not only on the part of those responsible within the agencies, but on the part of so called wild horse advocates as well. Such people, whether they work within an agency or exert their selfish agendas through public organizations should be held accountable.

It appears that before the BLM gets involved in any new programs such as elk herd expansion, it would behoove them to address present problems.

Adverse impacts on riparian areas.

Dr. Charles E. Key, related in a lecture before the Wyoming Public Lands Council on Aug. 23, 1991, that ungulate remains unearthed from over 200 archaeological sites in seven western states, (only one elk bone has ever been found anywhere in Nevada), indicate that historically elk made up no more than 3% of total ungulate populations.

Large numbers of elk are destructive and impossible to control. They are known to impact riparian areas from early spring to early winter with no relief for many key plant species. Such impacts, as well as secondary impacts on existing wildlife which depend on these areas need to be fully assessed in any analysis completed.

Adverse impacts on endangered species

In recent years there have been a good many plants and animals listed as threatened and endangered here in Elko County. It is quite likely that any adverse effects on key resource values may prove harmful to one or more listed species. As an example, if riparian areas are adversely effected, such a situation might result in increased sediment loads, reductions in tree regeneration, or higher water temperatures, any one of which might prove detrimental to a threatened or endangered species.

Therefore we recommend that all possible adverse impacts on threatened and endangered species be thoroughly examined in any analysis completed.

In conclusion, it has become clear to us that as State and Federal resource management agencies have implemented new and often unproven management practices over the last thirty or so years, such practices have, for the most part, been detrimental, not only to local enterprise and the economics of the county as a whole, but to wildlife as well.

It appears to us that the most sensible thing to do, particularly at this time of great controversy and loss of native wildlife, would be to concentrate on predator control and other past and proven conservation practices that have been tested; practices that have proven themselves to be beneficial to everyone and everything. Our state's deer, sage grouse and chucker all need help, so let's do something productive and help them and not be chasing after a new game animal that will in all likelihood prove detrimental to many residents and resources.

Note: the forgoing comments are made in appendix to the Citizens Resource Management Plan and Environmental, Social, Economic, Impact Statement (CRMP, ESEIS) filed at the Elko County Court House and Elko County Library. We ask that all inconsistencies with the

objectives of the CRMP, ESEIS be addressed in any planing process, (ie. to protect and enhance the economic stability of family ranching units as the most proven and effective means of protecting the natural environment, as well as the health and welfare of local communities).

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cliff Gardner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Cliff Gardner