My name is John E. Neff. I am a rancher who was raised in Ruby Valley and I have been actively engaged in the ranching business here since July of 1972. I currently am of sound mind and body and the information I will present is true and correct.

Wildfire in Ruby Valley has always been of concern to me and to my neighbors. We have organized a local volunteer fire department with firetrucks located on the Rory Krenka ranch, the Calvin Wines ranch, and the Ruby Lake refuge. We have made good use of this equipment during the past twenty years and have put out many fires in a first strike effort because we were on the scene before the fires got large.

Since 1985 my concern for fire has been increased because I have a grain mill and other buildings that are essential in my operation. My normal spring practice has been to put over 100 head of yearling heifers or cows in the yard around my mill and other buildings to graze off all of the crested wheatgrass, cheatgrass and other plants that provide fuel for fires around my buildings. During dry years like 1992 and 1994 it ususlly has only taken 1-2 days to graze almost all of the grass. This year the cheatgrass was over 2 feet tall next to my large machinery storage building and so when I put the heifers in the yard in May it took three days to graze the grass down. Since taking the heifers out this spring I have had regrowth that will take another day to graze in early September.

On my forest allotment (Lutts Creek C & H) we had good growth on all of our three fields. I put my cows on Unit 2 of this allotment on May 19, 1995. The Forest Service wanted the cows off on June 1, 1995. I didn't move them then. On June 7, 1995, the Forest Service did a utilization study saying I had used the riparian areas 65% and the uplands 60%. I knew this was inaccurate and so hired Linda Masters to do an independent utilization study. Linda could find no area in the field (riparian or upland) that were utilized over 20% and over half of the field was used less than 5%.
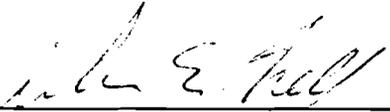
On August 6, 1995, we saw smoke from a lightning strike that eventually proved to be on a high ridge south of Battle Creek. I called Ira Wines and told him to see what the fire looked like because he was 8 miles closer to the smoke. He called back in two minutes and said to come and help. My son Ben and I gathered up shovels and coats and some water and got in our suburban and drove straight up the Battle Creek road to the fire. I noticed that there were no cattle in the area but could see there had been some cattle earlier. There was lots of grass left and it reminded me of my experience with Unit 2 on Lutts Creek.

We got around the fire on the south end and had it pretty well contained but a strong wind came up and the fire on the north end came in below us and we had to go back down to the county road for our own safety. The subsequent day and a

half proved disastrous for Ruby Valley. It could have been stopped much earlier if the Forest Service had allowed proper grazing to take place. More cattle should have been on the mountain earlier and should have stayed longer to reduce the fire threat to the Forest Service controlled land as well as the adjacent private land. Fire respects no fences and property lines and has destroyed 11,000 acres of good grazing land and prime deer winter range. During my lifetime I do not think I will ever see the bitterbrush grow to the size and quantity that was present before the fire. This area has not had this kind of devastation in the last 120 years since this valley was settled.

The policies and practices of the U.S. Forest service during the last ten years have been based on an agenda of completely eliminating grazing in this area. Good range science and research by their own agency have been completely ignored. The end result has been the terrible destruction mentioned early and has endangered the public health and safety of the citizens of Ruby Valley.

I give my oath that this information is correct, this 28th day of August , 1995.

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John E. Neff

JN:jn

AMY L. GARDNER
NOTARY PUBLIC
STATE OF NEVADA
WASHOE COUNTY
My Appt Expires Sept 1, 1998