

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE, AND
MINING**

**Seventy-Fourth Session
March 5, 2007**

The Committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Mining was called to order by Chair Jerry D. Claborn at 1:32 p.m., on Monday, March 5, 2007, in Room 3161 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/74th/committees/. In addition, copies of the audio record may be purchased through the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Publications Office (email: publications@lcb.state.nv.us; telephone: 775-684-6835).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblyman Jerry D. Claborn, Chair
Assemblyman Joseph Hogan, Vice Chair
Assemblyman Kelvin Atkinson
Assemblyman John C. Carpenter
Assemblyman Pete Goicoechea
Assemblyman Tom Grady
Assemblyman Ruben Kihuen
Assemblyman John W. Marvel
Assemblyman James Ohrenschall
Assemblywoman Debbie Smith

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Assemblyman David Bobzien (Excused)

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jennifer Ruedy, Committee Policy Analyst
Randy Stephenson, Committee Counsel
Sherrada Fielder, Committee Secretary
Matt Mowbray, Committee Assistant



OTHERS PRESENT:

Ron Wenker, State Director, Bureau of Land Management, Nevada
Terri Marceron, Forest Supervisor, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
David Marlow, Vegetation, Fire & Fuels Staff Officer, U.S. Department of
Agriculture, Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
Edward C. Monnig, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest,
Sparks, Nevada
Andrew List, Executive Director, Nevada Fire Safe Council, Carson City,
Nevada
Pat Murphy, Sierra Regional Project Coordinator, Nevada Fire Safe
Council, Minden, Nevada
Jason Arnold, Tahoe Basin Regional Coordinator, Nevada Fire Safe
Council, Lake Tahoe, Nevada

Chair Claborn:

[Meeting is called to order.]

Ron Wenker, State Director, Bureau of Land Management:

[Reads from talking points submitted ([Exhibit C](#)).]

The 2006 fire year was devastating for Nevada. Public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had over 1.3 million acres burned with 1 million acres in the Elko region, which was considered good range condition and habitat. I would like to summarize the 2006 wildfires, the recovery effort we have underway, and provide an outlook for 2007 and 2008.

During the past ten years, we have had an average of 958 fires per year with an average of 549,000 acres burned per year. We are seeing an increase in both the number of wildfires and the number of acres burned in Nevada. In 1999 the fire season was particularly devastating with 1,082 fires burning 1,616,806 acres. In 2006 we had 1,274 fires that burned 1,348,871 acres and 946,800 acres burned in Elko County alone. These fires represent 70 percent of all the acres burned in Nevada. Wildfires have had a severe impact on the economy as well as on the land. Over 125 grazing allotments were affected by the fires, impacting 10 percent of all Animal Unit Months (AUM) that we authorize. Approximately 750,000 AUMs were impacted by the fires. The fires also have a devastating effect on wildlife habitat as well as wild horses. We had seven Herd Management Areas (HMA) burned, leaving the horses with little to eat. We conducted emergency gatherings to remove 672 horses from the areas burned.

The amount of stabilization and rehabilitation we have planned for this year includes \$28,517,000 identified for stabilization activities. We are well underway on spending most of that. On emergency rehabilitation we have approximately \$9.6 million earmarked. We have conducted most of the rehabilitation work through on-the-ground seeding or aerial seeding when we cannot drill. The weather impacts our ability to get drills on the ground; when it is frozen it hinders our operations.

In the Elko area, we are planning to rehabilitate approximately one-third of 300,000 acres burned, and over 20,000 acres in Winnemucca. On this side of the State in Carson City, there are 1,000 acres, and on the east side of the State in Ely, we are rehabilitating 63,000 acres. Other rehabilitation areas include Las Vegas with 3,800 acres, and Battle Mountain with 28,000 acres, for a total of 412,000 acres. The rehabilitation will be done this winter and spring. We also have several fencing contracts under way to help manage the areas we are seeding.

Our bill for firefighting last year was \$50.75 million for all fire suppression. It is recognized that no one agency has the ability to fight the fires alone, and we can do it only with the cooperation of others. We work closely with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, and the State and local fire fighting is critical to all efforts.

We recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the State and the Forest Service, who agree to work together and coordinate efforts regarding wildfire prevention and management. By this agreement, the agencies work cooperatively to counter the adverse effects of fire, invasive species, and other ecologically disruptive changes in vegetation condition.

In 2007 our budget will be the same amount with a little extra for cost-of-living increases. The President's budget for 2008 proposes a reduction in our fire program, and at the national level hot-shot crews and aviation fleets will be affected. We are looking both nationally and in the State for opportunities to increase our efficiencies and reduce our costs. For example, we are looking at combining dispatch centers, and reducing overhead positions. Locally, we are working with the Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest for opportunities where services can be shared and more effective to the public.

The 2007 fire season is not looking good. We only have 50 percent moisture across the State which is lower than normal. We have been working with communities throughout the State on wildfire protection plans and continue our commitment to put in fire breaks around the communities. Wildfires have an impact on all the economy from outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat to life and property. Our number one priority will remain protection of life and property. We are working closely with the State, other federal partners, and

counties to prepare for the upcoming fire season. We stress working cooperatively to improve and increase the number of fuel treatments on the ground.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Can you provide what the total suppression costs were for all the agencies including the federal and State?

Ron Wenker:

I do not have the information available but will get it for you.

Chair Claborn:

Do you contemplate doing any control burning in Nevada?

Ron Wenker:

We do some. What we look for is the right prescription, which means the weather and fuel moisture content have to be right, and we have to be able to control the fire. We do burning in spring and late fall when we can control the fire. Most of the fires that start through natural ignition happen during the summer.

Chair Claborn:

My reason for the question is that I have a place in Utah, and they are always doing control burning. Any questions?

Assemblyman Carpenter:

There was a program in Winnemucca in which the ranchers became more involved in suppression before fires start. Is there any plan to carry that on in Elko?

Ron Wenker:

The program we refer to as the "wildland fire support group," has been successful for us. There are ranchers in the area that assist us. They are red-carded and qualified to fight fire. They are actually trained to help us in a safe manner. I encourage Elko and other areas to look into that opportunity.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

Years ago, the ranchers put the fires out. I do not know what happened, maybe the agencies did not want the ranchers out there, but I think it is time to get back into the mode of using the ranchers. I would encourage this program to get going in the other districts.

Ron Wenker:

Our first and foremost concern is safety. In Winnemucca, the people are red-carded, which means they are trained to be out there.

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

The rehabilitation acres in Las Vegas and Mojave—was that 3,800 or 38,000?

Ron Wenker:

That was 3,800.

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

Are cuts in the President's budget because we have had fewer fires?

Ron Wenker:

The proposed reductions for the President's budget in 2008 causes us to look at increased deficiencies. We are looking at taking the reductions more on the overhead side of fire management and not impact what actually occurs on the ground.

Assemblyman Hogan:

What factor dictates the percentage of acreage you plan to do in each area?

Ron Wenker:

After a wildfire, we look at what emergency stabilization is necessary to keep the soil in place. We have burn area rehabilitation teams that look at the fire to determine what areas can rehabilitate naturally compared to areas needing assistance. We then put in our request for funding. The majority of our requests have been funded. Competition occurs nationally, but we have been very successful in our requests.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

I am concerned with seed mix. Since we are going to rehabilitate, the bottom line in some of the areas is that we rely on the agency to provide the fresh components and end up with a cheatgrass monoculture. Would we be better off, especially on initial rehabilitation to go towards a more fire-retardant seed mix?

Ron Wenker:

We use crested wheatgrass as well as forage kochia in our seed mixes. We try to bring in as many native plants as we can since it is our objective to get the land back to as much of the native habitat as we can. The cost is a factor in the native plant species. They are costly and hard to get. It is important to get perennial plants growing rather than cheatgrass.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

You are not holding projects up waiting for seed mix? Sometimes things are held up waiting for the proper seed mixture.

Ron Wenker:

We will look at that.

Terri Marceron, Forest Supervisor, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit:

I have been on the Basin for a little over a year and appreciate the unique and special place Lake Tahoe is. I am happy to be here today to give you an overview and update of our hazardous fuels reductions program on the Basin. For some of you, this may be new information, and for those of you we have worked with before, I hope it will be a helpful update. I have with me today Dave Marlow, our Vegetation, Fire and Fuels Staff Officer, and Pam Robinson, our legislative and government liaison. [Reads from written testimony ([Exhibit D](#)).]

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Why do you have whole tree harvesting, do you bid that out to a contractor?

David Marlow, Vegetation, Fire & Fuels Staff Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit:

Yes, we will put it out to bid when we are ready to offer those contracts.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

I assume it would end up being a profit to the Forest Service, or is it costing more to log it because of the requirements?

David Marlow:

Our hope is that we would be able to turn a profit. But it is based on the quantity and value of material we are moving.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

It was interesting to hear what you had to say about fuel reduction in the Slaughterhouse Canyon. It is still waiting to get NEPA (Nevada Environmental Protection Administration) permitting. What is the status of that permit?

David Marlow:

We are working with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) to get the permit for the railroad grade restoration activities. That is what the permit is for: to construct reasonable agency access across the head of the canyon using the Comstock-era railroad grade. It is the most cost-effective, efficient, and long-term access, not only for the Forest Service, but for the State of Nevada, to manage the lands adjacent to the Slaughterhouse Canyon area.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

What percentage is the fire threat in Lake Tahoe Basin? I know you are gaining, but are they significant gains or are we still facing a catastrophic event?

David Marlow:

We are making great strides in fire fuel reduction in the Tahoe Basin. The combined work effort is making good progress. There are approximately 30,000 acres that have already received first treatment in the basin. Most of those are in the wildlife-urban interface to provide the greatest amount of protection to the community.

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

How will the low precipitation and warm weather affect the fire danger in Lake Tahoe if it continues? Will it be better or more dangerous?

David Marlow:

Like any forested condition, if we have drought conditions, the forest is more susceptible to starts. I am confident that in the Tahoe Basin we will have a reduced problem because of our great partnership with the fire protection districts there and the number of people in the basin during the fire season. If something starts, literally the world comes to it. A good case in point is last summer we had a small fire on the west side of Fallen Leaf Lake, and in a matter of a half hour, we had all the fire protection districts, our staff and an adjoining forest staff en route. Within an hour we had aircraft on that fire. We kept it to 24 acres.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

I see you are doing the mechanical treatment. How difficult is it to get by the environmental community to do things like that? Have they accepted it?

Terri Marceron:

The environmental groups during my tenure have been supportive of treating fuels around the basin. We have been putting out projects where there have been public comments. We have actively engaged with the regulatory agencies to protect the water quality and clarity of Lake Tahoe and still allow the fuels to be treated. Thus far, we have received very few challenges if any. We do not receive any appeals or litigation on our fuels project in the Basin. The challenge is that we need to get more types of treatment. Using the whole-tree harvesting will be new. We are working with the environmental groups for acceptance in using that kind of mechanical treatment. To date, they have been supportive of the effort. Does it take time to go through the planning and ensure we are applying the proper regulatory mechanisms to protect the lake? Yes, but we are doing it.

Chair Claborn:

Is SNPLMA (Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act) part of the Clark County Lands bill?

Terri Marceron:

Yes, it is the SNPLMA.

Ed Monnig, Forest Supervisor, U.S. Forest Service, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest:

I have worked for the Forest Service in land and resource stewardship for 22 years. Prior to that I held a variety of positions in private corporations. I have met a number of you when I began working in Nevada as the Deputy Forest Supervisor. I came to Nevada almost four years ago from Montana. This past September I was promoted to Forest Supervisor after several months of detail. I still work in our office in Sparks, Nevada. I have a folder and my prepared testimony is included. I provided a map of the Humboldt-Toiyabe Forest. We are scattered across Nevada and into eastern California. With 6.2 million acres, about 5.5 million acres in Nevada and 800,000 along the Eastern Sierra in California. The name Humboldt-Toiyabe comes from the name of a German naturalist, Baron Alexander von Humboldt who explored the country in the early 1800s; and Toiyabe is a Shoshone word that means White Mountain.

[Read from written testimony ([Exhibit E](#)).]

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Of the \$1.5 billion the Forest Service spent last year, what was the Forest Service's suppression cost in Nevada?

Ed Monnig:

I do not have the figures, but we had about 1.5 million acres. Our costs would be considerably less than the BLM's.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Can you get that information for us?

Ed Monnig:

Yes. In 2006, we spent about 41 percent of our entire Forest Service budget, which represented \$1.5 billion last year. Compared to 17 years ago, 13 percent of our budget was spent, which is an increase from 13 to 41 percent.

Chair Claborn:

Could that be from natural causes or arsonists?

Ed Monnig:

There is certainly an arson element in fires, but most of our fires are natural ignitions or unintentional human ignitions. Arson, on a nationwide basis, is a relatively small percentage of total fire starts. In the West, it remains that most of our fires are natural ignitions.

These escalating costs have greatly impacted our other agency programs. If you spend 40 percent on fire suppression, you are spending it on something else of equal or significant importance to our overall mission of caring for the land and serving the people. To address this problem, various internal and external groups have studied these costs and have provided recommendations intended to curb increasing suppression costs. One of the more provocative was a recent audit report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General. The report is entitled "Forest Service Large Fire Suppression Costs" ([Exhibit F](#)).

Of the three audit findings, the one most emphasized by the media is titled, "Suppression Costs Need to be Fairly Shared by State and Local Governments." The summary points to the high costs of protecting structures and proceeds on the assumption that these costs are more fairly apportioned to state and local governments. As we get into the issue of who pays, I do not want it to overshadow the good and cooperative efforts we have made with state government to protect and improve the wildland interface and reduce the fire risk.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Is this on a national basis?

Ed Monnig:

This is a nationwide report. You do see nationwide and increasing settlement in the wildland interface, such as houses being built in the forest. The consequence of that is significant for our firefighting effort. In the old days, the strategies taken to fight fires were much different from the strategies now when houses and people are scattered in the forest. It is an entirely different challenge. Five of the fatalities we suffered last year were directly contributable to defending a house that probably was not as well protected from wild fires as it should have been.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Do the agencies have a breakdown of the food costs for the firefighters?

Ed Monnig:

The meals are good. The workers fight fire hard and they earn it. It is a relatively insignificant item in the overall budget. The huge costs cover primarily aviation suppression, helicopters, and fire retardant. The helicopters run \$10,000 per hour to stay in the air.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Do we get the bombers anymore?

Ed Monnig:

We do get the bombers. We still have a retardant base in the valley in Minden. There was concern about the safety of our retardant bombers several years ago and many were pulled off-line. We are bringing them back slowly on line to meet our safety requirements. A helicopter is one of our most important tools.

Another finding of the audit is "Forest Service Cost-Containment Controls Need to be Strengthened." That is relatively significant compared to other items such as aerial suppression activities. We are looking very hard at how we do that and how we cooperate with our local volunteer fire departments, local volunteer resources, and communities to better implement our initial attack and get the forces on the ground expeditiously. That is going to be an important part of our effort as we proceed to reduce the cost.

The last recommendation is entitled "Use of Wildland Fire Should Be Expanded To Control Costs of Future Fires." As the report indicates, wildland fire is a bureaucratic term for allowing naturally occurring fires, such as lightening strikes, to burn where they would benefit the resources on the ground. Fire is a part of the Nevada landscape and under some conditions it can be beneficial. It is not always a problem. It has been here, vegetation has adapted to it, and it can provide significant benefits.

Our initial efforts will be on the high wilderness areas. We will continue to do everything we can to prevent and suppress fires in areas susceptible to cheatgrass invasion, where we have a serious problem.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

In the White Pine County Lands Bill, there were thousands or millions of acres declared as wilderness, much of which were on the Shell Creek Range.

Ed Monnig:

There is one large wilderness area established on the Shell Creek Range consisting of 120,000 acres.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

That will really make it more difficult to fight fires in that area. In Elko, they cannot get into the wilderness areas. In White Pine County, it will become a real problem because you cannot get in there.

Ed Monnig:

Under appropriate circumstances, we can approve the use of bulldozers in wilderness areas. It requires my approval or my boss's approval to allow that if the situation dictates. In many of those circumstances it could be allowed to burn.

[Refers to photographs ([Exhibit G](#)).] These photos reflect some of the changes we see throughout the West. This is a photo taken in 1909 of a pine forest in Arizona. It has conditions similar to the Sierra Nevada front. That condition, the open-grown forest, has been maintained by fire for hundreds of years; small, cool fires under the trees consumed small vegetation and trees. They prevented fires from getting big and prevented material from building up, allowing the large trees to prosper.

The second slide shows that very same stand. Those are the identical trees in 1949. You can see that with fire suppression, small trees have begun to grow in the understory. In 1992, it is an entirely different forest. You cannot see the large trees. Problems occur when we get a fire started in that kind of stand condition. That fire is going to climb from the small trees up to the crowns of the larger trees and destroy the entire forest. It is an entirely different fire behavior we see than was seen 150 to 200 years ago when there were frequent small fires—fires that cleared the understory every 5 to 15 years.

On slide four, the Waterfall Fire of 2004, you can see the consequences of not treating and having a very dense stand of trees that has been subject to a wildfire. The entire stand has been replaced because those trees are so dense and densely packed, their crowns are all intermingled. When a fire gets going, it takes out the entire stand. We had done some fuel treatment work where we thinned the stands. The fire climbed up the tree, but the stand was thin enough that the fire did not kill the trees. They were able to withstand the fire. Doing that treatment at that urban interface saved the Lakeview Subdivision. That work was paid for by the Nevada Fire Safe Council (NVFSC).

Slide number six is of central Nevada in 1970 and 2005. What was a vibrant sagebrush community has turned into a pinion-juniper monoculture. If you walk in under that stand, you see virtually no vegetation in the understory. Nothing for the sage grouse, cattle, or mule deer to eat. It becomes a biological desert in those dense pinion-juniper stands. Those are the areas we are interested in treating and allowing for natural fire to take its course. We need to get back to the actual condition in which we had native vegetation, sagebrush, annual

forage, and bunch grasses. There is nothing more cost-effective than putting fire back on those landscapes. We are starting some fairly aggressive burning programs in Nevada to try to accomplish that. We are also proposing to let some of our naturally occurring wildfires burn through those kinds of stands and provide that similar kind of treatment effect.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

You have an extensive project scheduled on the South Ruby's for a 46,000-acre burn. That has been on the books for the last year; however, I assume if we get a bad fire year, you will be diverting the funds for those projects, and we will end up with no control burn and a lot of area to rehabilitate.

Ed Monnig:

That is one of the challenges. These are hard stands to burn. It takes what we call "red-flag" conditions to burn through some of the pinion-juniper stands. When we have high winds and low humidity, we have wildfires across Elko County.

Slide seven shows an example of our active management using fire in the Buttermilk area on the Santa Rosa District in the north. A couple of summers ago, we started control burning in thick areas that were at elevations above 7,000 feet, which is above the cheatgrass zone. Slides eight and nine show the response of the native grasses to take the understory out. It was gratifying to see the results of that kind of treatment.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

I want to congratulate you on what you are doing. We have been preaching this for many years. The first example I saw was years ago in the Ely area when one of these burns went through the junipers, and it looked like your last slide.

Ed Monnig:

Many of our local ranchers are supporting some of this change in policy, trying to get more disturbance on the ground, and it will have positive impacts on the vegetation. Wildland fire use comes with risks, and we have stringent criteria for allowing wildland fire to work on our landscapes. We have to consider threats to life and property, threats to socio-economic values, the impacts of the fire itself, the distance the fire will spread, the distance we can allow it to burn, and the likelihood of adverse effects of fire exceeding the desired benefits. This is not an unmanaged, let-it-burn policy. It is a policy we intend to implement with significant care, restrictions, and oversight. If it does occur in your area, you will be the first to know about it. We will be contacting the local community and county commissioners to make sure they know what is going on.

In the packet, the last handout is a list of some of the funding and programs provided to the State of Nevada through our State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet ([Exhibit H](#)). They are in a number of different areas including forest health management projects, forest stewardship projects, state fire assistance, urban and community forestry projects, and volunteer fire assistance projects.

In 2006, for example, the Forest Service provided \$3.7 million for these programs. This year we will invest over \$4.2 million in Nevada's timber and forest products, wildlife, water resources, rural economy, and conservation practices. Here are highlights of the projects we have been supporting: under forest health protection, we had 13 national fire plan projects that reduced fuels in the wildland-urban interface and three forest health prevention suppression and restoration projects; we mapped tree mortality in Nevada and eastern California, and we awarded \$170,000 to the Nevada Department of Agriculture to support the coordinated weed management areas. The State, in cooperation with federal and local governments, needs to get an aggressive program to combat invasive species.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Do you use the honor camps as much as the BLM does?

Ed Monnig:

Yes, we have a number of contracts. We use them in a few different fire fighting arenas for fuel-reduction programs and projects.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Do you get good crews out there?

Ed Monnig:

My understanding is we do. In conclusion, I hope I have been able to give you a big picture of the agency. In the long run, the best defense against the negative effects of wildfire is to ensure we have healthy and resilient rangelands and forests—lands that people can enjoy and profitably use. We in the Forest Service are committed to a program of active management to reach that goal.

Chair Claborn:

Any questions? [There were none]

Andrew List, Executive Director, The Nevada Fire Safe Council:

I have with me Jason Arnold who coordinates the projects of the NVFSC on the eastern side of the Lake Tahoe Basin and Patrick Murphy who coordinates all of the Nevada Fire Safe projects on the Sierra front.

The staff is handing out a report on the expenditures the NVFSC has made in the last two years with the State of Nevada appropriation provided by

Senate Bill No. 1 (Section 28) of the 22nd Special Session. The report was written for the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means, but it will be useful for this Committee to understand what the NVFSC is and the type of projects we work on in the State of Nevada.

[Provided Report on the NVFSC ([Exhibit I](#)).]

The NVFSC was formed in 1999. We are a Not-for-Profit Corporation. The NVFSC works with communities interested in taking care of themselves by fire saving their own communities, much in the way the Neighborhood Watch Program works. When a group of interested citizens approaches us and wants to become a chapter, we ask for documentation to help us make sure the community is large enough and interested in making projects work on the ground. They have to have goals on what they want to do with their community. Today we have 60 chapters throughout Nevada. Our organization includes the entire Tahoe Basin, so we have chapters on the California side of the Basin. We have 3,515 members. To become a member you send in \$10 and receive our quarterly publication, which serves as our education component.

Our first component is educational. We work closely with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension to promote the Living With Fire curriculum. The Cooperative Extension, with the help of Ed Smith, has put together our guidelines for homeowners. We have the Lake Tahoe, Sierra Front, and Western Nevada versions. This is like a bible for homeowners on how to make their homes safe. We also work with communities every year for Wildfire Awareness Week held in May.

Aside from the educational component, we work with 60 communities to match them with grant dollars to do more large-scale fuel reduction on their properties. The State of Nevada appropriation we received last session was \$1 million, earmarked for on-the-ground fuel reduction projects. Out of our 60 chapters, 28 received money out of the appropriation.

Projects include the community of Holbrook in southern Douglas County. The project was a cooperative effort between many entities. We matched the state funding with BLM funding and worked on a fuel break system on private property in the area. The State of Nevada funding was used to spray herbicide on the fuel break to keep the growth and cheatgrass down. When you create a fuel break, one thing that will come back is cheatgrass. Another project is the Chimney Rock Project. This was a large-scale project, and of all the communities in Nevada, Chimney Rock is one of the worst for fire safety. Between 2004 and 2006, the NVFSC worked with the private contractor and the BLM to do a study of more than 250 communities in the State. The contractors went to every community. They looked at the slope, housing, roofing, architectural features, and vegetation. After a ranking, Chimney Rock

was the highest at risk of catastrophic loss in the event of a wildfire. We tried to prioritize State funding for this community.

The project resulted in treating 25 acres of private land using \$59,000 of state funding, \$100,000 from U.S. Forest Service from a California Clearinghouse grant, and a grant from the Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF). On top of that, we asked each community member whose property was included to contribute cash or in-kind contributions. Each property owner contributed \$300. The community is now more fire safe. The TRPA was also a partner in this project and had marked and removed over 800 trees from the community.

We have also worked with the NDF on a clearing project in southern Nevada called the Kimball Scott Camp, and with the ROWE Chapter, which is comprised of the Ryndon, Osino White Rock and Elburz communities northeast of Elko. We were able to use state funds to build capacity for extra water resources for fire suppression.

The crux of what the NVFSC does is increase defensible space as a matter of public policy. We create defensible space where firefighters can work. It is a cost-effective way to do business. Defensible space increases the safety of fire suppression personnel. Implementing fuels reduction projects prior to a wildfire event can mitigate the costs of future fire suppression. A shift in those costs from federal to state and local governments seems imminent. Fuels reduction projects have environmental benefits.

Assemblyman Marvel:

Is there any money in the budget for you?

Andrew List:

We approached the Governor's Office to get money in his budget but were not able to. At this point, we are working with the Senate leadership to get an introduction with the Senate Finance Committee for funding.

Our organization is unique in the way we are able to mobilize communities. We administer many grants and require every community to contribute matched funding or work hours. Each community is asked to come up with a 2-to-1 match. Our effective overhead rate is less than 15 percent, which makes us fairly cost-effective in getting the work done.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Can the time ranchers train to get red-carded be used as a match?

Andrew List:

Yes. A couple years ago there was a \$125,000 earmark given to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the NVFSC to help the Wildfire

Support Group. Because the Fire Safe Council is a non-profit corporation, we can act as the fiscal sponsor for the communities. Many times agencies are hesitant to give moneys without any legal status. We took the money on behalf of the Wildfire Support Group and are now putting together an action plan on how we can help that group. The Wildfire Support Group has not formed as a chapter, but we would take their time as a match.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Would they have to become a chapter? On the fire lines the ranchers have to be turned away because they are not red-carded. It becomes a real issue that is critical to address if the NVFSC can in fact be the intermediary in rural Nevada to train ranchers to become red-carded.

Pat Murphy, Sierra Regional Project Coordinator, Nevada Fire Safe Council:

One of the questions that came up earlier addresses what is happening with cheatgrass. In Holbrook, we were trying to bait cheatgrass by working with a chemical that is working well. We will continue to work throughout northern Nevada and anticipate getting it out this fall.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

What are you using?

Pat Murphy:

It is a chemical from the chemical company BASF Corporation, called Plateau. It is recommended to use 2 to 6 ounces per acre. It is quite potent and used as a preemergent.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

Do you have to come back to rehabilitate and reseed?

Pat Murphy:

Depending on the area: If we are in an area that looks like there are native species that could come back, we will not reseed it. In most fuel breaks, we are putting down the seed first and doing a treatment over the top, then putting Plateau over the top of that.

Assemblyman Carpenter:

What is the cost of the Plateau?

Pat Murphy:

It is \$300 per gallon; however, when you put it out and use 4 ounces per acre, just for the chemical alone, it will cost \$22 per acre. Application by using a ground rig is recommended. We are working closely with the weed districts in putting it down. The only way you can obtain the chemical is through a

government entity such as a weed district. The NVFSC cannot buy the chemical, so we work with a contractor which is a weed district.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

There was a chemical put out in a hard pellet that was fairly successful, and it could be applied aerially.

Pat Murphy:

It was called Oust and was a chemical that was sprayed.

Assemblyman Goicoechea:

I am sure it was Oust. They put it in a clay grinder and threw it out.

Pat Murphy:

One problem with Oust is that the half-life takes too long to break down, which is not adequate for wildlife settings.

Assemblyman Hogan:

How much of Nevada is subject to problems with cheatgrass? Does it extend to the Mojave area in the southern part of the State?

Pat Murphy:

In the 1960s and 1970s it was thought cheatgrass was associated only with the valley bottoms at the 5,000-foot elevation. Since then it has adapted, and you can find it over 7,000 feet in the Tahoe Basin. The red-brome, a cousin of the cheatgrass, is more associated with what you have in the Mojave Desert. Cheatgrass has adapted quite well and is taking over our native lands.

Assemblyman Hogan:

Is the treatment for those two vegetations the same?

Pat Murphy:

By using native species, the recommendation is to let nature outcompete the cheatgrass. It has been proven that the use of the perennial plants will outcompete the cheatgrass. You want to keep fire out of the ecosystem until the native plants grow into the woody areas. When you get fire every five years, it is difficult for the plants to adapt.

Jason Arnold, Tahoe Basin Regional Coordinator, Nevada Fire Safe Council:

The money coming in has helped with our Home Ignition Defensible Space Program in the Lake Tahoe Basin. We are trying to protect the homes and essentially protect lives as well.

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Chair Claborn:

Any questions? [There were none.]

Meeting adjourned [at 3:19 p.m.]

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sherrada Fielder
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman Jerry D. Claborn, Chair

DATE: _____

<u>EXHIBITS</u>			
Committee Name: <u>Committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Mining</u>			
Date: <u>March 5, 2007</u>		Time of Meeting: <u>1:30 p.m.</u>	
Bill	Exhibit	Witness / Agency	Description
***	A	*****	Agenda
***	B	*****	Sign-In Sheet
***	C	Ron Wenker, State Director, Nevada Bureau of Land Management	Talking Points for Testimony
***	D	Terri Marceron, Forest Supervisor, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit	Written Testimony
***	E	Edward C. Monnig, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt- Toiyabe National Forest	Written Testimony
***	F	Edward C. Monnig, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt- Toiyabe National Forest	Audit Report - Forest Service Large Fire Suppression Costs
***	G	Edward C. Monnig, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt- Toiyabe National Forest	Photos of Forest Fire Suppression Efforts
***	H	Edward C. Monnig, Forest Supervisor, Humboldt- Toiyabe National Forest	State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet
***	I	Andrew List, Executive Director, Nevada Fire Safe Council	Report to the Nevada State Legislature