

**MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Seventy-fourth Session
May 9, 2007**

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources was called to order by Chair Dean A. Rhoads at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, 2007, in Room 2144 of the Legislative Building, Carson City, Nevada. [Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda. [Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Dean A. Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike McGinness, Vice Chair
Senator Joseph J. Heck
Senator Bob Coffin
Senator Maggie Carlton

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Mark E. Amodei (Excused)
Senator Michael A. Schneider (Excused)

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Bonnie Parnell, Assembly District No. 40

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Susan E. Scholley, Committee Policy Analyst
Randy Stephenson, Committee Counsel
Shirley Parks, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Michael Brown, Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire District
Jim Braswell, Airport Manager, Minden-Tahoe Airport
Leonard K. Parker, Minden Air Corporation
Bob Ashworth, Deputy State Forester, Division of Forestry, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Senate Committee on Natural Resources
May 9, 2007
Page 2

Kelly Clark, Conservation Education Chief, Department of Wildlife

CHAIR RHOADS:

We will open the meeting with the hearing of Assembly Joint Resolution (A.J.R.) 7.

ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION 7 (1st Reprint): Urges the Secretary of the Interior to fully fund the interagency airtanker base programs for wildland fire suppression in Battle Mountain, Minden and Stead. (BDR R-290)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BONNIE PARNELL (Assembly District No. 40):

Assembly Joint Resolution 7 deals with the interagency airtankers used so greatly during the fire season. This bill urges the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to fully fund the interagency airtanker base programs for wildland fire suppression in Battle Mountain, Minden-Tahoe and Reno Stead Airports. During the last several summer fire seasons, the northern areas of Nevada and California have had several really frightening wildland fires. There are times when northern Nevada has been without a wildland fire airtanker because of the number of fires needing to be suppressed, with the airtankers already in use. The bill requests that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Vice President of the United States as the presiding officer of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of the Interior and each member of the Nevada Congressional Delegation. It is critical to have continued funding for the full operation of the interagency airtanker base program. This will provide a critical quick response needed for early suppression of wildland fires. As budgets are considered, this is not the time to decrease funding.

CHAIR RHOADS:

What is the track history for funding the airtankers?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PARNELL:

The funding issues will be covered by other testimony; however, it is possible there will be a decrease in the budget across the board for this type of program. It becomes even more urgent to move forward on A.J.R. 7. Because the snow pack was lower than normal, our fire season will begin early this year. Then take into account the loss of the National Guard and their equipment; all these factors create concern for our citizens.

MICHAEL D. BROWN (Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire District):

There are discussions taking place to consider closing airtanker bases in this area and other western states. We are here urging you to assist us in support of the continued availability of the Stead and Battle Mountain facilities. I will speak on behalf of the north shore of the Lake Tahoe area. When a fire is detected, it is reported and our resources responding to the fire rely on the aircraft and its air support activity to keep these fires small. If we lose the airtanker support, it will take longer to get to a fire and control its size as it increases rapidly. Our money resources are then reduced as we must use more ground support.

CHAIR RHOADS:

We do have a bill before the Senate Committee on Finance, Senate Bill 224, urging among other things, increased funding for volunteer firefighters of Nevada.

SENATE BILL 224: Makes an appropriation to the Division of Forestry of the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to prepare for and suppress wildland fires in this State. (BDR S-988)

JIM BRASWELL (Airport Manager, Minden-Tahoe Airport):

We requested the Bureau of Land Management to meet with our airport advisory committee and the board of county commissioners about 1 year ago after they informed us they were asked to cut their budget by 5 percent. In Minden, this would decrease our program by one person who is involved in the airtanker-base program support. At the present time, this program has single engine airplanes that get on the job quickly, but it is crucial to be able to recharge the more efficient, larger airtankers. There is an airtanker-base program at Stead, but as anyone who fights fires will tell you, 5 to 10 minutes can make a huge difference in the size of a fire. Stead is further away and distance is critical to reaching a wildland fire. I have with me today Leonard and Janet Parker who own Minden Air Corporation. They have been flying a naval aircraft, P2V airtanker for many years. They have a new aircraft that they intend to certify which is a British Aerospace BAe 146. It is a British Airways four-engine jet. Speed and maneuverability are assets of this aircraft. It is the airtanker for the future.

LEONARD K. PARKER (Minden Air Corporation):

I am one of the owners of Minden Air Corporation. We have an airtanker operation. We are the only one in Nevada. We are located at the

Minden-Tahoe Airport. We are in the process of converting a British Aerospace BAe 146 which is a four-engine jet aircraft. We are doing this for several reasons. First, the modernization needs of the airtanker industry, and second, the heavy airtanker staffing level presently is about 18 or 19 airplanes, down from a high of about 40 aircraft of several years ago. The airplanes need to be faster and more efficient. The Minden-Tahoe Airport is a critical resource for the Tahoe Basin and for the whole front-range area within this part of Nevada. Battle Mountain is in a critical area as well, because it is eliminated as a reload base, the support for northeastern and eastern Nevada has to come from Pocatello, Idaho; Salt Lake City; Utah or Cedar City, Utah. These are very long trips impacting a large area of Nevada in terms of wildland fires and home protection. Instead of a 20-minute response, they may be waiting an hour and a half.

CHAIR RHOADS:

I observed a large fire 2 years ago as it was moving at a speed of 25 miles an hour.

SENATOR COFFIN:

We have some packages for the C-130 aircraft that are available. We purchased one or two of them to be used for firefighting. Have we been using these packages?

BOB ASHWORTH (Deputy State Forester, Division of Forestry, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):

At this time, we have not used any of the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) units for retardant that fits into the C-130 aircraft. Currently, we are working with the National Guard to put one in the area.

SENATOR COFFIN:

My question is why are we not using these packages for the C-130 aircraft? Why have we not purchased these packages?

MR. ASHWORTH:

Those packages are available for the U.S. Forest Service and they are mobilized as needed when required for the large airtankers. We do not have them in operation in Nevada at this time. They are commonly used in places like Pocatello, Idaho, and other similar areas.

Senate Committee on Natural Resources
May 9, 2007
Page 5

SENATOR COFFIN:

We should have been using this resource. I do not understand why we are not doing this.

MR. ASHWORTH:

This is actually a federal resource. The airtanker service is available to us. When needed, the National Guard resources are brought in for support to the airtankers. We certainly have used the service. To date, those resources have not been available for purchase to Nevada.

SENATOR COFFIN:

Who is able to make this resource available? The federal government purchases the airplane and pays most of the operating expenses. We could be using this resource as well. They have been available, according to the National Guard. I will certainly support A.J.R. 7, but I think the airplanes we have and the packages ready-made for them are part of the arsenal we already have for firefighting.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Possibly we could ask staff to research this issue.

MR. PARKER:

I would like to respond to the issue. All the firefighting aircraft are federal resources. The MAFFS C-130 units are military airplanes that have the modular units which can be placed in them. Typically, they are all under the control of the federal government and when dispatched to fires, they usually try to call on the contracted airtankers first. The MAFFS C-130 is a follow up at some point. It is a resource that should be utilized and presently it is not.

SENATOR COFFIN:

This concerns me, as your resources are limited as well. We need our own resources for a quick response to fires.

CHAIR RHOADS:

We will close the hearing on A.J.R. 7 and open the hearing on Assembly Bill (A.B.) 573.

ASSEMBLY BILL 573 (1st Reprint): Revises certain provisions governing wildlife.
(BDR 45-1413)

KELLY CLARK (Conservation Education Chief, Department of Wildlife,
I am here today speaking about A.B. 573. The "take a group" fishing permit was initiated through our agency in an attempt to recruit additional anglers into the "fishing marketplace," so to speak. I will not take time to give all the details of the bill, but there is some cleanup language for antlerless elk tags. There are a few other administrative details listed in the bill.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Have the angler "days" as you measure them, been going down every year?

MS. CLARK:

The number of anglers has decreased over the last 6 years from 125,000 to about 85,000 anglers. We have seen a slight increase in permits, especially in southern Nevada where we have new residents. Increasing the number of short-term permits will hopefully bring a long-term investment for the future, especially for children. There are families who will take advantage of this permit.

CHAIR RHOADS:

The park attendance numbers have gone down the last few years. A portion of the bill deals with lowering elk tag licensing from \$1,200 to \$500 for a nonresident. Is that correct?

MS. CLARK:

In the past we offered 129 elk tags. The price of \$1,200 was for all elk tags. At this time, we are reducing the cost for the antlerless elk tags in the hope of selling more elk tags. This could bring in more revenue.

SENATOR CARLTON:

We are going to have a one-day permit at \$8 for a primary adult and \$4 for each child. Is the child defined as above 12 years of age but less than 16 years of age? Below the age of 12 years of age there is no fee. Would this be correct?

MS. CLARK:

Yes, this is correct.

SENATOR CARLTON:

As I review the fee schedule on A.B. 573, I do not see a fee for 12 years of age to 16 years of age. Are we instituting a new fee structure?

MS. CLARK:

No, there is a junior license for this age group but it is not listed here. The fee is \$8 for a short-term permit. This is discounted from the regular price for a permit of one day. It is a junior one-day permit. As mentioned in earlier testimony, this is an angler recruitment tool to bring new people into the market.

SENATOR COFFIN:

This could be marketable as part of a package plan for tourists. I do wonder how many people will go out for antlerless elk. This could be most unrewarding, unless someone is going for the meat. Is most elk for consumption farm-raised?

MS. CLARK:

Not in Nevada. We do not have farm-raised elk in Nevada. Eastern Nevada does have a healthy elk population.

CHAIR RHOADS:

We will close the hearing on A.B. 573. We have no further business to come before the Committee on Senate Natural Resources. We will adjourn at 4:05 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Shirley Parks,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Senator Dean A. Rhoads, Chair

DATE: _____