

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

**Seventy-fourth Session
April 6, 2007**

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources was called to order by Chair Dean A. Rhoads at 3:34 p.m. on Friday, April 6, 2007, in Room 2144 of the Legislative Building, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, Room 4412E, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, 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 Mark E. Amodei
Senator Joseph J. Heck

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Bob Coffin (Excused)
Senator Michael A. Schneider (Excused)
Senator Maggie Carlton (Excused)

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Susan E. Scholley, Committee Policy Analyst
Randy Stephenson, Committee Counsel
Lynn Hendricks, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Randy Robison, City of Mesquite
Lindsey Dalley, Partners in Conservation
Elise McAllister, Administrator, Partners in Conservation
Kurt O. Sawyer, Partners in Conservation
Susan Fisher, Nevada Powersport Dealers Association
Paula Berkley, Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance

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Pamela B. Wilcox, Administrator and State Land Registrar, Division of State Lands, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Steve Weaver, Chief of Planning and Development, Division of State Parks, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Carrie Sandstedt, Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance
Tom Baker, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

CHAIR RHOADS:

I will open the hearing on Senate Bill (S.B.) 376.

SENATE BILL 376: Requires the State Land Use Planning Agency to prepare a statewide master plan for the recreational use of land in this State. (BDR 26-1009)

RANDY ROBISON (City of Mesquite):

Senator Hardy has asked me to represent him on this bill and has prepared a written statement for the record to introduce the bill ([Exhibit C](#)). I also have a proposed amendment to the bill from Senator Hardy ([Exhibit D](#)).

The purpose of S.B. 376 is to develop a statewide master plan for the recreational use of publicly owned lands. This is more than just off-highway vehicle (OHV) paths, state parks or campgrounds; it is a comprehensive plan. The master plan would be used by groups such as Partners in Conservation to obtain funding from local, State and federal agencies to construct, maintain and operate recreational areas designated by the master plan in and near their communities.

As Senator Hardy met with various interest groups, two things became clear. First, money is tight, and developing this plan would take some funding. Second, there are a lot of resources and activities out there already. Perhaps it would be a good first step to get all of the different agencies and localities communicating and working together before we move to develop this comprehensive plan.

LINDSEY DALLEY (Partners in Conservation):

The impetus for this bill is that we are feeling the effect of the growth bubble in Las Vegas. As more people move into Las Vegas and the bubble expands, they come to Logandale, where I live, to recreate. That is good and we appreciate it,

but they end up going into one or two places and hammering the resources because there is no comprehensive look at recreation. The communities are growing and have needs for recreation. Being born and raised in Logandale, I can see the changes there, and my motivation is to try to hold onto the resources we have, to utilize them without abusing them.

A master plan would allow recreation areas to be spread out and planned. On the way here today, I picked up a copy of *Nevada* magazine; it includes 14 pages of advertisements from rural counties, demonstrating their desire to bring in the recreational market. Without a master plan, it is difficult to manage those resources. For example, there were more than 37 people camped in Whitney Pockets near Lake Mead this weekend, and there are no facilities there. It is primitive camping, and people like that, but there is no plan to provide for that many people. Without a plan, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would classify this as habitat destruction. We want to manage the situation for the economic benefit of the communities and the preservation of our natural resources.

ELISE MCALLISTER (Administrator, Partners in Conservation):

I live in Moapa. We have many people in our area from Las Vegas, southern Utah and elsewhere. They know of a few places to go to for recreation, like Logandale Trails, which is an area about five square miles. When I was in high school, my family had Easter picnics there, and there was never anybody else there. Today, there are lots of people there enjoying the area. It is a small area that people know about, while they do not know about the vast areas in southeastern Lincoln County, where there are lots of recreational opportunities. One of the problems with Logandale Trails is that heavy use has started to develop social trails, which have gone off of the BLM land into the Valley of Fire State Park lands. An informal access point to get into the back of Logandale Trails has been made that goes through Overton Wash, which is a place where people like to go target shooting. The need to address the recreational needs of the public is great.

Partners in Conservation has been working for more than six years in the northeastern part of Clark County on conservation and natural resource projects. We mapped over 1,200 miles for the BLM's road designation project using global positioning system (GPS) equipment. We have removed 171 tons of trash from the desert. We have worked with more than 150 youth groups who have accumulated almost 8,000 volunteer hours installing desert tortoise fencing

along Mormon Mesa. We have been working with a large number of people on projects and spend a good amount of time networking with other organizations. This demonstrates that we have an ability to tap into the public and get them involved in these issues.

KURT O. SAWYER (Partners in Conservation):

I live in the city of Mesquite. One of the things Partners in Conservation brings to the table is the ability to work with just about everybody. We have good relationships with the BLM, rural areas like Lincoln County and Mesquite and so forth. In order to create a master plan, you have to be able to integrate between counties and help counties and rural communities decide what to do. That is why we wanted a master plan, to help integrate and to help people use the natural resources we have.

Nevada is a beautiful state with a lot of natural resources, and the only parts of it that are not underutilized are those that are overutilized. Our thought is to help utilize all of Nevada, not only around Las Vegas but in the rural communities. Many of those rural communities need a boost in the economy. For example, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are the fastest growing sport in the United States. If you let people with ATVs go wherever they want, every desert, mountain and hillside where they can go will be touched by them. That is not what anyone wants. We need trails and roads for ATVs, bikes, equestrians and so on. Mr. Dalley referred to Whitney Pockets; in northeast Clark County, there are no approved camping spots other than around Lake Mead. Without such spots, people will camp anywhere and ruin the beauty of the land.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Where does Partners in Conservation get their financing?

MR. SAWYER:

The Clark County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) pays us to put up fencing for desert tortoise habitat. Groups of Boy Scouts come out to do this work; we pay them for the work, then keep a portion of the money from MSHCP for administration. We have also done desert clean ups for the BLM, using volunteers, school groups, church groups, groups like the Elks and so on. We have contracts with the BLM to do GPS mapping, and we have several groups that do that for us. With all these projects, we pay the volunteers some and keep some money aside for administration.

SUSAN FISHER (Nevada Powersport Dealers Association):

We are in support of S.B. 376. We think it is important to develop a State plan; it is a wonderful tourism and economic development tool for the State that will pay off well for Nevada. There is a great need for mapping, signage and public education so that people know where they are supposed to go and where they are not supposed to go.

PAULA BERKLEY (Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance):

We support the concept of S.B. 376 as presented today. We especially like the part recognizing that all planning is local. The bill recognizes the need to come up with good comprehensive plans, but check with local people to make sure everyone affected by these plans has an opportunity to give input. We would like to request that we be involved in finalizing this.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Ms. Wilcox, can you handle more responsibility? Are we duplicating something?

PAMELA B. WILCOX (Administrator and State Land Registrar, Division of State Lands, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):

Let me start by saying Partners in Conservation is a great group. It is one of the rewarding parts of the job to find these small groups and see the work they are doing.

Our agency is friendly to this kind of bill, but I need to be clear about what we can do, since we are a small agency and this is a large effort. We will work with the Division of State Parks, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, to try to get our arms around it this biennium, but we will not be able to do any more without funding. We will work with them to look at what plans and resources are currently available, get a better definition of the need, and help them determine what will be needed in the future to move towards the kind of plan they envision. We will not be able to develop that kind of plan this biennium with no additional resources.

This bill does to some extent duplicate an existing plan, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which was developed by the Division of State Parks. That plan is required by the federal government for us to qualify for the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. It has existed for some years and is updated periodically. They do not have funds to update it; instead, they do it catch-as-catch-can in-house. They are slated to do an update

beginning in 2008, but those updates often lag because of the difficulty of getting resources. The SCORP is not as specific as this group would like; rather, it is a general inventory of the State's recreational needs and resources. When we met with Partners in Conservation earlier today, we suggested over the long run they should be looking at an enhancement and refocusing of the SCORP. This would enable them to build on the SCORP rather than starting from scratch, with perhaps a pilot project in northeastern Clark County and Lincoln County where they have a lot of volunteer resources, and perhaps building into a statewide planning effort eventually.

We can support the bill as amended, which only takes this baby step, and see what we can get done during the biennium.

STEVE WEAVER (Chief of Planning and Development, Division of State Parks, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):

I have been involved in development of a number of SCORPs and SCORP revisions. I was involved in the discussions that happened earlier today and actually suggested the idea of augmenting the SCORP to provide additional detail. I concur with Ms. Wilcox's suggestion of doing a pilot program. It would be extremely difficult for our agency to undertake a statewide effort or even a pilot program with no funding at all. However, we can at least get started as far as inventorying what plans are currently available and looking for areas that need further refinement.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Perhaps when you get started on this, you could update the Legislative Committee on Public Lands and let us know how everything is coming. It sounds like a great plan. I will close the hearing on S.B. 376 and open the hearing on Senate Joint Resolution (S.J.R.) 10.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 10: Expresses support for the designation of trails for off-highway vehicles by certain federal agencies. (BDR R-1350)

CARRIE SANDSTEDT (Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance):

I have written testimony that includes a statement as to the purpose of S.J.R. 10, along with a proposed amendment and a list of the organizations that make up the Nevada Responsible Trails Alliance ([Exhibit E](#)).

CHAIR RHOADS:

I am glad to see so many people interested in our big problem. These OHVs have been getting a lot of attention and a lot of complaints, and there are a lot of groups out there trying to fix the problem.

MS. BERKLEY:

There are lots of opportunities to fix these problems, and I have faith that we have the people to do so. The challenge is always money.

CHAIR RHOADS:

Where do you get the money for your organization?

MS. BERKLEY:

Our funding comes from donations and foundations. In fact, some of the foundations contacted us because they saw that Nevada was one of the few states without plans or licensing for these vehicles.

MS. FISHER:

I am here in cautious support of S.J.R. 10. I like the concept, but I want to make sure this is not an effort to shut down trails and limit the access that we currently enjoy. We are in favor of responsible use and staying on the trails. There are groups that do trail maintenance on their own time and work with the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service on cleanup of public land. They have also bought their own GPS equipment to have volunteers map the trails. Once trails are on the maps, people know where to go and where not to go.

MS. MCALLISTER:

We also extend our cautious support to this resolution. It is very much needed. We need to maintain access to all the areas, but the designated route system with signage and education is a critical component. Responsible users support that.

CHAIR RHOADS:

I will close the hearing on S.J.R. 10 and open the hearing on S.J.R. 18.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 18: Urges Congress to support a proposed off-highway vehicle park in Clark County. (BDR R-1433)

Ms. McALLISTER:

Clark County staff members are looking at converting about 10,000 acres of Nellis Dunes to an OHV park to try to keep kids from going out into the desert and destroying habitat. The park would allow this type of activity to be managed in a controlled environment. From that perspective, this is a good idea and needs to be done. I know that OHV parks across the country are successful and well-attended.

Ms. FISHER:

This is an exciting project and would be a huge tourist draw for southern Nevada. It would be a good family recreational opportunity. There have been plans in the works for the last seven or eight years for a park like this in Arizona.

TOM BAKER (Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture):

I would like to remind the Committee that the Committee on Public Lands is in the process of doing our Motor Vehicle Travel Management Plan. All that information is available on our Website. I would suggest that anyone who is interested in OHVs or other types of recreation should participate in that planning. We are systematically going through each of our ranger districts and looking at the existing roads and trails at this time.

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CHAIR RHOADS:

I will close the hearing on S.J.R. 18. Is there any further business to come before this Committee? Hearing none, I will adjourn the meeting at 4:13 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Lynn Hendricks,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Senator Dean A. Rhoads, Chair

DATE: _____