

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Eighty-First Session  
February 8, 2021**

The Committee on Natural Resources was called to order by Chair Howard Watts at 4:02 p.m. on Monday, February 8, 2021, Online. 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/App/NELIS/REL/81st2021](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/81st2021).

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Assemblyman Howard Watts, Chair  
Assemblywoman Lesley E. Cohen, Vice Chair  
Assemblywoman Natha C. Anderson  
Assemblywoman Annie Black  
Assemblywoman Tracy Brown-May  
Assemblywoman Maggie Carlton  
Assemblyman John Ellison  
Assemblywoman Cecelia González  
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen  
Assemblywoman Susie Martinez  
Assemblywoman Robin L. Titus  
Assemblyman Jim Wheeler

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

None

**GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

None

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Jann Stinnesbeck, Committee Policy Analyst  
Allan Amburn, Committee Counsel  
Devon Kajatt, Committee Manager  
Nancy Davis, Committee Secretary  
Trinity Thom, Committee Assistant



**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Robert Mergell, Administrator, Division of State Parks, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Nikhil Narkhede, Program Manager, Off-Highway Vehicles Program, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Colin Robertson, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

**Chair Watts:**

[Roll was called. Committee rules and protocol were reviewed.] I would like to welcome Assemblywoman Brown-May to the Committee on Natural Resources and give her the opportunity to introduce herself to the rest of the Committee.

**Assemblywoman Brown-May:**

It is my pleasure to be on this Committee. I am very excited about many of the issues. I am an outdoorswoman; I love fishing. I come from a long line of hunters and fishers, although primarily from the East Coast. When I moved to Nevada in the early 1990s, I found this to be my home. I am excited to help protect our outdoor recreational areas and maybe to establish a few new bike trails.

**Chair Watts:**

I also want to remind members of the public that they may provide testimony and participate in a variety of ways, all of which are listed on the agendas.

I have one other item of business; that is the introduction of bill draft requests (BDRs). As most of you are aware, committees are asked to introduce BDRs to begin the process of assigning a bill number and having it referred to a committee. Your vote to introduce a BDR is not an indication of your support for the measure, it is to get the bill printed and assigned a number to begin the process. Today we have a bill draft request introduction.

**BDR R-112**—Recognizes that forest health and water quality are inextricably linked. (Later introduced as [Assembly Joint Resolution 2](#).)

I will entertain a motion to introduce BDR R-112.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN COHEN MOVED TO INTRODUCE BILL DRAFT REQUEST R-112.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARLTON SECONDED THE MOTION.

Is there any discussion?

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

Thank you for the clarification that a vote is procedural and is in no way an acknowledgment that we are in support or opposition of this bill; it is simply to move it through the appropriate channels.

**Chair Watts:**

Is there any more discussion? Hearing none, we will have a roll call vote.

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

We will now move on to our presentation on outdoor recreation in Nevada. We welcome the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the divisions that will be presenting today.

**Robert Mergell, Administrator, Division of State Parks, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

I will begin our presentation [[Exhibit C](#)]. It is a little bit of a risk having me talk first. I could talk all day about state parks and outdoor recreation. Within the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Division of State Parks' (NDSP) mission is to manage the cool and amazing outdoor opportunities that Nevada has to offer and ensure that those opportunities are available for our grandchildren's grandchildren.

On page 3 [[Exhibit C](#)], we are the Division of State Parks, but we are much more than that. We manage 27 state parks spread around the state. We manage those parks in four geographical regions. We employ a large variety of staff: rangers, both commissioned and noncommissioned, park interpreters, maintenance staff, and clerical staff. We have over 140 seasonal employees who we rely on to keep the parks open to the public. We also work collaboratively with our neighboring federal partners and our sister agencies, such as the newly created Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR), and the Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Program. We do that in an effort to provide the best outdoor recreational opportunities as possible for the residents of this state.

Page 4 shows what we do: Primarily we try to provide a clean and safe place for people to go with their families to recreate. We provide interpretive programming and we oversee two large grant programs: The Recreational Trails Program within the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 within the U.S. Department of the Interior. We use both of those programs to help provide outdoor recreational opportunities throughout the state, not just inside the state park boundaries. This is where the collaboration with the other agencies, such as the OHV Program and the NDOR among others, is critical.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund brings in several million dollars to the state each year that we get to use for a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. We use approximately half in state parks, and the other half is distributed to political subdivisions

throughout the state. Cities and counties, for example, can put in for outdoor recreation grant projects and we are able to fund the vast majority of those projects.

Page 5 represents several statewide projects that we have been able to move forward with over the last couple of years, and some that we will be doing in the future. We are always looking for ways to improve the experience of visitors, and this funding allows us to make improvements to our facilities around the state. One of our recent projects that we have been able to do is to construct a visitors center at Ice Age Fossils State Park in Las Vegas. We have not received the final certificate of occupancy yet, but it will be here very shortly. We have built the building; now we are getting a few last-minute things finished so we can actually move in and start putting up the displays.

Cabins are another of the projects that we have recently done. We have cabins installed in Wild Horse State Recreation Area that have been hugely popular. We also put some cabins in the Walker River State Recreation Area. Those cabins are not open yet; we are waiting for the power to be put in them. We are excited to get those operational and are hoping for late spring or early summer. Page 5 also has a picture of collaboration and the lower picture is the Spooner Lake and Backcountry visitors center that we will be breaking ground on this spring. This project would not happen without a huge amount of collaboration. For this project we are using funding that is managed through the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program. We are using Lake Tahoe license plate funds, Land and Water Conservation funds, Recreational Trails Program funding, as well as private funding that we secure through private donations, such as the Tahoe Fund.

On page 6, we are also working on modernization efforts. At NDSP, we have joked for years that we are going to drag our agency kicking and screaming into the 1980s. This is only kind of a joke. We are the last state parks program in the country to not have online reservations. We still rely on what is currently known as the "iron ranger" for most of our fee collections, which is just a giant well casing that people drop their money in and then we hope no one comes along with a cutting torch and gets in before we empty it. We would like to get away from that. We have ordered self-pay kiosks that have just made it through the purchasing process. We have installed some at Sand Harbor that have worked well. We are now in the design phase of these kiosks. They have to be programmed and then installed. We are hoping to have them installed throughout the state by mid-May.

We have worked with Viasat, Inc. to install Wi-Fi in all our developed campgrounds throughout the state. Viasat did not put in Wi-Fi in super remote areas, because it is just not practical there: they cannot sell enough Wi-Fi to make it profitable. All the places where it is practical, we now have Wi-Fi installed.

On page 7, anyone who participates in outdoor recreation knows that there has been a transfer to more and more outdoor recreation use. In 2020, COVID-19 threw a wrench into the works for outdoor recreation for a short period of time. We had several of our parks closed during the busiest time of spring in the south. Also, most of our camping was restricted for several months. We are now open at 50 percent capacity. Valley of Fire State

Park was closed for almost three months during the busiest time of the year. That is where much of our visitation comes from; it is one of two busiest parks in the state. By the end of the year, our visitation was only down 2.6 percent, and our camping was up over 41 percent. People really want to get outside and recreate. A big part of those visitation numbers are not as bad as we were first projecting. That is because the rural areas had a huge increase in visitation. In areas like Lincoln County, the visitation was up significantly. My colleague Nikhil Narkhede will now discuss some of the exciting opportunities that the Off-Highway Vehicle Program has offered in Lincoln County.

**Nikhil Narkhede, Program Manager, Off-Highway Vehicles Program, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

On page 8 [[Exhibit C](#)], the goal of the Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Program is to use the funding that is generated by the annual OHV registration sticker to improve rider experience, conserve natural resources, and draw attention to Nevada's awesome off-road recreation. We do this in a number of ways. We support and manage a nine-member Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles. These governor-appointed members help us figure out what the riders want, whether the riders want improvements, and where we can be investing these dollars. We administer OHV grants to focus on expanded quantity and quality of OHV opportunities. Finally, we also work to increase our OHV registration compliance. This is the sticker that costs \$21 a year. On the graph to the right, you will notice that the registrations are on an upward trend with a slight but significant dip at the end of February to May of 2020. That is attributed to the time that our offices were shut down and we were not processing registrations.

On page 9, outdoor recreation is at an all-time high. It does not matter if you are riding a bike, taking your dirt bike outside, driving your side-by-side, or if you are just going for a hike. Also, people are buying OHVs. Those OHV purchases are through the roof. Dealers are having trouble keeping inventory in stock. All our trailheads are packed with trailers and people getting out into Nevada's backcountry. This has also consequently increased the calls for emergency services. We are getting search and rescue crews out in the field more often, and they are needing equipment to go out and rescue outdoor recreationists who are in trouble. We would like to use our OHV funds to try to mitigate this and get our Nevadans better prepared to go out into remote areas. One way is our statewide map initiative. You can see a product of that on page 9. This map initiative is used to help visitors or anyone using these maps see where the points of interest are in Nevada as well as some of the important "must see" sites.

Page 9 is a snapshot of Lincoln County and the rural communities of Pioche, Caliente, and Panaca. Also noted are points of interest such as our state parks and the ability to travel between them, all using dirt roads with OHVs. The blue lines depict the nationally recognized Silver State Trail system, which is the only nationally recognized trail for motorized recreation in Nevada. We want to showcase that for our users to explore the Silver State Trail system and stop in state parks while they are recreating in Lincoln County. I would also like to draw your attention to the left side of the page where there are green overlays showing the Big Rocks Wilderness and Weepah Spring Wilderness. These are

important wilderness areas and as you may note, motorized recreation is not allowed within those boundaries. While we encourage riders on the Silver State Trail System to explore those areas, we ask that they park their machines and hike into the wilderness sites. Finally, there are the boundaries for the Basin and Range National Monument, which allows OHVs to travel through. One very interesting comment about the Nevada mapping collaborative is its funding source. It has been running for two years and it is regularly matched using the OHV funds—state dollars—and an equal match from the Recreation Trails Program housed in the Division of State Parks. It helps that we are all on the same page, and it also helps that when our crews are going out to map all these sites, they get to stay at the state parks and camp using the new amenities.

On page 10, in 2017 and 2018 we really got our feet wet with grant projects. We are awarded in the neighborhood of \$1 million each year, and our OHV revenue is just under \$1 million per year. This graph shows that some of these projects do not get completed on an annual basis. Most of the time these infrastructure projects run for two years. We are now operating with approximately 40 active projects. In 2021, we added 15 new OHV grants. There are asterisks on 2021 simply because two projects have funding that is being withheld. The funding is contingent on getting an operating plan and the other half of the funding spoken for before we release our OHV grant.

On page 11, projects throughout Nevada are where we put our money where our mouth is. We really want to see geographic diversity in the types of projects being issued and also geographically where they are being issued. There is a list of colored points on the graphic that shows where all our 2020 grants were placed. Looking closer, there are a number of gray dots that show all of our past grant projects.

We really want to consider the end users and where people are going out and recreating. We want to tie our projects in with what they are recreating on. This is where we faced the challenge in 2020 because many of our OHV users want to show us their completed projects, and the trails that are causing them issues. The inability to travel on these trails and build relationships with our partners as well as the community has really made it difficult to put those OHV dollars on important projects on the ground. We have been trying to accomplish this through phone calls and through Zoom meetings, but also through outdoor, socially distanced meetings where we can track problems on a number of projects that are on the ground.

Looking forward to 2021, we hope to standardize our messaging such that it does not matter if you are recreating in Elko County, Lincoln County, or even Clark County, you have one standard way of knowing OHV regulations in your riding area. With that diversity of projects, we will be looking to the Division of Outdoor Recreation for some guidance on how to increase recreational interest.

**Colin Robertson, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

We are three agencies within the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) working individually and collectively to advance into perpetuity outdoor recreation across the state of Nevada.

On page 12 [[Exhibit C](#)], the mission of the Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR) is "To promote Nevada's outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities and the conservation of its natural environment, grow Nevada's economy through outdoor recreation, and educate the public about responsible recreation and healthy and active lives enriched by the outdoors." I am going to use my allotted time to articulate how this mission was enacted.

On page 13, we all know that Nevada has an extraordinary amount of diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities, ranging from world-class mountain biking opportunities in Lincoln County, White Pine County, and the Lake Tahoe Basin to the only national OHV recreation trail in Nevada, which is the Silver State Trail system. Nevada has extraordinary dark sky opportunities, the Toiyabe Crest Trail, and world-class views from more than 360 mountain ranges across the state.

On page 14, one of the ways that NDOR has been gauged, at the outset of its creation, is to look to the economic impact of outdoor recreation on Nevada's overall economy. According to the most recent data, released in November 2020, from the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce, in 2019, outdoor recreation in Nevada represented \$5.5 billion of economic output, or about 3.1 percent of the state's overall gross domestic product (GDP). This represents growth over 2017 when data revealed Nevada's outdoor recreation economy represented \$4.1 billion and 2.8 percent of the state's GDP. The most recent data, 3.1 percent of the state's GDP, is almost a full percentage point above the national average of all the states in the country. Also, in 2019, outdoor recreation—directly and indirectly—represented just shy of 50,000 jobs statewide. This is interesting and important although certainly not the only way of understanding the significance of Nevada's outdoor economy and its growing importance to the state's overall economy. Outdoor recreation, as a whole, compares favorably to industries like construction, which in 2017 represented \$7.5 billion of GDP in the state. That is an easier one to get our heads around because you can see the construction happening around the state in the form of heavy equipment, cranes, and buildings going up, for example. So \$5.5 billion is a good number, and it gives us wonderful opportunities in our state.

With the help of the Office of Economic Development (GOED) within the Office of the Governor and nonprofit partners such as the Nevada Outdoor Business Coalition, the outdoor economy is now a thread within GOED's Nevada's Plan for Recovery and Resilience released in December 2020 and moving forward in the next five-year strategic plan that GOED will be producing.

On page 15, in the first year of the NDORs existence, there has been a lot of effort put into developing partnerships and collaborations. Currently, I am an agency of one. The work

I am doing is only possible through the efforts of partnerships within DCNR, such as the Division of State Parks and the Off-Highway Vehicles Program, and the work that we can do individually and collectively to amplify the impacts and importance of outdoor recreation in the state. All three of the agencies presenting to you today work individually and collectively to do that work: often with the help, support, and media platforms represented by Travel Nevada—which is also known as Commission on Tourism and is chaired by Lieutenant Governor Kate Marshall—and Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, led by Director Brenda Scolari. Travel Nevada not only promotes awareness and information about OHV opportunities across the state, but the many remarkable outdoor recreation experiences available to visitors of our state parks. When our team started hearing and then realizing that a record number of people would be venturing into the backcountry this winter, Travel Nevada helped us spread the word about safe and responsible backcountry recreation. The Division of Outdoor Recreation is now engaged with Travel Nevada's early-stage destination development program with Lincoln County and its many communities.

As Administrator Mergell indicated earlier, camping in Nevada state parks in the eastern region was up 41 percent last year with increased visitation in Nevada's eastern region. Knowing those kinds of facts combined with the anecdotal evidence and economic data about the rise in outdoor economy matters, we continue to develop and diversify Nevada's economy via outdoor recreation.

On page 16, I would like to mention a few key priorities. The Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation's Advisory Board on Outdoor Recreation convened in the latter half of January 2021 for the first time. They will meet two or possibly three times again in 2021. The key priority of the Division alongside our partners in the Division of State Parks is to revise the Nevada Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan which is a document that the state must have in order to benefit from the state's five grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We are all collectively and individually working to expand Nevada's outdoor recreation profile. I would like to mention that one example of the way we were able to work toward that this year was when we were able to help achieve a grant for the Las Vegas-based Get Outdoors Nevada nonprofit from The North Face company to support a camp-in-a-box program for young people in Clark County who were unable to go to traditional summer camps as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are all engaged in coordinating the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) funding opportunities that are represented by the GAOA for Nevada. Part of what we want to do as a department and the individual agencies within the department, alongside our federal agency partners, is to maximize the amount of Land and Water Conservation Fund investment opportunities in the state, which is growing from about \$2.8 million in grant funds this year to \$3.8 million in subsequent years.

Because of all of our work with small-population-based rural counties, such as Lincoln County, there are very important things that we can all engage in the rural community and economic development components that are represented by outdoor recreation. There are extraordinary opportunities across the state for outdoor recreation to grow and develop



a community infrastructure, especially as gateways to a lot of Nevada's most remarkable recreation opportunities. Those communities stand to benefit from outdoor recreation as a growing part of their local economies.

Finally, I would like to mention Senate Bill 52, which is before the Legislature this session. This bill is a state dark sky designation program administered by the Division of Outdoor Recreation. All of this is about making sure that Nevadans of all backgrounds and experiences have greater access and more equitable access to outdoor recreation opportunities across the state.

Page 17 shows some of the projects following the pillars of the Confluence of States, which is the alliance of states with offices of outdoor recreation following four founding principles which NDOR is created under: conservation and stewardship, education and workforce training, economic development, and health and wellness. This concludes our presentation.

**Chair Watts:**

Thank all of you for a very informative presentation. There is a lot to take in, and a lot of great work happening. It is great to see some of these projects moving forward; to see the collaboration between different agencies and entities; and to see how conservation of our public lands can also help create jobs, support small businesses, and leverage additional resources in every corner of the state. I enjoy taking advantage of recreational opportunities, and today I am wearing a Tahoe Rim Trail pin in recognition of that area.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

As you know, I am a very avid outdoor enthusiast and have the newest state park in my backyard. Thank you for what you are doing. I was part of the decision process to put cabins in Wild Horse State Recreation Area. How many cabins are there, and can I make reservations online?

**Robert Mergell:**

We have three cabins there and, unfortunately, you cannot make reservations online. You have to call to have one reserved.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

I worked to remove the OHV Program. The argument that was given to initiate that program was, first, ensuring that folks bought OHVs in Nevada which would help locally as opposed to going out-of-state, and, second, making sure people had to get the sticker. The purpose of the sticker was to be able to identify someone who was abusing the outdoors or going off-trail. There was a lot of debate on the different size of stickers so that folks could identify who was abusing. There has been a lot of debate behind the program. I will tell you that I have learned to appreciate the program. I am pleased to see what you have done with your program, the awards and grants that have been distributed, and the collaboration of the program and making sure that the OHV Program has been a success. You have, in so many ways, increased access and, at the same time, helped prevent some of the damage done by folks who were riding anywhere they wanted. You mentioned that it is an annual program.

We have two OHVs, and it is a bit frustrating that we have to renew our stickers annually. Have you looked at the possibility of going to a two-year sticker? I can license my trailer for two years, and I am wondering if there is any more thought to expanding it to two or three years. I do know that some folks may not want to license their snowmobile for more than one year because there may be no snow some years.

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

It is great to hear that you are following the progress of the OHV Program. We are working towards a simplified process for registration, and part of that would be multiple-year registrations. The first hurdle, however, is to get everything into the twenty-first century where we can have the registration process online. As the registration process changes, I think we can entertain multiple-year registrations.

**Assemblywoman Anderson:**

There used to be a program that Assemblyman Yeager brought forward two sessions ago that had to do with fourth graders getting free access to state parks [Assembly Bill 385 of the 79th Session]. Is that activity still happening, and if so, how successful or not has it been?

**Robert Mergell:**

Yes, the program is still active. We do not track how often people use those permits. Unfortunately, there is a lot of information that we cannot track right now. It has been problematic this last year with some of the schools doing distance learning. We would print those permits and send them to various school districts for distribution. With kids distance learning, that has been a challenge. We did send the permits out this year; it will be interesting to see how many of them will be used this summer.

**Assemblywoman Anderson:**

I thank you because it forced me to take two nephews to two state parks that I had not been to yet. I found the program to be very beneficial.

**Assemblywoman Black:**

Recently it came to my attention that Arevia Power is proposing the Battle Born Solar Project on the Mormon Mesa, which is between Mesquite and Las Vegas in Moapa Valley. The project is going to cover approximately 9,180 acres of the 24,000-acre mesa and if approved, the project will be the largest solar-generating field in the United States. This area is obviously a favorite for the locals in Mesquite and Moapa Valley and is a huge draw to our communities for OHV tourism. The plans for this project leave little room for off-road activities. Has the Division of Outdoor Recreation seen this proposal, and will the Division weigh-in on the proposal?

**Colin Robertson:**

As of now, that proposal has not come to the attention of the Division of Outdoor Recreation.

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

We are focused on using the OHV grants to improve facilities and infrastructure. What comes to mind is the Logandale Trails System, and we have been involved with improving the trailhead facilities. We want to pick up the interesting points in Nevada and put those at the forefront of the OHV Program for visitors coming into Nevada for a ride. I agree that if this project goes through, the Mormon Mesa trails will be impacted, but there are lots of other riding areas in that vicinity.

**Assemblywoman Black:**

This is extremely important to the Moapa Valley area because we already saw that Overton lost their Lake Mead access. This is an industry that they put forward to try to recoup those tourism losses. I am not satisfied with your response. I would hate to see the Mormon Mesa trails go away. I hope there is something we can do to preserve all the trails there.

**Chair Watts:**

I would encourage the agencies and the administration to evaluate that project and look at the potential impact that it may have.

**Assemblywoman Brown-May:**

My question is relevant to the multiplication of resources as detailed by Mr. Robertson. You and I had an opportunity to work together on the Transportation Planning Advisory Committee for the Department of Transportation. I know that you are working very hard across the state to do just that, to multiply the resources at hand. Is there a plan to broaden outreach populations we do not have a tendency to think about, such as accessibility issues, those who are considered marginalized populations, or those from inner-city neighborhoods? Do you have a concerted plan?

**Colin Robertson:**

Accessibility and equity are key principles of the Confluence of States, which is the association of states across the country with offices of outdoor recreation. Those are our concerns always, across all the founding principles that I outlined earlier. There is not, at this time, a detailed concerted plan for outreach from the NDOR, but it is something that we are deeply engaged in trying to achieve. One example of that is with the revision of the Nevada Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). There are considerably more questions in the public survey instrument that will be out later this week for direct access from a variety of different abilities protected—not only physical abilities, but also learning abilities are addressed in some of the questions. The revision of the SCORP can give consideration to the needs of differently abled people.

**Assemblywoman Brown-May:**

Do you have any idea when you would have that data and analysis ready to be able to consider those populations?

**Colin Robertson:**

The revised report is due to the National Park Service by the end of this calendar year. After the process of soliciting public feedback and input through the survey instrument, there are follow-up opportunities to do focus group discussions and/or workshops after our initial analysis of the feedback. The revised SCORP needs to be delivered by the end of the calendar year. I think there is plenty of opportunity to consider those kinds of needs as the process unfolds.

**Chair Watts:**

I am also interested in that issue and I look forward to seeing how that progresses with the engagement and collaboration of federal and local partners as well as nonprofits and indigenous partners in advancing access to our recreation opportunities.

**Assemblyman Ellison:**

I would like to follow up on Assemblywoman Titus's comment on licensing OHVs. We have had several issues through the years and have licensed our OHVs to go on the road. Now the problem we are having is businesses are using OHVs strictly for snow removal on their lots. I have a side-by-side, a four-wheeler, and a tractor that I use for nothing but snow removal. It would be great if we could license these vehicles like Utah and Idaho do. Have you looked at how those states register their OHVs?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

We have consulted with Idaho, Oregon, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado to see how they structure their OHV programs. At this time, regarding OHVs on roads, we leave that up to city ordinances to define where the OHVs can go. I see an interest in using them to come into town, gather resources, and then go back out onto the trails. Our intent is to let the communities create their own on-road OHV rules and to decide what the best fit is for that community. For example, the restrictions and regulations for White Pine County, specifically Ely, differ from the regulations in Mesquite.

**Assemblyman Ellison:**

That was a bill that Senator Goicoechea, among others, and I sponsored [[Assembly Bill 217 of the 78th Session](#)] and the county commissioners are adopting that to fit their need. In Spring Creek and Lamoille you can go down the road to go to the store or pick up your mail. I would really like to see what we can do to add to one of the bills that will fast-track the licensing for the OHV to three or more years. I think it is very important to do that.

**Chair Watts:**

We also heard about increased participation from the Department of Wildlife. Can any of you speak about having negative impacts on resources or other issues from places being loved too hard?

**Robert Mergell:**

Yes, that is absolutely the case at our state parks. As I mentioned earlier, our camping has increased 41 percent. Much of that was outside of our traditional time of heavy use. Our

historical use is basically Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend. That is when we are heavily staffed with seasonal employees to help keep the parks clean and operational. Use has really expanded. We have had people camping and a large amount of visitation after our seasonal employees left for the year. That left many of our parks with just one or two permanent personnel trying to do the work of four or five people. That has absolutely been an issue for us—increased use and increased damage—because when people use stuff, it gets damaged. We are absolutely seeing that and trying to do more with less. It is always a challenge for us and with this increase, it has definitely been exacerbated.

**Colin Robertson:**

I would also add that we have all experienced the increase in visitation as a result of the pandemic. There were huge increases in waste of all kinds left behind at state parks and on the federal lands in Nevada as well. There is a large need around defining sustainable recreation and working towards the initiatives that mitigate that kind of "loved to death" challenge.

**Chair Watts:**

I have one last question dealing with impact, and that is around climate. I am wondering if any of you can speak to the impacts of the climate, especially with drought and wildlife on your operations. Is there any way that you are working to incorporate climate adaptation or resilience into the work that you are all undertaking within the Department?

**Colin Robertson:**

I was involved in helping with the development of the state climate strategy. One of the impacts that is potentially very real in Nevada, for example, affects not only agricultural users downstream, but also the rising elevation at which the snowpack is a snowpack and not posing a dangerous runoff at lower elevations. This will impact winter recreation, in particular the ski and snow-play industries which are an important thread of the outdoor recreation economy in Nevada. A future roundtable discussion from the State of Nevada Climate Initiative led by our colleague Dr. Kristen Averyt at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas will be addressing that very subject of the impact of climate on recreational opportunities in the state. The other end is higher risks of drought and heat in the southern part of the state, for example, with things like rock climbing in Red Rock Canyon.

**Chair Watts:**

I will close this agenda item. Thank you for your presentation. I will move to public comment. Is there anyone who would like to have public comment? Hearing none, that concludes public comment and concludes our hearing for today. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, February 10, 2021. This meeting is adjourned [at 5:04 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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Nancy Davis  
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

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Assemblyman Howard Watts, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## **EXHIBITS**

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Working Cooperatively to Support Outdoor Recreation in Nevada," presented by Robert Mergell, Administrator, Division of State Parks; Nikhil Narkhede, Program Manager, Off-Highway Vehicles Program; and Colin Robertson, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.