

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
AND  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
SUBCOMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND  
TRANSPORTATION**

**Eighty-First Session  
March 26, 2021**

The joint meeting of the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means and Senate Committee on Finance Subcommittees on Public Safety, Natural Resources, and Transportation was called to order by Chair Brittney Miller at 8:03 a.m. on Friday, March 26, 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).

**ASSEMBLY SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Assemblywoman Brittney Miller, Chair  
Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, Vice Chair  
Assemblywoman Sarah Peters  
Assemblywoman Robin L. Titus  
Assemblywoman Jill Tolles  
Assemblyman Howard Watts

**SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Senator Moises Denis, Chair  
Senator Chris Brooks  
Senator Pete Goicoechea

**SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

None

**GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

None

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Brody Leiser, Principal Deputy Fiscal Analyst  
Alex Haartz, Principal Deputy Fiscal Analyst



Cathy Crocket, Senior Program Analyst  
Kimbra Ellsworth, Program Analyst  
Nancy Morris, Program Analyst  
Mary O'Hair, Committee Manager  
Adam Cates, Committee Secretary  
Bet Torres, Committee Assistant

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Nikhil Narkhede, Program Manager, Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles Program,  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
Dominique Etchegoyhen, Deputy Director, Department of Conservation and Natural  
Resources  
Robert Mergell, Administrator, Division of State Parks, Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources  
Charles Donohue, Administrator, Division of State Lands, Department of  
Conservation and Natural Resources  
Ellery Stahler, Deputy Administrator, Division of State Lands, Department of  
Conservation and Natural Resources  
Colin Robertson, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, Department of  
Conservation and Natural Resources  
Gerri North, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Kyle Davis, representing the Nevada Conservation League

**Chair Miller:**

[The meeting was called to order. Roll was taken and protocol was discussed.] We have a few different budget accounts from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources that we will hear today including the Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles Program, the Division of State Parks, the Division of State Lands, and the Division of Outdoor Recreation. Our first budget account is for the Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles Program, and we have Nikhil Narkhede to present it.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Program. Our mission statement is "To promote safe and responsible use of Nevada's outstanding off-highway vehicle recreation opportunities, and to ensure today's registration dollars create tomorrow's off-highway adventures" [page 2, [Exhibit C](#)]. The account for OHV is a revolving account in which we use the registration dollars in the form of grant funds awarded by a nine-member gubernatorial commission. These funds are used to improve OHV recreation around the state and encourage responsible use of our natural areas. The bread and butter of the OHV Program is to administer the OHV grant program [page 3, [Exhibit C](#)], which exceeds awards of approximately \$1 million per year. We want to promote safe and

responsible OHV recreation. We would like to expand the quantity and quality of OHV opportunities around the state through united messaging under our program's umbrella. One item that we have noticed over the past two years is the difficulty in obtaining an OHV registration and the complexity of the registration process. This results in very low compliance with *Nevada Revised Statutes* Chapter 490, therefore, we are tracking Senate Bill 170 that aims to simplify that registration process and put that sticker in the hands of the user.

**Senate Bill 170: Makes various changes relating to off-highway vehicles. (BDR 43-464)**

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

The map on page 4 [[Exhibit C](#)] is a depiction of where we have spent the off-highway vehicles (OHV) registration dollars since 2019. Annually, we award approximately \$1 million of funding, and the map shows exactly where those projects are. The color-coding indicates the different categories that we have been able to fund, including education and outreach projects, trail building, and law enforcement. These are all important ways that we use the money to enhance or encourage responsible use of OHV recreation. In 2019, we had 17 strong projects with just under \$1 million awarded. That was achieved through a successful campaign in 2018 that provided outreach to different communities in Nevada, notifying them about the grant program. In 2020, we awarded just over \$1 million for 18 strong projects. Once again, this was specifically due to our program's ability to travel statewide and build our partnerships with land managers and OHV user groups. The 2021 grants awarded in December 2020 were significantly lower than in previous years. I would directly attribute this to the inability to travel—trying to build these partnerships online or through Zoom meetings was strategically more difficult.

One of the OHV Program's largest investments in the past two years is the Nevada Mapping Collaborative [page 5], which was established in 2018. It is funded annually by a grant from the Nevada OHV Program as well as multiple other funding sources including federal funds from the Recreational Trails Program. The greatest thing about this project is the interagency collaboration. This team works with our OHV Program across the state and with land managers to identify the greatest riding areas that the state has to offer. Currently, we have 74,540 miles of trail inventory, and we are in the process of sorting through that to make sure to that we are only providing accurate and legal-to-ride information. The 79 active "Get the Dirt" pages refers to information provided on the OHV website about resources, rules of operation, and what to expect when you get out to your local OHV recreation site.

Now to the budget for the Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) Program, budget account 4285.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES**

**DCNR - ACCOUNT FOR OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES (OHV) (101-4285)**

**BUDGET PAGE DCNR-34**

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

I would like to draw your attention to the program expenditures for the next biennium depicted in the chart [page 6, [Exhibit C](#)]. The total program expenditures for the 2021-2023 biennium are \$309,747. These are broken up into personnel costs, operating, and travel, with a few other minor details. The program generates slightly over \$2 million in revenue each year after OHV registrations are processed by the Department of Motor Vehicles. We receive about \$2 million each biennium for OHV grants. As I mentioned earlier, we are awarding approximately \$1 million in grants each year, however, we request an annual budget of \$1.5 million to cover new grant awards as well as grants from previous years that have not been completed in one year's time. At the end of fiscal year (FY) 2023, we expect to have an ending reserve balance of \$1.5 million. The intent is to reduce the amount of money we have in the reserve of this revolving account so we can show that our registration dollars are being put on the ground for important projects. We want to stress that the funding is coming into the account from off-highway vehicles, and it is going right back out on the ground statewide. You will note the bottom table on page 6 shows one full-time employee for the next biennium.

Next are our budget account decision unit enhancements (E) [page 7]. Over the past two years, we have noticed that while we want umbrella uniform messaging, we find our messaging and outreach differs between different grant projects and their associated activities. In our enhancements, we are requesting some more funding for the Program to better unify that messaging to the OHV community. Decision unit E-251 involves the purchase of an enclosed trailer and basic vehicle maintenance for mobile outreach. Currently, we have a stack of outreach materials that provide education, registration methods, and steps to get a registration sticker, and we have been dispersing these materials through the grants statewide. We also have an OHV Program utility terrain vehicle (UTV), funded in part by a grant from the Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative. This UTV currently sits at the Washoe County yard where it is exposed to the elements, and we want to provide some shelter for that. In FY 2023, we are seeking \$2,000 to maintain three pieces of equipment: the state administrative vehicle, the OHV, and the trailer.

Decision unit E-252 recommends increased funding for out-of-state travel to better coordinate with our neighboring states that have longer running OHV programs. We want to strategize by picking and choosing the best options from those neighboring states to implement here in Nevada. Decision unit E-253 is for basic website maintenance services and includes a forwarding address from a separate hosting site. Decision unit E-255 restores funding for grant projects. This goes back to my previous statement about wanting to get our

funding out of a reserve account and onto the ground in the form of grant projects. To do this requires available funding and the ability to go out and solicit grant projects from Nevada communities. Decision unit E-710 replaces computer hardware and funds information technology (IT) costs. This expense will only be incurred in FY 2023 and is in line with the state's mandated equipment replacement cycle.

That concludes the details of my budget presentation, and I am happy to answer any questions.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

I appreciate the statements that have been made and the plan to get more dollars out onto the ground in the form of grants. You mentioned this briefly, but could you give us a little more background on how you allocate grants, and then explain the lag in actually getting the funding out the door? As a result of the lag, it looks like the amount that has been budgeted in previous fiscal years has not been utilized. Can you give us more background into how the process works and why we have not seen those amounts line up with the previous grant allocations? What does the timeline tend to look like for projects from the date of award to completion?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Yes, we watch the OHV Grant Program closely. The grant awards are completed annually through our nine-member Nevada Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles, and then they come to my desk to make sure that the budgets requested are exactly what is being funded on the ground. The OHV Grant Program is a reimbursement grant, so we go back and forth with our grantees to make sure that all of their submitted receipts and timecards total the amount that they are requesting. Admittedly, when I first came into the program, I was expecting these grant projects to go quickly and on an annual basis. Right now, we are finding that our education and outreach projects spend their funding faster than some of the larger projects, like trail building. Trail building requires several environmental assessments or documents, especially if they are taking place on federal land. Going through that process is what takes a lot of time on the trail building infrastructure projects, and those are typically the larger funding amounts. One example is the US 95 HU Winnemucca Dunes Trailhead. We are working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Humboldt County to build a new facility for their sand dunes recreation site, but simply allocating funding to the project does not mean we can start building the next day. Currently, we are going through the environmental impacts of increasing visitor use of that site, as well as the infrastructure that will be built. The construction projects, at a minimum, take two years to complete. We try to do the education and outreach projects on an annual basis and continue the funding for past successful projects.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

That is helpful. You gave a good overview of the revenue that is coming into your agency. Can you speak about how the reserves have been developed? Is that a result of the lag that

we see in the grant allocations getting out the door or is it the result of some more cautious budgeting to make sure that the agency is sound?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

As I understand, the program was started in 2012, and that is when we began building these reserves. Once the program came into the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), we were able to sink our teeth into funding grant projects and began putting the money on the ground in 2016. Since that time, we have not spent all of the funding that we were allowed to because we are growing sustainably—we do not want to spend money without a return on that investment. Annually, we do not spend all of the money that we are allocated. While we try to diminish those reserves, we continue to solicit positive grant programs.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

I appreciate your response and the note about trying to grow sustainably and making sure the dollars are being deployed in a way that is thoughtful and having the maximum impact.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

I know you are new to this program, but I will let you know that since the time I have become a legislator—and this is my fourth session—I have been trying to get rid of the OHV Program. I was always concerned about the registration process and what the funds were going to be used for. It seems like my fears are realized in that you are building up a lot of money in reserves and not really putting it back out, regardless of why you say that is. Was there any thought to actually decreasing the amount of the registration fees?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

The fees are mandated in *Nevada Revised Statutes* 490.070(c) to be between \$20 and a maximum of \$30. Right now, we are at the minimum. It is a \$20 annual registration fee with a \$1 technology fee. In the eyes of the OHV user, that is kind of a drop in the bucket when you are filling your gas tank each day.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

I beg to differ with you, as an OHV user. It may not be a drop in the bucket to some. You mentioned you purchased some equipment and had some matching funds from the federal government. How much money have you received in matching funds from the federal government?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

That should be clarified. We received a grant not from the federal government, but from the Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative. That was a rebate on the piece of equipment that we purchased, which was an OHV. When I referenced federal funding, that was for a specific grant project, the Nevada Mapping Collaborative.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

How much federal funding did you get for the Nevada Mapping Collaborative?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

That project has been federally funded at approximately \$100,000 per year since 2018, and that is matching state funding of the same amount.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

So, it is equal matching on that?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Correct.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

Can you tell me how much money you spent from registration fees on law enforcement? How much have you granted in law enforcement, and what types of projects did you fund in regard to law enforcement?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

I cannot quote a specific amount, but I can describe the law enforcement projects and where they are across the state. We are working with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department at Moapa Valley. They receive OHV funding. Mesquite Police Department, also in Clark County, receives OHV funding. Across the state we partner with county sheriffs' departments to provide them with equipment for law enforcement activities and also to bolster safety training. That is being put into place in Elko County, Humboldt County, Churchill County, and most recently Carson City.

**Assemblywoman Titus:**

I appreciate that. I would like to see a breakdown of where the funding for projects has gone. I am sure the other Subcommittee members would like to see that. I ask that you please submit it to staff so that we can see where those grants have been allocated. I am concerned about the increasing reserves that are there. I do not accept that last year you were unable to do anything because of the COVID-19 crisis—frankly, our parks, country, and every single area in the state of Nevada that could possibly have an OHV site were packed. People wanted to get outside. I think there was an increased utilization, and I worry about the impact on our natural environment. I am supportive of trails and designated riding areas so that we do not destroy areas that we want to protect, so I would like to see a more detailed report of what you are doing with the money and where this is going. I encourage you to be more proactive on getting these funds out where they need to go.

**Senator Brooks:**

I want to go back the grant awards map [page 4, [Exhibit C](#)]. I do not know if it is indicative of the dollar amount, but if the map is any indicator of where the awards went, it seems as if

the most populous county in the state—the one that is paying a good portion of all the fees going into this grant program—got relatively few projects. Do you know what the revenue breakdown going into the program from registrations is across the state and where the money was spent? If those little dots mean dollars, 80 percent of it was spent outside of Clark County. I know my neighbors, my family, and I all contribute to that fund, as do many people down in my neck of the woods. Do you have rough estimates on the breakdown between spending and revenue?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Yes, I do have revenue by county, and I am happy to provide those numbers afterwards in an Excel spreadsheet. Right now, there is no mechanism to guarantee that the revenue generated in Clark County is only spent in Clark County. We are required to judge all of the grant applications that come in for this funding equally statewide. Yes, you are correct that the colored dots represent the projects in Clark County since 2019 [page 4]. If you take a closer look, there are also grey dots that represent projects in seasons past. Going back to the education and outreach component for finding projects, that is really where it takes proactive legwork to make sure that we are planning a year in advance so that projects come in during the open grant application period.

**Senator Brooks:**

On behalf of this Senator, I would urge you to be more proactive to spend that Clark County money that you raised in Clark County. You say there is no mechanism, but the mechanism is you. This is your program. I would assume you are in Carson City, and I would love to see you work more with the most populous county in the state to expand some of these opportunities for the people down there.

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Thank you, Senator Brooks, and that is noted.

**Assemblywoman Peters:**

My question is related to the work you are doing that overlaps with the Division of Outdoor Recreation. Do you collaborate, or have you collaborated yet, on identifying projects that enhance the Division of Outdoor Recreation's activities in the state?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

I am here today with Mr. Dominique Etchegoyhen, the Deputy Director of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and Colin Robertson, the Administrator of the Division of Outdoor Recreation. Mr. Robertson and I speak on a weekly basis, if not more frequently, and make sure that there is collaboration on those interagency grant projects. So, yes, that communication is very clear.



**Dominique Etchegoyhen, Deputy Director, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

Yes, that is something we have been actively working towards as a department. Outdoor recreation certainly encompasses off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. We have been working with the new administrator of the Division of Outdoor Recreation to help manage the OHV grant program, and it is something we are going to see more of as we move forward. We think it is working very well. We have many users who are interested in outdoor recreation that are working together to figure out how best to manage these landscapes. This is to ensure that we are not impacting these natural areas and that we are avoiding any of the conflicts that might exist between the user groups. It is something we are going to continue to try to improve upon.

**Assemblywoman Peters:**

That is exciting, and it is a benefit to the state to have that overlap. My other question has to do with your grant program. I am wondering about the difference between the reimbursement grants versus the seed grant program, and if there are barriers to entry for some projects because they do not have the upfront funds to potentially fund their programs. Have you thought about allocating a portion of those grants to seed programs that would be paid for up front and then work through the Department in a different supporting manner?

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Currently, we only operate on a reimbursement basis. To alleviate the stress on some of those smaller groups, we reimburse on a more frequent basis. If there is an OHV club that does not have a ton of reserve funding in their accounts, we break that project up into a month-by-month or week-by-week basis. As soon as they submit their receipts, we put those funds back in their pocket. Currently, there is no procedure or plan to create a seed grant program that puts money on the ground before the costs are incurred.

**Assemblywoman Peters:**

I am curious if there are any statutory barriers to doing that and if you would not mind following up on your interpreted authority on a seed program.

**Nikhil Narkhede:**

Noted, Assemblywoman Peters. I will be following up with any statutory limitations for a seed grant program.

**Chair Miller:**

Not seeing any additional questions, thank you for your presentation of this budget. We can move to budget account 4162 for the Division of State Parks with Robert Mergell. [Technical presentation and protocols were discussed.]

**INFRASTRUCTURE  
CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES  
DCNR - STATE PARKS (101-4162)  
BUDGET PAGE DCNR-44**

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

Our mission is "to develop and manage Nevada's system of parks and recreation areas, contribute to a vibrant economy, and protect areas of scenic, historic, and scientific importance" [page 2, [Exhibit D](#)]. In other words, we get to manage all the cool stuff that Nevada has to offer and make sure that it is available for our grandchildren's grandchildren. We manage 27 parks that are spread out throughout the state [page 3]. We manage them in four regions: western, eastern, southern, and the Lake Tahoe area, which is its own region. We offer a number of interpretive programs throughout the year—more than 350 is the pre-COVID-19 number. We still managed to do some programming even during the pandemic, but with significant decreases in the number of people that we allowed to show up to those programs. We provide affordable recreation opportunities for families and people in general. I think we all recognize the health benefits—the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront that it is good for people to get outdoors. Pandemic or no pandemic, it is just a healthy place to be.

Revenue for our budget is split between user fees and the State General Fund [page 4], as well as other sources, including the marina gas tax as the next largest chunk, and some other miscellaneous revenue. Largely, we are dependent on the State General Fund and user fees. Next are our expenditures [page 5]. As you can see, the majority of our money goes to personnel. It takes people to run parks and keep them open, and that is where the vast majority of our budget is spent. The rest of it goes to operating and other smaller portions, but primarily it is people and then the materials that it takes to keep parks open, safe, and clean for the public.

Now I will run through the budget account 4162 enhancements (E) [page 6]. Decision unit E-252 is for additional funding for Category 4, which is our operating budget. It includes cleaning supplies, operating supplies, and those types of things. We have always kept our bathrooms clean, but, as you can imagine, during the pandemic the frequency has had to increase. As visitation increases so does the impact on our facilities, so we have to clean more frequently when there are more visitors.

Decision unit E-254 is for a temporary office building at Van Sickle Bi-State Park. We have one person and some seasonal staff up there, but there are no buildings yet. There is a restroom, picnic tables, and those types of things. That park gets a significant amount of walk-in day use, so we do need a place for our one employee to be able to get on their computer, check emails, do their time sheets, and all of the administrative things that we still have to do.

Decision unit E-255 is for contract costs for the biennial State Parks academy employee training. Several sessions ago we were able to establish funding to do a biennial State Park academy. Once every two years, we get as many of our employees together in one place as possible to go through various things like personnel procedural updates. We bring in outdoor recreation professionals from the National Parks Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), or the Forest Service to speak on a variety of different topics. It allows for a lot of collaboration and makes sure we are addressing issues statewide. This decision unit adds some extra funding for contract costs, generally with a hotel/casino, a convention center room, or someplace where we can all gather.

Decision unit E-256 is for additional funding for Category 59, which is our utilities category. We have increased campgrounds with hookups, for instance. We have put in cabins. A lot of various things have increased our utility costs, so this is looking to make that category whole.

Next is decision unit E-257, which replaces our tourism funding [page 7]. As I am sure everybody is aware, the Commission on Tourism's budget comes primarily, almost exclusively, from room tax. The lack of people occupying beds statewide has impacted our budget significantly. We normally get a transfer from the Commission on Tourism. They were not able to do that because they did not have the money to do it. This category contemplates not getting that transfer in fiscal year (FY) 2022. They anticipate being able to give us the transfer again in FY 2023, but we are asking for State General Fund to offset that lack of a transfer in FY 2022.

Decision unit E-262 is for additional funding for Category 7, which is for buildings and grounds maintenance. As I have mentioned, our visitation numbers continue to go up. That causes more wear and tear on all of our facilities, and we have to do the maintenance to those facilities in order to keep them open to the public. Decision unit E-263 is for additional funding for Category 4, which is for vehicle maintenance and operational costs for new facilities and increased visitation. You can see the trend here. The increased visitation and the age of our infrastructure carries through to every part of our budget.

Decision unit E-710 is for replacement computers per the Enterprise Information Technology Services (EITS) replacement schedule. This is asking for replacements for computers that have exceeded their age per the EITS replacement schedule. Decision unit E-712 establishes a radio replacement schedule. We are heavily dependent on radio communications in order to fulfill public safety requirements and to be able to communicate between staff. All of these radios need to be replaced on occasion. They have a life expectancy. We are really good at using things throughout their life expectancy and then keeping them around for many more years after that, but at some point, you just cannot get replacement parts for radios.

Next is decision unit E-500 which shows the reduction in the tourism funds [page 8]. As you can see, there is still a reduction in FY 2023. The transfer we get from the Commission on Tourism basically covers two different things: part of it goes to brochure purchases and part

of it goes to seasonal funding. They are still going to be able to transfer the money to help us out with the seasonal funding but not for the brochures. Decision unit E-800 is for the cost allocation associated with the Director's Office position changes. Decision unit E-900 transfers the grants and projects analyst position. Last session, we got a grants and projects analyst to run the outdoor education grant program. The grant program is being shifted over to the Division of Outdoor Recreation. It will be a better fit over there, so this is showing that transfer out of our budget.

Decision unit E-680 is a reduction in State General Funds and an increase to user fees. We were asked to contemplate a reduction to our budget. As I showed earlier, a reduction to our budget of any significance would have resulted in losing staff, and we cannot keep parks open and safe if we lose anybody. We asked instead to do a minor increase to our fees, specifically to our annual permit sales, and to implement an out-of-state user fee on people coming into our parks without Nevada registered vehicles. This was done in an effort to offset a potential reduction.

The first Division challenge is, as I have said, doing more with less [page 9, [Exhibit D](#)]. We are having more visitors, and we are increasing the things we offer to the people like cabins, hookups, or letting people stay longer. Costs go up and we are providing more, but our budget is flat, thus it is a struggle to maintain things at the level that we need to. The next challenge is that recruitment and retention are getting harder. For the first time in a long time we had to go outside of our agency in order to hire a park supervisor. That usually does not happen. Usually we have promotions, but people are staying where they are at, and it is getting harder to fill vacancies. We have had numerous vacancies over this last year that we tried to fill, and people either did not accept the job or they could not pass the background check for a variety of reasons. The trend that we are recognizing is that it is just harder to find qualified people.

Another challenge is embracing new technology. Most people on the Subcommittee may already be aware that we are trying to implement an online reservation system. We have also been trying to put in self-pay fee kiosks to make it easier for people to pay when they show up to the parks. These things make it more likely that the state will get that revenue rather than somebody breaking into our fee tube and stealing it before we can get to it. Providing more fee payment options, and preferably more digital or electronic methods, reduces our dealings with cash. We also have outdated collection methods for tracking visitation. We rely on several logs that someone needs to fill out, and that we hope do not get lost in somebody's patrol truck. That information has to be input into a spreadsheet and then transferred to another office where somebody takes the information and consolidates it into a larger spreadsheet. We are trying to get away from that by using technology to our benefit and streamlining the process.

The next challenge is our aging facilities which are requiring more maintenance to keep things open [page 10]. As any homeowner knows, the older your house gets, the more stuff

breaks. You have to fix it to try to keep everything functioning properly. Our maintenance staff are spread extremely thin. We have less than one park maintenance person for every two parks that are out there, and it is a struggle to keep things operational. The last challenge is resource protection. There was an increase in visitation by first time users; everybody saw that in the news a lot over the last year. People are going outside recreating, but then they leave their trash behind because they are new to outdoor recreation and do not know the "pack-it-in, pack-it-out" or "leave no trace" philosophies. We are trying to have a broader outreach to get that message out to more people, and we are doing that through the Division of Outdoor Recreation and reaching out to federal partners. We are all trying to have a unified message so that we can teach people how to be good users of outdoor recreation facilities. With that, I will be happy to answer any questions.

**Senator Denis:**

You are proposing an increase in out-of-state fees, and I assume you have done some research. How do we compare to other states when we do that? Have you found any negative consequences that could come from doing that?

**Robert Mergell:**

Yes, we have reached out to a number of states. I am a member of the National Association of State Park Directors, along with other administrators and directors from around the country. Many states already had an out of state charge in place and many others implemented one during the COVID-19 pandemic for a variety of reasons. When the economy took a hit, so did state budgets, so it was a fee or revenue generating opportunity. But it also tried to encourage people to stay a little bit closer to home during the pandemic as well, so there are more reasons that agencies have implemented this fee. We get a large number of visitors who come from out-of-state, but the local Nevada residents are the ones who are paying for the majority of the costs through various taxes just by being residents of the state of Nevada. A five dollar increase for the users coming from out-of-state is a pretty minimal increase. Other states have implemented it. Oregon increased theirs even more than ours in an effort to decrease the number of people that were coming into Oregon to camp. I talked to the director in Oregon, and their reservations did not drop at all. In fact, they continued to go up, so it had zero impact on the actual number of visitors coming to Oregon from out-of-state.

**Senator Denis:**

That is interesting. You say they raised their fees to decrease the out-of-state usage?

**Robert Mergell:**

That is correct.

**Senator Denis:**

Is that because more out-of-state visitors wear it down faster? Why would you want to decrease them?

**Robert Mergell:**

In this particular instance, it was done in order to try to reduce the number of people that were traveling to Oregon during the COVID-19 pandemic. That was very specific to 2020. The Board of Directors for the Association of Oregon Counties wanted to decrease the number of people coming into their counties from outside of the state. They decided to implement that fee because they could not exactly say, "You are not allowed to come into Oregon," so they tried to do some things to persuade people to camp in other places. Like I said, it really did not have the impact that they were looking for, but it did increase their fees.

**Senator Denis:**

Five dollars seems reasonable. How do you identify somebody as being from out-of-state?

**Robert Mergell:**

This is something that we have done before, but last time it was put out as a discount for Nevada residents. In essence, it was the exact same thing. With this plan, we are basing it on the license plate that is on the vehicle. If your vehicle is not registered in Nevada, you are going to pay the out-of-state fee for coming into the state. That is what we are doing to try to make getting people through the fee booths a little bit faster at busy parks. When it was a Nevada resident discount, people would come in with California or Arizona plates, and then spend five minutes digging in their trunk, looking for their identification to show they were actually Nevada residents. We are trying to make it simpler. We just look at the license plate. If it is a Nevada plate, you get in for the normal price; if it is a plate from out-of-state, even if it is a rental car with out-of-state plates, I am sorry. We have to try to expedite people through the fee booths as quickly as we can.

**Senator Denis:**

I see. I was going to say that when some people travel they rent a car rather than put the miles on their own car, but I get what you are saying as far as being able to expedite the fee booth process. I want to follow up on something else that you said about the kiosks and the online reservation system: do you currently have an online reservation system?

**Robert Mergell:**

No, we are the last state in the country to not have an online reservation system, so we are rectifying that now.

**Senator Denis:**

That is good because everybody is used to using online systems. I am surprised we have not done it sooner. What are the kiosks? How do they function out in the middle of nowhere?

**Robert Mergell:**

They use a variety of technologies. The kiosks we are getting have the capability to operate on solar power if we do not have power. They have the ability to transmit the data through fiberoptic—if we happen to have fiberoptic in that area—or through cellular mechanisms or

satellite. We are going to be able to install these in a lot of places where we were not expecting to be able to, but the technology is there so we will be able to put them in at most of our more highly visited parks. To follow up further, one of the requirements in the request for proposals (RFP) for the new reservation system is the ability to synchronize data. If somebody shows up and the booth is closed, for instance, they can pay or check in with that self-pay kiosk.

**Senator Denis:**

That is great. Do we anticipate that this will increase revenues in some of those areas where visitors can go in and not pay because there is no one present to collect it?

**Robert Mergell:**

I honestly do not know if this is going to increase revenue, but it will increase people's ability to pay. I rarely ever have cash because when I do, my wife or my kids take it anyway. So, when I owe someone money somewhere, if they do not take a debit card, I am not getting whatever that thing is. This works the same way. If you drive out to Wild Horse State Recreation Area, for instance, and you did not bring cash with you and there is no other mechanism to pay, then you are just not going to pay. You are going to go in; you are not going to turn around and drive 67 miles back to Elko to break your \$20 bill. In that regard, yes, I believe that people will pay more often because it will be easier for them to do so. There are the people who do not pay until one of our rangers shows up because they figure they will just not pay a fee until we show up. I do not think that philosophy is going to change for those people until we write them a citation and they realize it would have been cheaper to pay up front.

**Senator Brooks:**

My question is on decision unit E-262 [page 7, [Exhibit D](#)]. It is recommending additional State General Fund appropriations of \$108,422 in each year of the biennium. We have increased visitors and fees, and it appears as if the current budgets are sufficient for the ongoing maintenance of the facilities. Can you discuss the feasibility of utilizing the account for the maintenance of state parks and the account for the maintenance of state park facilities and grounds to support these ongoing costs?

**Robert Mergell:**

Our Category 7 is for routine maintenance items like light switches breaking, light bulbs burning out, or other operational things that happen all the time. Our account for the maintenance of state parks is for those unforeseen and typically larger things that an individual park budget cannot support. Category 7 is managed at the park level, so when something breaks, the maintenance person contacts the accounting person from the region, they get a purchase order, they go buy the item, and they make the repair. They do not have to ask anybody because they know how much is in their budget, they use it, and they go make those repairs. If something is significant, like a larger break that the park cannot cover, then we are going to have to use our larger park maintenance account in order to make those

repairs. For instance, a report came across my desk yesterday about somebody who decided to pull down all of our light towers at Lahontan State Recreation Area in the day use area. There are six light poles that we are going to have to replace. That is more than the park budget can handle.

**Senator Brooks:**

You have proposed Senate Bill 53 that allows you to float those funds around regionally as opposed to individual parks and facilities. Does that help alleviate this issue?

**Senate Bill 53: Makes various changes relating to the Division of State Parks of the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. (BDR 35-338)**

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

Senate Bill 53 will help smaller parks. Lahontan State Recreation Area, where that particular damage happened, has a pretty decent utility surcharge account, so they will be able to handle the repairs better. But if Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park, for instance, had all of their solar panels destroyed, damaged, or in need of replacement, they do not have a utilities surcharge account with a large enough balance to be able to make those repairs. They would need to be able to tap into that regional account, and that is what we are trying to fix with that bill.

**Senator Brooks:**

I see a theme here. People need to just be cool when they go to our Nevada State Parks and facilities.

**Robert Mergell:**

I would appreciate that.

**Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:**

My questions are about decision unit E-257 [page 7, [Exhibit D](#)]. During your presentation, you discussed some of the challenges you are having with recruitment and retention and that it is hard to fill vacancies [page 9]. As we have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic, we have not had the tourism that we have become accustomed to in our state which has reduced the amount that comes from the Commission on Tourism. Can you tell us what the impact would be to the agency's operations if the recommendation to replace the revenue from the Commission on Tourism with State General Fund appropriations is not approved to support your seasonal staffing?

**Robert Mergell:**

That is a good question, and I probably do not have a great answer for what we will do if that transfer does not take place and we do not find a mechanism to offset the seasonal funding we need. Our seasonal funds are really what keep our parks open and operational. Not



having seasonal staff cannot happen. We just would not be able to keep parks open. We definitely would not be able to keep our facilities clean and operational. If that funding does not happen, I honestly do not know what we will do. We will have to do something, but I wish I had a better answer for you. I do not know how I would offset that \$403,000.

**Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:**

I appreciate your honesty with that. Along those same lines, you also used those funds for the printing of the brochures. Are there any alternative funding sources that you have found or thought about to continue with the printing of the State Parks brochures?

**Robert Mergell:**

Yes, that one we can help to alleviate. We have a gift shop program. The money we bring in from sales at the gift shops is not a crazy amount of money, but it is enough money that we can do a grant because it is used specifically for interpretive programming. Our brochures definitely qualify as interpretive programming. We can still handle the brochure printing when we need to.

**Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:**

I am happy to hear that you have found an alternative for that. We do need to get the word out, we need people to come to our parks, and we need them to be responsible while they are in our parks as well.

**Senator Brooks:**

I do not know if I missed this, and I did not see it anywhere in your presentation, but what about the Elgin Schoolhouse State Historic Site improvements? There were one-time State General Fund appropriations in the last session for \$20,000 in each year of the biennium, and the budget currently has that continuing in each year of this future biennium. Has the agency identified any alternative funding sources that could be used to support the Elgin Schoolhouse site improvements besides State General Funds?

**Robert Mergell:**

With the one-time money we got for the Elgin Schoolhouse State Historic Site, we were able to build that in under our two times cap. We recognize that we need to continue to make improvements at the Elgin Schoolhouse, and we want to do everything we can to continue that process. The only outside funding source we are looking at right now to help with improvements there is the Land and Water Conservation Fund programming, which is a federal grant program we administer. It is a 50/50 match, so for any project that we do we can cover half with State Park funding, whether from the park maintenance account or funding that we are putting into the budget, and then we can double that money if we use a qualified Land and Water Conservation Fund grant.

**Senator Brooks:**

So, basically, you are looking at supplementing the spending by matching funds as opposed to alternatively replacing these funds with something else?

**Robert Mergell:**

That is correct.

**Chair Miller:**

Any additional questions from members?

**Senator Denis:**

I have a follow up to that. What are the visitation numbers at Elgin Schoolhouse State Historic Site?

**Robert Mergell:**

I do not have those figures with me, but I can certainly get them to you.

**Senator Denis:**

I remember when we created this, and I wonder if visitation has increased and if people are hearing about it and going out there.

**Robert Mergell:**

We do not have actual traffic counters there—really what we do is count visitors when we actually meet up with them out there. With COVID-19, we did not do a lot of that type of outreach because we were not encouraging people to come together in groups. In 2020, I would have to say we probably saw a decrease out there, but like I said, I am happy to forward the Subcommittee our visitation numbers if you would like those.

**Chair Miller:**

With that, thank you for your presentation. We will move onto budget account 4173 for the Division of State Lands presented by Charles Donohue.

**INFRASTRUCTURE  
CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES  
DCNR - STATE LANDS (101-4173)  
BUDGET PAGE DCNR-106**

**Charles Donohue, Administrator, Division of State Lands, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

The Division of State Lands is rather small, but we have a lot of different programs. As you heard in the Division of State Parks presentation, they have had a number of vacancies and so has the Division of State Lands. When you work in a small agency with vacancies, you get an opportunity to do a lot of things that maybe you did not know you were going to be asked

to do by your administrator. That was the case this past summer. Ellery Stahler [Deputy Administrator, Division of State Lands] is the one who built our budget, so my plan is to turn it over to her. She is going to run this presentation and walk you through our budget.

**Ellery Stahler, Deputy Administrator, Division of State Lands, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Governor's recommendations for budget account 4173. As Administrator Donohue mentioned, our agency is a small division within the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Though we are small, we have a broad set of responsibilities. Our mission is "to uphold Nevada's conservation values through land stewardship, environmental improvement, and responsible land-use planning" [page 2, [Exhibit E](#)].

We operate in three core program areas [page 3]. We have five land agents, led by a supervisory land agent, who run our State Land Office. They acquire and dispose of land on behalf of other state agencies in fulfillment of their missions. Once we acquire property, we take title in the name of the State of Nevada, and then assign that property to a state agency for their day-to-day management. We also authorize third-party use and occupancy of state lands. This includes the state's sovereign lands. For example, we issue easements for a utility corridor that runs across state lands. We issue permits for piers and buoys that occupy the state-owned lakebed of Lake Tahoe. We also manage land records, both electronically with our Land Management System database and in hard copy form. In our climate-controlled vault, we have records that go back to the time of statehood.

In the Division of State Lands, we house the Nevada Tahoe Resource Team (NTRT). The NTRT is responsible for implementing the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program for the State of Nevada. This is a bond-funded program that results in implementation of capital projects that benefit resource areas like forest health, water quality, sensitive species, recreation, and also for the control and eradication of aquatic invasive species. We have a multiagency, multidisciplinary team that runs that program. We also have a forester position who manages our Urban Lot Management Program. The State of Nevada holds title to nearly 500 undeveloped, sensitive lots at Lake Tahoe that are managed for their conservation values. We have a land agent on the NTRT who runs our Nevada Land Bank program. This is run through a memorandum of understanding with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, and we operate that program on their behalf.

Finally, our agency houses the State Land Use Planning Agency. This is a planning agency of one full-time employee. This individual has a number of different responsibilities including managing the Division of State Lands portfolio and providing technical assistance as requested by local jurisdictions. This position serves as staff to the State Land Use Planning Advisory Council, the Nevada Joint Military Affairs Committee, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. This individual also runs the Nevada State Clearinghouse, which

is the single point of contact for federal actions which may have a significant impact on the environment.

Our proposed budget for the next biennium is just over \$4 million [page 4]. The graph shows that we are funded primarily by State General Fund with about 78 percent coming from State General Fund appropriations. Although our budget is small, it is complex. We also receive revenue from smaller revenue sources. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) excess coverage mitigation funds support the Nevada Land Bank program. We have general obligation bond funding that supports our Environmental Improvement Program. We are a participant in the five-year Department of Energy (DOE) federal grant which funds our land use planner. Our Lake Tahoe License Plate Program is a robust grant program that funds 50 percent of our environmental scientists on the NTRT. We also have other revenue sources, the most prominent of which are the sportsman fees collected by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) that support a land agent dedicated to NDOW in our State Lands Office.

We are proposing a handful of revisions to our biennial budget [page 5]. The first enhancement (E) is a modest State General Fund recommendation, decision unit E-350, to cover the Division of State Lands' share of the cost of a software license. This cost is shared among four divisions within the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Next is decision unit E-354 which proposes a non-General Fund recommendation to support our environmental scientist on the NTRT to attend an annual hydrology stream restoration for water quality conference. The final three enhancement units are meant to achieve budget reduction targets. The first, decision unit E-682, holds one of our land agent positions vacant. We would expect to hire this position in January 2023. You might notice that the figures under this enhancement unit look a bit off, and in fact, they are a bit off. We are working with the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) fiscal staff as well as the Governor's Finance Office (GFO) to provide a technical correction so that this number truly reflects the proposed vacancy. The next item, decision unit E-683, reduces the contract maintenance for our land management system database. You will also see a funny number there in that the second-year proposed reduction is a lot higher than the first year. That is due to a math error. We discovered that \$8,000 was deducted twice from our budget, so we are working with LCB fiscal staff and the GFO to make that technical correction. That second-year number is approximately \$1,300. Finally, decision unit E-685 proposes budget reductions to both our in-state and out-of-state travel categories.

Fiscal year (FY) 2020 was a challenging year for our agency [page 6]. This was not just because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of the vacancies that our agency experienced with promotions and retirements. We are looking forward to the future. We are excited to report that we are backfilling our vacancies and, with the exception of the one land agent position that we are proposing to hold vacant, we are in the process of filling the rest of our vacancies. We look forward to having a more complete staff. In terms of challenges, we do not foresee significant challenges in the next biennium, but looking ahead into the future,

potentially in FY 2024 and FY 2025, we foresee some equipment and service needs. One example is our forester, a field-based position which manages our Urban Lots Program, who uses a 2002 Toyota Tacoma truck. This truck has been very reliable, but recently had a major service issue where we had to replace the clutch. It has 188,000 miles on it, so we will look to replace that vehicle in the 2023–2025 biennium. In addition, our Land Management System, which is our central database for the agency, functions well for our internal purposes, but we think we can improve the way it interfaces with the public and our customers. We would like to see it enhanced so customers can submit their applications, pay their application fees, and potentially track the status of their applications online.

The last bullet in this category concerns two positions in our State Land Use Planning Agency that were funded by the State General Fund. Those two positions were reduced down to one as a result of the Great Recession of 2007-2009. As I stated earlier in the presentation, this one position currently manages a lot of different responsibilities. The incumbent is very capable, but as those responsibilities continue to increase, we will seek to balance that workload by adding another position to the State Land Use Planning Agency. Finally, the NTRT has two positions that we have been working to transition from bond funding to State General Fund appropriation funding. This is because these two positions, the program manager and the administrative assistant, tend to have more of an administrative capacity rather than a true project implementation capacity. We have successfully transitioned the payroll expenses for those two positions to General Fund appropriations, but their operating expenses continue to be funded through bond interest in budget account 4206, which is the fund to protect Lake Tahoe. We are projecting that bond interest will be depleted by the middle of FY 2024. We will seek to transition the operating expenses for those two positions fully over to the State General Fund, if possible, in the 2023-2025 biennium. Those are some of our challenges and opportunities for the future, and that concludes my remarks. Administrator Donohue and I are available for any questions.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

I noted decision unit E-682 continues to hold the state land agent position vacant, and decision units E-683 and E-685 reduce your travel and information technology (IT) costs [page 5, [Exhibit E](#)]; can you discuss the anticipated impact of holding that position vacant over the next biennium?

**Ellery Stahler:**

We anticipate the impact to be that a proportional share of that position's workload responsibility will be distributed among the other land agents in the State Land Office. We receive a little over 300 applications per year, so that is a lot of projects to multitask among our small office staff. We would expect to see an incremental increase in processing time and in completing projects due to the share of the workload.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

What about the reduction in maintenance support for the land management system, decision unit E-683? What impacts will that have?

**Ellery Stahler:**

The land management system maintenance contract covers bug fixes, system errors, process efficiencies, and things of that nature. We have a business process analyst who is tech savvy and provides a lot of support for our land management system. Our contract with the software development company who originally created the land management system is about \$12,000 per year. Decision unit E-683 would be a somewhat modest reduction in their capacity to assist the agency.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

It sounds like there would be some additional time required of one of your staff to help troubleshoot any major issues, and there would be less efficiency improvements or bug fixes as a result of that reduction. Is that a fair characterization?

**Charles Donohue:**

I would say that is a fair assessment. As background, when the land management system was developed for the agency, we also were allotted approximately \$20,000 for maintenance. While maintaining the contract over time, we have noticed that we have not had to use those funds, so we have slowly been whittling it down. We both feel comfortable with this modest reduction with some of the staff support that we have in-house as well.

**Senator Denis:**

I want to follow up on that line of questioning. As I look at decision unit E-683, it says you are reducing it by 16 percent in FY 2022 but by 80 percent in FY 2023. When you say, "whittling it down," is that what you are talking about?

**Ellery Stahler:**

That question is a good opportunity to provide clarification. The FY 2023 number that you see in the amount of \$10,091 [page 5, [Exhibit E](#)] was actually discovered to be a math error in our budget. It turns out that approximately \$8,000 was deducted twice, so we are currently working with LCB fiscal staff and the GFO in order to correct that. That number is more around \$1,300.

**Senator Denis:**

That sounds more reasonable. You talked about having a business analyst who can provide some tech support, but you have this new system that was custom designed for you, correct?

**Charles Donohue:**

Yes, that is correct, Senator.

**Senator Denis:**

Somebody else developed it for you, and you have been paying a maintenance fee for that. If you reduce that fee but have any major issues at some point, you are going to have to go back to the person that developed it, right?

**Charles Donohue:**

That is right, Senator. We have not had to go back to the developer as frequently as we did when the system was first deployed. The system is nearing its tenth year, and it is one of the things that Deputy Administrator Stahler identified in her presentation about opportunities and challenges in the future. In the next session, we are going to be coming back with a request to modernize that and make it more accessible for some of the items she talked about in terms of submitting applications and payments electronically, and things of that nature. It will be a rather substantive enhancement.

**Senator Denis:**

That makes more sense. My next question was going to ask if, because it is getting older and you need to replace it, you are going to be coming back, so I appreciate that. If you have a computer system that you are dependent on and that somebody else wrote, it worries me when you reduce your support for it. If it goes down, those processes become inhibited, so that is why I wanted to follow up.

**Charles Donohue:**

In my mind, the agency has an extremely good relationship with the company that developed the software for our land management system. They have spent quite a bit of time with our staff when we have had issues, and have tutored or mentored them in terms of enabling us to manage some of that system on our own without having to go back to them. They are comfortable with that relationship, but I do believe that in the next biennium it will be time to upgrade it.

**Senator Denis:**

This is where we are always a little hesitant because we have seen a lot of IT projects run into problems afterwards due to the developer no longer developing that product or other things. When we ask those kinds of questions, it is because we are concerned as we have seen other projects fall through. I appreciate the information.

**Charles Donohue:**

When the agency went to the Legislature ten years ago and asked for the development of this system, I think everybody recognized that it was critical at that time. But in the wisdom of the agency head and the Legislature, we were also afforded the maintenance money that enabled us to troubleshoot those minor bugs at the outset. We have gotten a lot of miles out of this system, and it has been extremely stable over the last number of years.

**Chair Miller:**

Are there any additional questions? [There were none.] Thank you so much for this presentation and we can move onto our last budget of the day, budget account 4180 for the Division of Outdoor Recreation.

**INFRASTRUCTURE  
CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES  
DCNR - DIVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION (101-4180)  
BUDGET PAGE DCNR-198**

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

I am pleased to be here today to present a summary of this important new Division's budget for the next biennium. The Division of Outdoor Recreation (NDOR) was created to promote Nevada's outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities and the conservation of its natural environment, to grow Nevada's economy through outdoor recreation, and to educate the public about responsible recreation and healthy and active lives enriched by the outdoors [page 2, [Exhibit F](#)]. The Division's authority and responsibilities are outlined in *Nevada Revised Statutes* Chapter 407A. The Division is currently a division of one, and I look forward to being able to recruit for two additional staff later this calendar year.

The Division is part of the Confluence of States, the alliance of 13 U.S. states that have created offices of outdoor recreation in the last four years to foster outdoor recreation's many benefits to the public and to the economy. In the first year, despite the pandemic, a great deal of effort has been invested in successfully standing up the Nevada Advisory Board on Outdoor Recreation, chaired by Lieutenant Governor Kate Marshall.

I am currently working closely with the Nevada Division of State Parks to revise the Nevada Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) [page 3]. This important effort guides the focus and investment of federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars in Nevada, which are helpful and increasing in our state this year and in subsequent years with the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020. The early work of NDOR has focused on developing substantive, meaningful, and productive partnerships and collaborations with state agencies such as the Governor's Office of Economic Development and Travel Nevada; federal agencies such as the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service; the Bureau of Land Management in Nevada; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development; and numerous communities and private sector organizations, both for profit and nonprofit.

The Division is contributing to efforts to grow and diversify Nevada's overall economy by focusing on the communities that are the gateways to Nevada's most beloved recreational opportunities. This work helps to develop the portion of the state's economy attributed to



outdoor recreation, which in 2019 represented \$5.5 billion of economic impact, 3.1 percent of the state's gross domestic product, and nearly 60,000 jobs, according the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The Governor's recommended budget for NDOR for the 2021-2023 biennium is \$1.06 million, all of which is State General Fund [page 4]. The vast majority of this is tied to the Division's three full-time employees, as illustrated in the table. There is one enhancement (E) in the Governor's recommended budget, decision unit E-900, that transfers the Nevada Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program (OERGP) from the Division of State Parks to the Division of Outdoor Recreation. The mission and purpose of the OERGP is closely aligned with the mission and goals of NDOR, but OERGP was created by legislation separate from the legislation that created NDOR in the 2019 session. Moving the OERGP to NDOR improves efficiencies and better aligns missions, purposes, and goals of divisions and programs within the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

A key challenge for NDOR is driven by the scope of the Division's mission and authority—the capacity for a small agency with extremely limited resources to accomplish an important mission in a state as large and geographically diverse as Nevada [page 5]. Special opportunities exist to work with state and local agencies to advance the many well-documented benefits of outdoor recreation for underserved populations, like those we have in Nevada.

This concludes my presentation. Thank you for the opportunity to present a summary of the Division of Outdoor Recreation and our budget for the upcoming biennium. I am very happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittee may have.

**Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:**

Thank you for the presentation. I can hear the excitement in your voice about your position and this first year. I have a question about the transfer in decision unit E-900. What are the anticipated benefits of transferring OERGP to NDOR? I know you spoke about it briefly in your presentation, but could you elaborate a bit more on that?

**Colin Robertson:**

Thanks for your comment. I have one of the very best jobs in state government, and I am very happy to have it. The OERGP is a tremendous idea and a wonderful program. I anticipate that some of the work I am doing on the outdoor economic front for the State of Nevada will help to provide introductions to organizations with philanthropic mindsets to help increase funds that may be available for the mission-driven purpose of the OERGP. That was evidenced this year, not through the grant program specifically, but by work that I did with a private philanthropic donor to provide a grant to Get Outdoors Nevada during the height of the pandemic in Las Vegas, and to provide a small grant for the purposes of introducing underserved children in Clark County to outdoor education and recreation opportunities in the form of a "camp in a box" program. It was well received and could have

been expanded dramatically by increased dollars invested in it, but it was a good start. I anticipate that a similar opportunity may exist on the private side to match or amplify any state investment in the future.

**Assemblywoman Monroe-Moreno:**

I know of a few very young constituents who used the "camp in a box," so thank you for your excitement, thank you for what you are doing, and thank you for the answer.

**Chair Miller:**

Are there any additional questions from the Subcommittee members? [There were none.] Thank you for that, Administrator Robertson. That will conclude our questions on this budget, and we can move on to our last agenda item, public comment. [Public comment protocol was discussed.]

**Gerri North, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:**

Good morning, Chair Miller and members of the Committee. My name is Gerri North. I am a resident of Assembly District 12 and Senate District 21. I have been retired from the Clark County School District since 2008 as a full-time teacher and have been a guest teacher from 2010 to 2020. I am a member of the Nevada State Education Association-Retired (NSEA-Retired) and the Clark Retired Educators Association. I know how rising health care costs are a continuous worry for many Americans. Some Nevada educators, both teachers and support professionals, who are eligible to retire continue to work because they have no access to Medicare, having never paid into Social Security. Many have come to the conclusion that they will die on the job because working is the only way they can qualify and afford insurance. Workers who dedicate three or four decades to the state deserve better. Please keep in mind that active and retired state workers need access to affordable health care when they retire. Members of NSEA-Retired appreciate anything you can do to help contain the costs of health care and medicine. We ask you to consider undertaking a study to identify the status of state workers who do not qualify for Medicare, and steps that could be taken to ensure that all workers have access to affordable health care and medicine in their golden years. Thank you for your time and all the efforts you all put into making Nevada a great place to live, work, play, and retire [[Exhibit G](#)].

**Kyle Davis, representing the Nevada Conservation League:**

The Nevada Conservation League would like to express our strong support for the programs outlined by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources today. Our state parks are a valuable way for Nevadans to connect with the outdoors and a mechanism for protecting our natural resources, helping us meet the goal of conserving 30 percent of our state land and water by 2030. Creation of the Division of Outdoor Recreation was a priority of our organization in 2019, and we are excited by the steps the Division has been able to take over the last biennium despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic. As you have heard, the outdoors provide a solace for Nevadans during these challenging times, and proper investment by the state is important to keep these opportunities available for our residents.

Finally, we would like to express our support for the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program and the Conservation Bond Program as authorized by Assembly Bill 84 of the 80th Session. We know that the details of this program were covered in the Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) budget a few weeks ago. The program is largely administered through the Division of State Lands. It is important to understand that these bonds are the primary source of funding for the state for proactive, on the ground conservation. Reauthorizing this program was a top priority of our organization in 2019, and we support the implementation of the program as outlined. We also would ask for the Subcommittee to consider providing the funding for the program manager position that is currently slated to be held open until 2023. This position is crucial to many of the grant categories and opportunities for conservation work. Thank you for your consideration and time today.

**Chair Miller:**

That concludes our agenda items for the day. I will adjourn this meeting [at 9:47 a.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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Adam Cates  
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

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Assemblywoman Brittney Miller, Chair

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

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Senator Moises Denis, Chair

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

## **EXHIBITS**

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

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

[Exhibit C](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles Program Budget Presentation," dated March 26, 2021, and presented by Nikhil Narkhede, Program Manager, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

[Exhibit D](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Division of State Parks Budget Presentation," dated March 26, 2021, and presented by Robert Mergell, Administrator, Division of State Parks, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

[Exhibit E](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Division of State Lands Budget Presentation," dated March 26, 2021, and presented by Charles Donohue, Administrator, and Ellery Stahler, Deputy Administrator, Division of State Lands, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

[Exhibit F](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Division of Outdoor Recreation Budget Overview," dated March 26, 2021, and presented by Colin Robertson, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

[Exhibit G](#) is a statement presented by Gerri North, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada, regarding affordable health care for retired state workers.