MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Eighty-third Session
February 11, 2025

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources was called to order by Chair Michelee Cruz-Crawford at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 11, 2025, in Room 2144 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 5 of the Nevada Legislature Hearing Rooms, 7120 Amigo Street, Las Vegas, Nevada. Exhibit A is the agenda. Exhibit B is the attendance roster. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Michelee Cruz-Crawford, Chair
Senator Melanie Scheible, Vice Chair
Senator Julie Pazina
Senator Ira Hansen
Senator John Ellison

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Assemblymember Howard Watts, Assembly District No. 15

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jennifer Ruedy, Committee Policy Analyst
Daniela Cortes-Arriola, Committee Policy Analyst
Erin Sturdivant, Committee Counsel
Donna Crawford Kennedy, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

James A. Settelmeyer, Director, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Denise Beronio, Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Kendal Scott, Outdoor Education Lead, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Tom Clark, Nevada Outdoor Business Coalition

Vince Guthreau, Executive Director, Nevada Association of Counties
Olivia Tanager, Chapter Director, Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter
Trystin St. Denis, Policy and Advocacy Associate, Nevada Conservation League
Mary Pierczynski, Nevada Association of School Superintendents
Staci Emm, University of Nevada, Reno Extension
Eric Jeng, Executive Director, One APIA Nevada
Taylor Avery, Vegas Chamber
Amber Falgout, Communications Director, Battle Born Progress
Mandi Elliott, Executive Director, Outdoor Business Administration
Chris Perkins, Coordinator, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
Brooke Clayton, Development Coordinator, Tahoe Rim Trail Association
Hannah Morgan, Climate Action Nevada
Brittney Pragalis
J.J. Goicoechea, Director, State Department of Agriculture
Doug Busselman, Executive Vice President, Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
Peter Saba, Nevada Restaurant Association
Nick Schneider, Director of Government Affairs, Vegas Chamber
Rebecca Goff, Nevada State Director, The Humane Society of the United States
Misty Grimmer, Nevada Resort Association
Zoe Houghton, Energy and Convenience Association of Nevada
Brian Wachter, Retail Association of Nevada

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
We will open this hearing with a presentation (Exhibit C) from the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

JAMES A. SETTELMEYER (Director, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):
We have a total of eight divisions at the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Division (NDCNR) and four stand-alone programs We have approximately 822 employees who administer 37 grant and loan programs. Plus, we have some employees that are half-time or three-quarters time within the State Historic Preservation Office. We also have 15 statutory boards and commissions and 59 different duty locations across Nevada ranging from Las Vegas to Eureka to Winnemucca, all throughout the State. We're proud of that and all the areas we represent.

The key focus areas for us are wildfires, natural resource management, protecting Nevada's water resources within the Division of Water Resources,

and sustainable land use. It is our overall opinion that we should do everything possible to preserve the natural resources of Nevada for the citizens of the State, those who visit, and for the industries within our State, to use as a renewable resource.

Our largest division by far and away is the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP). They deal with mining permitting, ensuring clean water systems, air quality, and clean lakes.

Since 2023, we have provided over $1 billion in sustainable water infrastructure through the State Revolving Fund and other federal government programs to the State. We recently started the 2024 Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force which works on the Nevada Cyanobacterial Harmful Algal Bloom Strategic Response Plan. We've seen some of those occur in the last couple of years. We've had hot conditions creating harmful algae blooms at Washoe Lake and other areas. We make sure information is available to the public so they can recognize and see what can be done, and more importantly, see what areas they should avoid based upon the harmful algae blooms. The mission is "To preserve and enhance the environment of the State to protect public health, sustain healthy ecosystems, and contribute to a vibrant economy."

Next is the Nevada Division of Forestry. They have recently been converting the conservation camp crews to fire fuel crews. We've hired 42 full-time crew supervisors, rather than seasonal, to deal with wildfire issues. Therefore, we are getting away from the conservation camp system due to the declining population of the prisons. They protect and restore over 5,600 acres per year. Nevada had over 600 wildfires last year.

The Nevada Division of Natural Heritage manages data on plants, animals and ecosystems to inform conservation and land-use planning in the State. They also do the Nevada Wetland Rapid Assessment of over 390 native species and tracked at least 650 at-risk species in the State. On September 23, 2024, the Nevada Division of Natural Heritage started a new botany program carrying over $600,000 in grants to update and maintain over 100 critical plants in the State.

The Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation put forth 57 projects totaling approximately $1.1 million that was distributed among all the State counties. They had requested $4.2 million for 163 projects, so they had to do a yeoman's job of figuring out priorities and deciding which ones were more worthwhile to

pursue. They also have the Nevada Trail Finder which displays over 200 verified trails across the State of Nevada, accounting for over 5,000 miles of nonmotorized, and 50,000 miles of motorized trails plus 5,000 different points of interest. Their mission is to support and promote responsible outdoor recreation and its contributions to Nevada's economy and quality of life.

The Nevada Division of State Lands manages public lands real estate transactions for State agencies. Beyond the information in Exhibit C, in 2024 the Division invested $225 million in property acquisitions for the State. Their job is to serve as the State of Nevada's real estate agent in acquiring those assets, such as the new legislative building in Las Vegas.

In the Ely area, we found a piece of property that had a threatened and endangered plant, the Monte Neva Paintbrush. Through the Division of State Lands, we were able to preserve that property thus ensuring that the species does not go extinct. So, to me, that is one of the things that a lot of people do not think about State Lands doing; but they work for the conservation program to do that very thing. The Nevada Division of State Lands also added 950,000 square feet of State property for rental purposes or for the different agencies, which is pretty substantial.

The Nevada Division of State Parks manages 27 state parks across Nevada. The director, Bob McGill, would love to have 30 parks by the time he has been here 30 years. That's his goal and objective, and if you can try to help him out with that within his last years, he'd be grateful to somehow accomplish it.

The Nevada Division of State Parks was given the responsibility of the 270 state historical markers across Nevada, and they are doing an excellent job of bringing those back and making sure that they are preserved. Some of them have gone missing over time. I did an inventory by driving across the State and looking at all 270 markers and the 27 state parks. I encourage anyone who has not done that to do so. It's a fascinating experience.

I have nowhere near the knowledge of Nevada history that Senator Hansen has, but there's an app called OuterSpatial. I encourage you to download it. It has all 27 state parks. It also has a challenge where you go to the park and, instead of getting a physical stamp, get a digital stamp and complete your passport that way. Sadly, our state parks stamps are very popular; they seem to disappear at nighttime. So, the digital form is an effective way to make sure that they do not

walk away at night quite as much as they once did. People are very passionate about trying to complete those passport challenges. We are proud of the OuterSpatial app. It also has the coordinates, so that even if your phones are off, you can find your way out of a state park, especially in Southern Nevada.

Next is the Nevada Division of Water Resources. As we know, we have the Nevada Water Initiative, whose goal is to play a foundational role in understanding groundwater consumptive use, water budgets, and water availability to ensure adequate water supplies and management for municipal, agricultural, and industrial uses and for future public health and the economic prosperity of the State. Our goal within this is to make sure that all the information is available to everyone in a digital format. If, in middle of the night you needed to look up a map pertaining to a river, they are all there.

We had a situation in Humboldt County where there was a flood. Unfortunately, all the maps were stored in the basement of the courthouse. Luckily, the Division of Water Resources engineer's office came in on their day off to rescue all those maps and have them digitized to preserve them. These documents are not only historical, but they are also legal. Without them, there can be questions about who has the water rights to any specific property. Therefore, to me, it is important that we continue the digitization process within the Division.

The last division I want to talk about is the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. In September 2024, the Commission for Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation distributed $2.85 million for 25 historic buildings in Nevada. What occurs in these situations is that people who have private property that is historic can apply for a grant to help restore those buildings to their former glory. However, with that comes a cost, meaning they must keep areas open to the public at various times of the year. If public resources are being used, they need to have them open to the public. If they do not want to take the money, they do not need to have it open to the public. There's a coffee shop in Eureka and what they've done there is beautiful—being able to get back the 12-foot ceilings and things of that nature.

The division has four standalone programs that cover eight different divisions as detailed in Exhibit C. Since 2022, Conserve Nevada has preserved 19,856 acres. In Las Vegas, there was $25 million for the Boulder Train Museum, which is still being finished. We also have an $8 million budget for Valley of Fire State

Park combined with a $7 million grant from the Helmsley Charitable Trust which is trying to make sure we get our limited resources stretched as far as possible.

The Nevada Off-Highway Vehicles [Grant] Program is now under the Division of Outdoor Recreation. In the future, it probably will not be a completely stand-alone program. They do some great things, and we are trying to work with them. It's important to me that they look at the program and at the trails and close trails on occasion, realizing those trails are not a benefit in a particular situation and might even be harming the environment. They do an assessment of trails to figure out how to improve or sometimes close them.

We have the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program to help protect Nevada's habitat to benefit the greater sage-grouse, native plants and animal species, as well as administer Nevada's innovative conservation credit program. That program allows businesses to continue to do things to the landscape to increase habitat for sage grouse in key critical habitat areas. It means that the sage grouse ecosystem is preserved, thus helping to ensure the sage grouse is not listed as endangered.

Finally, the Conservation Districts Program consists of 28 conservation districts across Nevada. The program supports and encourages community-based efforts to conserve natural resources and ecosystems. They do great work across the State for a very nominal amount of money. We give them about $5,000 per conservation district, which is the same amount of money we have given them since the year 2000. This year, we are seeking to give them a whole whopping $500 more. I know that is a $14,000 fiscal note. Hopefully, we can get that through. That being said, I stand for questions. I tried to keep this very high level and brief realizing that your time is short, and that was before I knew you had a "small egg bill" today.

SENATOR PAZINA:
You mentioned we currently have 27 state parks across Nevada and the goal was 30 by retirement. So how many years is he at right now?

MR. SETTELMEYER:
Mr. McGill only has about 2 1/2 years left before retirement, so we are in a rush. We have discussed the Monte Neva Paintbrush property in Ely. Maybe somebody would try to restore it to its former glory. It used to be like Wally's Hot Springs. It used to be a hot spring that movie stars visited. They came out

to Ely, Nevada, to ride horses and go on trails and things of that nature. Who knows what the future holds?

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I think, Mr. Settlemeyer, it depends on how you "crack the egg"—either having you here drew a bigger audience, or you are upstaged. My question is with the funding for the organization, how much funding do you get from the State and federal?

MR. SETTELMEYER:
It depends on which division you are looking at. But if you look at it overall, we are about 25 percent General Fund. A lot of it is more federal funds, especially when you look at the NDEP which is more based off fees and the federal government programs that exist.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Will you keep us up to date if any of the federal funding is at risk so that we can track that?

MR. SETTELMEYER:
We will do our best.

SENATOR ELLISON:
We get a lot of snow in the mountains, but we are getting nothing in the valleys. I wanted to talk to you about fires and if you are setting up anything big for this coming year, as dry as it is. I know our ranchers are the first line of attack, and I am hoping that precautions are still in there. Are we giving ranchers what they need to get out there and start seeing that they can get these fires down before they spread?

MR. SETTELMEYER:
The NDCNR is continuing, through the Division of Forestry and other programs, to try to affect the landscapes through the Shared Stewardship Program, which Governor Lombardo was kind enough to put in the budget, giving us more access to federal funds. We, as a State, have not been contributing to the program and several times the federal government's been asking why they give us money. They say, "You're not even throwing any of your own money at this." The program's goals and objectives are to go out on those landscapes and try to reduce the fire problems. We have the Humboldt Toiyabe area, as well as

all the eastern range within the Elko area—trying to reduce the fire risks going forward. And that is something we continue to do. We have converted those conservation camp crews. We now have full crews in Ely, Humboldt, Carlin and Washoe Valley that are again full-time. It is fascinating to see the increase in production from full-time crews versus inmate crews. They seem to be more motivated and are getting far more resource protection done on the ground.

If you wish, we can follow up offline. I realize you have a busy day, and I would be more than willing to do that.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
We will open the hearing on Senate Bill (S.B.) 21.

SENATE BILL 21: Revises provisions relating to outdoor recreation. (BDR 35-266)

DENISE BERONIO (Administrator, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):
Today I am here to present S.B. 21. With me today is Deputy Administrator Elizabeth Johnson. I have submitted the presentation of S.B. 21 (Exhibit D) in writing.

SENATOR PAZINA:
I was fortunate to serve on the advisory committee over the interim on outdoor recreation, and I think all this compliments the Transit-to-Trails Taskforce that came out of the Interim Natural Resources Committee.

MS. BERONIO:
I agree.

SENATOR SCHEIBLE:
I just want to confirm my understanding of section 2. In addition to expanding the eligibility for infrastructure projects, not just programing, we're also expanding the availability of grants for learning and health and wellness in general. We're not limiting the grants to schools or programs focused on school children.

MS. BERONIO:
Yes, we are expanding the grant program for a second bucket of funding opportunities beyond just K-12 education for the public.

SENATOR ELLISON:
It says there is no fiscal note and you will have grants in private funding, so will you not be asking for State funding for this project?

MS. BERONIO:
Yes, that's correct. We're hoping for funding opportunities through other resources such as federal funding. There is, I believe, an Assembly bill that is asking for funding for the Nevada Outdoor Education and Recreation (NOER) Grant Program.

SENATOR ELLISON:
It looks like you do projects in the camps. I know Memorial camp just got rebuilt from the fire. Are you involved with the Memorial camp?

MS. BERONIO:
I visited the Lamoille Canyon Camp last year with the Governor when the U.S. Forest Service had their unveiling of their projects in that area. We are open to working with anyone across the State to promote access and recreation across any of the communities or counties, but we do not have a particular project in that area currently.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I am an elementary school principal, so one of my favorite things is to make sure that everybody that is participating understands what is being asked. From what I am tracking, and you can just do a thumbs up or thumbs down—is that the grant award of $250,000 per year?

MS. BERONIO:
Currently, there is no funding available for the grant program going forward. We did not ask for any in our general budget, but we were awarded $500,000 in the last biennium. Those funds were spent in 2023-2024.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
On your website, it shows all the programming that was awarded in 2024 and 2025. Those are programs where children are interacting—such as a garden

program, a backpacking camp, leadership camps and field trips. This bill would allow us to start building infrastructure so that they can do that. Is there anything in place where we can see how many youths were involved with the current recreation structure? Is there some tracking mechanism for building that infrastructure to see how many youth are able to gain from this?

MS. BERONIO:
I think so; I will ask Kendal Scott to come up to give you that information; she administers the NOER Grant.

KENDAL SCOTT (Outdoor Education Lead, Division of Outdoor Recreation, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources):
Fresh off the presses—I have an impact report for our first-year programming in 2024. We have some metrics as a baseline for the first year of funding and we will do the same for 2025 when those projects wrap up. We have some information we can base that from depending on how things may change.

Currently we are funding things like transportation costs to get students to places where they can participate in these types of programming. If those places are near to them, there will potentially be greater impact on numbers. We would not be spending as much money on transportation. I do think there are some metrics in place to do that.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Would it be accessible to students outside of the program, to the general public as well?

MS. BERONIO:
It would not be strictly for education purposes. The only example I can think of that might be considered outdoor recreation is if somebody had an indoor climbing wall or something like that inside a school that maybe would not be as accessible to the public. We foresee more opportunities such as green school yards, teaching kids how to build trails and improving workforce opportunities for future outdoor recreation workforce. There are a lot of different opportunities to create small infrastructure pieces across the State that would benefit both pupils and the public.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I work with a youth inner city sports camp, and we get to provide all the sports training, but if they do not have the basketball court to play the sport on, it is a moot point.

Next, we will hear testimony in support of S.B. 21.

TOM CLARK (Nevada Outdoor Business Coalition):
We are the lead program collaborating with people in sports. Mr. Kyle Davis is in the crowd, and I can't let him get away with not getting credit for creating the Committee for Outdoor Recreation. And I am happy to report that under Administrator Beronio and her team, this Division is acting exactly the way they are supposed to. They are getting kids outside and are putting together the grants. Those programs are working to get both urban and rural kids to understand what going outside really is all about. It's been a fantastic evolution watching this Division grow. I think what you see in S.B. 21 is exactly the next step in that evolution. I have had many conversations with the administrator about this because we wanted to make sure from the Nevada Outdoor Business Coalition's (NOBC) perspective that now if new grant dollars come in, they were only going to go to infrastructure-type projects. I am comfortable knowing that the education programming is going to be the priority. But if there are opportunities for infrastructure-style projects, they can't even entertain those types of programs if this language is not in statute.

I will give you an example from the NOBC's perspective. We have some of the major retailers, ski resorts and others—Patagonia and REI—who are part of our coalition. If they wanted to put forward a million dollars to support infrastructure projects in the State, they could use the grant program to make that happen. So, there is a process with this Division that can make those programs succeed.

There was some talk about funding for the next cycle. I can tell you that the NOBC will be working diligently with others and the money committees to see that grant dollars flow in. Then the Division has the opportunity to not just fund those education programs that we know work, but also, if there are infrastructure projects, that they can also work on those.

VINCE GUTHREAU (Executive Director, Nevada Association of Counties):
We represent the collective county interests of all 17 counties of our membership. We are in support of S.B. 21. We support the expanded partnership and funding flexibility as we encourage uses and create experiences in Nevada's outdoor education programs.

OLIVIA TANAGER (Chapter Director, Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter):
We're the largest grassroots environmental organization in Nevada and represent over 40,000 members and supporters statewide. We're really excited about this legislation and happy to testify in support.

My organization has two programs called Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO). One is based in Reno and one in Las Vegas. The ICO programs seek to get underserved youth outside—kids who might not otherwise have access to green spaces. They have been really excited about the possibility of opening funding for infrastructure associated with recreation and with getting kids outside.

There are a lot of gaps still needed to be filled to get kids outside. We have the discussion on Transit to Trail that my organization is excited about. There are a lot of kids who have never been to Red Rock who live in Las Vegas or kids who have not been to Tahoe who live in Reno. If we can close those equity gaps that exist in getting kids outside, it certainly helps in building up the new generation of environmental advocates and helps our kids' mental health. We are excited to support this bill.

TRYSTIN ST. DENIS, (Policy and Advocacy Associate, Nevada Conservation League):
I am here in support of S.B. 21. Outdoor learning infrastructure, such as living school yards, offers a space for students to foster a connection to nature. Providing outdoor opportunities for youth has been linked to improved physical health, problem-solving skills, increased academic performance and environmental awareness.

While we are supportive of the bill, we want to ensure that education and recreation programs are being prioritized over infrastructure projects. The NOER grant program has been incredibly successful in its first two years, and it has been moving to hear how this program is benefiting kids across our State. We look forward to seeing the program grow and flourish and we will continue to advocate for ongoing funding.

MARY PIERCZYNSKI (Nevada Association of School Superintendents):
We like this bill. We like what this can do for kids in this program, so we are in support.

STACI EMM (University of Nevada, Reno Extension):
I am an extension professor with the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). I direct statewide agriculture programs and Nevada tribal programs. We're here today to support this bill. As you know the extension service is in all 17 counties. We identify needs in those counties and then we provide the educational programs. We work with several collaborators and partners, including the 4-H camp at Lake Tahoe, and the new 4-H camp at Alamo. We also have day camps that we hold in different counties. This funding will be critical to our educational foundation for getting kids outside.

I have spent 25 years as an extension professional trying to increase physical activity with youth and the best way to increase it is using our outdoors. Most of our tribal leaders are here at the Legislature today, in honor of [Nevada] Tribes [Legislative] Day. In directing Nevada tribal programs, this grant program has impacted us directly. The UNR extension was able to access funds for outdoor education for our tribal students. We were able to put youth on the ground on the Walker River Indian Reservation within Weber Reservoir and on the Walker River. In addition, the same youth were able to attend the 4-H camp at Lake Tahoe and get a foundation, prepping them for college in STEM-type careers. We can't think of a better way to expand and consolidate this program. I think having that infrastructure component of this grant program is going to be critical as we try to build our infrastructure across the State.

ERIC JENG (Executive Director, One APIA Nevada):
The rise of digital fragmentation and the dominance of social media cause isolation in our community, especially our youth, who are becoming more disconnected. Research, including our own work in the community, has shown how the loss of shared spaces and in-person interaction contribute to a lot of the issues we are facing. Outdoor recreation is one of the simplest and most effective solutions in a lot of the research we're seeing. Our nonprofit already brought community members to outdoor parks and trails, both in Southern Nevada and here in Northern Nevada.

When our youth spend more time in nature, they develop stronger attention spans, deeper social connections and greater resilience. Expanding access to

outdoor recreation and education through S.B. 21 is an investment in our collective well-being. And to finish in the Gen-Z colloquial: Let our kids touch grass, let them know the sage and the pine, see the spotted fawn and doe right here in the heart of the golden west.

TAYLOR AVERY (Vegas Chamber):
The Vegas Chamber is in support of S.B. 21. Expanding the field of outdoor recreation-related organizations and programs eligible for grants will support small businesses, help Nevada's growing outdoor tourism industry and spur economic development. The bill will also support efforts to increase student achievement, an objective not just important for the future of Nevada's children, but for the betterment of Nevada's future workforce and leaders.

Programs supported by these grants will expose students, especially underserved youth, to topics they may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. Through this bill, organizations that support enhancing custodianship of cultural and natural resources will be eligible for grants—ensuring our State's beautiful outdoor spaces will be available for all to enjoy for generations to come.

AMBER FALGOUT (Communications Director, Battle Born Progress):
As a mother of three and a native Nevadan who grew up enjoying our public lands, I know how vital outdoor spaces are for our children and our family's well-being. We strongly support S.B. 21 as a critical investment in Nevada's future.

Too many families lack access to outdoor opportunities. The Nevada Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program has helped bridge this gap, providing underserved communities with meaningful outdoor experiences. Expanding it to include recreation infrastructure will ensure even more Nevadans can connect with nature.

Outdoor education is not a luxury, it is essential. It improves health, boosts academic performance and builds problem-solving skills. This is not a partisan issue. All of Nevada's children deserve the chance to learn and grow outside. We urge the committee to prioritize education and recreation programs over infrastructure projects. Let's ensure kids get hands-on experiences in nature. Please support S.B. 21 and invest in Nevada's future.

MANDI ELLIOTT (Executive Director, Outdoor Business Administration):
We are in support of this section of the bill that allows the Division of State Parks to appoint a designee to the advisory board on outdoor recreation. We also support the sections of the bill that allow the Division to consider infrastructure projects from grant funds in the future. We maintain that the purpose of the grant this Division administers is to support outdoor recreation projects with educational programming and keeping those a priority. However, the administrator should have the ability to consider small infrastructure projects. We stand in support with the other comments made today.

CHRIS PERKINS (Coordinator, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable):
We represent nearly 110,000 businesses across the $1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy. These are businesses from hiking, biking, skiing and climbing to hunting and fishing, boating, motorized RV, camping, horseback riding and hospitality—you name it. I am here today to speak in support of S.B. 21 because, suffice to say, the impact of outdoor recreation in Nevada is huge. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2023 outdoor recreation generated $8.1 billion for Nevada. That's 3.3 percent of GDP representing about 60,000 jobs and growing 13 percent year over year. Nevada's outdoor recreation assets are a major component of its competitiveness. Nevada is fortunate to have the leadership of the Division of Outdoor Recreation and Administrator Denise Beronio and her outstanding team help guide its outdoor recreation priorities.

In our role, we have a great vantage point on the strategies that states are utilizing to grow their outdoor recreation economies, which is why we think this bill is so important. Nevada's neighboring western states, like Colorado, New Mexico and Utah have established dedicated outdoor recreation infrastructure programs like the one this bill would create. Just today, New Mexico announced another round of its recreation grant program, estimating the creation of an additional 300 jobs for the state with its infrastructure investments. In Utah, a 2021 survey of tech workers revealed that outdoor recreation was the number one reason people moved to the Utah, even outranking family.

At present, the NOER grant has been hugely successful. It has seen major demand with $2.6 million in asks across projects over two years. It has distributed projects in all 17 counties. Last year, it helped nearly 11,000 kids spend over 24,000 hours outdoors and supported 54 jobs. By expanding eligibility for this program and adding new categories for outdoor recreation

infrastructure and education funding, this bill provides a great opportunity to unlock Nevada's potential for consistent growth and workforce development. This is not just for the outdoor recreation economy, but also to invest in the assets that make Nevada an attractive place to live, work and visit. The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable is happy to lend our support for S.B. 21. I have also submitted a letter of support (Exhibit E).

BROOKE CLAYTON (Development Coordinator, Tahoe Rim Trail Association):
The Tahoe Rim Trail Association (TRTA) has been fortunate to receive funding from the NOER grant program and it's a pleasure to testify in support S.B. 21. Funding from NOER has helped the TRTA deliver impactful outdoor experiences for Northern Nevada use, particularly for those who face barriers to outdoor access and may not otherwise have this opportunity. One camper from our most recent summer of 2024 wrote in a survey, "I cannot imagine my life without this experience."

Expanding the program would not only protect opportunities for those who use the county camp, but it would also ensure that outdoor recreation as a whole can remain sustainable and accessible in the face of a growing body of recreators. Our youth camps inspire the next generation of stewards and outdoor leaders, and they are going to have a challenge on their hands. How do we connect people with nature while minimizing human impacts on the landscape? The TRTA sees an estimated 700,000 annual users and it takes parking, bathrooms, signage, online resources, print materials, education, adaptive trails and a whole lot of building and maintenance to keep up with this swell of recreation, which is only growing since the COVID-19 pandemic. Expanding the NOER grant program would continue to connect youth with the outdoors while also helping meet the overarching need for sustainable recreation infrastructure and practices. The TRTA is in full support of S.B. 21.

HANNAH MORGAN (Climate Action Nevada):
We're a local nonprofit that focuses on ways that we can protect our environment through both everyday choices and key legislation that serves to keep communities clean, breathing clean air and having healthy lives through clean water access.

I am here to express my strong support for S.B. 21 as part of the infrastructure that ensures our communities have thriving outdoor environments to engage with. Outdoor recreation is a cornerstone of Nevada's identity contributing

significantly to our economy, health and quality of life. Senate Bill 21 ensures a more diverse and representative body that can address the evolving needs of our communities here in Las Vegas. Furthermore, enhancing the NOER Grant Program will provide greater opportunities for our youth to engage with and appreciate Nevada's natural landscapes.

These initiatives not only promote environmental stewardship for these youth, but also stimulate economic growth through increased tourism and job creation, which we need here desperately. I urge the committee to support this bill as it represents a vital investment in the future of our State's outdoor heritage.

BRITTNEY PRAGALIS:
I strongly support S.B. 21 because all children in Nevada deserve access to the great outdoors. Expanding outdoor recreation and education ensures that every child, regardless of background, has opportunities to explore, learn and benefit from nature. I urge the Senate Committee on Natural Resources to support this bill and help outdoor spaces be more accessible, equitable and beneficial for Nevada's youth.

CHAIR CRUZ CRAWFORD:
We have a letter of support of S.B. 21 from the Native Voters Alliance Nevada (Exhibit F). Hearing no opposition or neutral testimony, I close the hearing on S.B. 21 and open the hearing on Assembly Bill (A.B.) 171.

ASSEMBLY BILL 171 (1st Reprint): Revises provisions relating to the State Quarantine Officer. (BDR 51-985)

ASSEMBLYMEMBER HOWARD WATTS (Assembly District No. 15):
I think everyone has seen the issues that we are facing with eggs and the cost of groceries these days. Eggs, I think, particularly stand out. You can go to the grocery store and, depending on where and when you go, you might see that the shelves are empty, or you might see that the supply is very low. While the price can vary, one thing that is certain is that it is higher than it used to be and, in some cases, dramatically higher.

The reason for this is due to avian influenza. It is an outbreak that has gone across the country and has killed tens of millions of egg-laying chickens. That has really put a crunch on the supply of eggs across the entire country. Director Goicoechea will talk more about the scope of that issue.

In 2021, the Legislature passed A.B. No. 399 of the 81st Session with bipartisan support. It established cage-free standards for our State. No eggs can be sold in our State unless they meet certain humane treatment standards. That is part of a regional and even national move toward cage-free standards. Already more than 40 percent of the eggs produced across the United States meet cage-free standards, and that continues to grow each year.

However, one of the things that was not foreseen at that time was a major animal disease outbreak. As a result, there was no regulatory flexibility to suspend those requirements in the event of a major supply chain disruption. This is an emergency that has dramatically impacted the supply chain across our country.

That's what A.B. 171 seeks to do. It adds additional flexibility and puts tools in the State Department of Agriculture's (NDA) toolbox to help address this issue. As a result of conversations with other stakeholders, the bill as revised, provides that—to the extent allowable under federal law—we provide maximum flexibility to the NDA to create procedures that help get more eggs on store shelves across Nevada, ultimately helping drive down the price of eggs for Nevada families.

I want to make extremely clear that one thing we will never be flexible on is our health and safety standards. We are always going to make sure that we are delivering healthy and safe food products to consumers. But this set of tools helps do everything that we can at the State level, again, to get more eggs available to customers and help drive down the cost of groceries for our families.

This is, I think, a very smart, measured targeted approach that is aimed at addressing emergency circumstances only. With that, I would like to turn it over to Director Goicoechea.

J. J. GOICOECHEA (Director, State Department of Agriculture):
I just want to start where Assemblymember Watts left off on food safety. Just this afternoon, there was a headline in a newspaper in Southern Nevada that said Nevada could suspend food safety law to help lower egg prices. Nothing is further from the truth. I want to get it on the record right now and make it clear that that is not what this bill will do. Nor is it anything that our agency would ever contemplate doing.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) share regulatory authority for egg safety, not the NDA. Nothing is changing there, regardless of the manner in which these eggs are produced and how they get to us on the market.

For some context, in December alone, table egg-layer losses due to high-path influenza were 13.6 million birds in the United States. That brought the total for 2024 to 38.4 million birds lost due to this disease. While that is a lot of birds, as Assemblymember Watts said, in the fourth quarter, 59 percent of all layers lost to high-pathogenic influenza were in states with cage-free egg laws. Those are the states that we are currently sourcing our eggs from today. And because there are only 38.7 percent of the nation's flock that is in those states, it leaves us roughly 60 percent of the egg-laying population that we can source other eggs from.

You're going to hear that it will not make a difference—it will. We know the price difference between the New York state fixed price and California's is $3 a dozen today. That's the difference. A dozen eggs in California is $3 higher than New York—again because of the cage-free standards.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER WATTS:
Section 1 gives the State Quarantine Officer, who happens to be the director of the NDA, the ability to temporarily suspend State egg regulations, as long as those are aligned with federal law. So that makes sure that all those FDA and USDA health-and-safety standards remain in place to temporarily suspend those regulations. There are several conditions that must be met. There has to be a federally declared foreign animal disease outbreak, a disease emergency or a natural disaster. In addition to that, those circumstances have to be connected to a negative impact in the national supply chain of eggs. Once those conditions are met, that suspension can go into place, and A.B. 171 outlines a range of tools.

We have discussed the cage-free laws. This will allow the State to temporarily expand sourcing of eggs to other producers. There's been a discussion of Grade B eggs, which again meet all health-and-safety standards and are often used in baking and other applications. That's another option that could be evaluated and considered. Currently, the State does not procure large numbers of eggs for any programs. But if in the future they do, they could look at

temporarily suspending that to make sure that we are getting more eggs onto the grocery shelves.

And lastly, we could look at additional options to work with our smaller producers because Nevada does not have commercial egg production itself. We bring all our eggs in from commercial producers in surrounding states, but we do have some small producers. You might even hear from some and we can look at ways to get those eggs from the farmer's market to the grocery market. There are other options potentially out there. This gives the maximum flexibility to the NDA to see what we can do to increase the supply of eggs for our consumers.

Most of the rest of the bill makes conforming changes. I do want to note that the duration of this suspension can only be for a maximum of 120 days. There can be no more than two suspensions in any calendar year. It takes about 120 days to raise up new laying hens. We are hoping that we can start to get on the rebound by then.

We want to make clear that those foundational laws make sense; they work for the State when times are normal. In times of an emergency, we want to be able to activate this flexibility. And this allows us to do that and have the option to do it again if, during the calendar year—down the road we are still battling these issues and need a little bit of that flexibility once again.

The last thing that I will note is that the bill, as amended, adds in a requirement for the Department, within 60 days of passage, to compile some information regarding price discrepancies in the egg supply chain. As you may know, when you go to one store, they might be out of eggs. You go to another store, they have some; you go to one store, it is $5 for 18 eggs; you go to another store, and it is $12 for a dozen. There are reasons for that. And we want to make sure that we get that information out to the Legislature and out to the public. The Department has graciously agreed to help compile some of that information and data and get that out to us.

SENATOR ELLISON:
"I think that reporter is all cracked up." I sent a bill to the caucus waiting for the Assembly to finally send the bill over. I said, "I could have laid an egg by then." When we started getting reports about how big this avian flu epidemic was, a lot of egg producers went in and destroyed a lot of the hens. It wasn't just the

bird flu itself, it was also having fewer hens, so the flu didn't spread every place else. Is that correct?

MR. GOICOECHEA:
That's a good question. So, this is a foreign animal disease. High-pathogenic influenza is a foreign animal disease. We have strict guidelines on how we manage that disease and those come down from the USDA. While you see that a lot of those birds were destroyed, they are in fact destroyed to keep them from dying. Once this gets into a layer house, it will approach near 100 percent morbidity and mortality in those barns. Once it is diagnosed, then that barn is depopulated so that we can start the cleaning and sanitation phase. Everything in there must be composted or discarded in a way that is no longer infectious. That barn must sit fallow, meaning empty, for a period of time, and then we can start bringing those new pullets in. And, as Assemblymember Watts said, the fastest a pullet can get there, depending on the breed, is 120 days from the time they come in until they lay their first egg.

SENATOR ELLISON:
That really gives us a good look at what we are facing. How many states did that affect as it started coming out, and how far has it affected?

MR. GOICOECHEA:
High-pathogenic avian influenza has affected all 50 states in the United States. Definitely the 48 contiguous states have had diagnoses of high-pathogenic avian influenza in domestic birds—all 48.

SENATOR PAZINA:
I was curious if there are any other states, and I would imagine there are, that have the cage-free specifications currently in statute. And if so, do you know of any other states that are doing what we are doing here right now.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER WATTS:
I do not have the most up-to-date statistics. I know it's more than ten states. I recently saw something that said 15, but I have not done the research to give you a number with absolute certainty. We will just say 10 to 15 states have some sort of cage-free law on the books. As far as if other states are considering this, yes, they are. I know there have been conversations in Colorado and other states as well.

MR. GOICOECHEA:
Yes, Arizona was just getting ready to implement this full scale. They went through the regulatory process rather than the statutory process; their director suspended the rules in the face of this outbreak. They have not implemented 100 percent yet because of this outbreak.

SENATOR SCHEIBLE:
You mentioned in your presentation that this has some reporting requirements, and I am expecting that you can point me to that because I can't find it in the bill.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER WATTS:
I will get it pulled up for you. Due to the speed with which this has moved through the process, I do not think the first reprint of the bill is even available in hard copy format right now, and that was added via an amendment. So, I will point you to that, but you are going to have to go on Nevada Electronic Legislative Information System and look at the first reprint of the bill.

One of the other things that I wanted to mention is that this does give the NDA the ability to promulgate regulations on everything related to the production and sale of eggs. And all of that has to conform with all these statutes. But again, we are talking about making sure that we have some flexibility in place for the NDA to act and to add additional clarity that the Legislature can't, and honestly shouldn't. Looking at the bill, section 9.5 is where the reporting requirement is.

SENATOR SCHEIBLE:
Is there a nexus between a foreign animal disease outbreak and the cage-free requirements that are currently in our law? Or is the nexus simply that requiring eggs to be cage-free is always going to increase the cost of eggs?

ASSEMBLYMEMBER WATTS:
Yes, there is some cost associated as producers make investments in conversion. And so there has been some price differences. But again, as you look at moving from about a decade ago, 20 percent now up to 40 percent of production, you are going to continue to see those cost efficiencies improve.

You heard from Director Goicoechea that this has affected every single state across the country. You heard that these facilities have been hit particularly

hard. From my perspective, it is more correlation than causation. No facility or operation is immune to being affected by this highly pathogenic bird flu.

MR. GOICOECHEA:
In October, November and December, the greatest death losses were, in fact, in cage-free. And, again, why? Was it just their turn? Perhaps it was and that spread west. But something that we need to keep in mind is that cage-free environments are just that; they are not as confined or as bio-secure, so we can get entry of some wildlife at times. And that is often the way this flu is introduced. I am in no way advocating that we get away from cage-free, but we need to go in with eyes wide open. If you have hens spread out more, you can see a decrease in biosecurity.

SENATOR SCHEIBLE:
Are there other provisions in law that affect the price of eggs? In a different situation, a different natural disaster, are there going to be different requirements that need to be changed or is it always going to be the cage-free requirements that are limiting our egg supply?

ASSEMBLYMEMBER WATTS:
Again, we wanted to make sure that we had all the tools available. This has evolved from conversations with the Humane Society and others. We want to make sure that if we are going to do this, we are providing flexibility for the experts at the NDA to see what the available options are. Again, we want to make sure health and safety is always number one. That is the bottom line. We are always going to work to protect that. But any regulatory flexibility we can provide, whether it is getting those smaller producers into the supply chain out of their immediate community and get those to a broader group of folks or, whether it is potentially looking at getting Grade B eggs on the shelves, which really are eggs that have minor cosmetic issues. Obviously, there's already a market for those. We are trusting the experts to look at these options and, as they do their rulemaking, they might discover some other options that are out there and then figure out what set of tools is best to use in any given circumstance. It may be the suspension of cage-free egg laws. It may be other items. It may be a combination.

MR. GOICOECHEA:
We have all our eggs in one basket here—no pun intended—that is the problem. I have been trying not to say that, but there's no other way to say it; everybody

gets it that way. We're trying to find avenues to get more eggs on the shelves. Obviously, the price will come down as the supply goes up. We have communities that rely on that protein. We need that high source of protein. Normally it is very affordable. Our job is to get that back into people's hands using whatever tools we can.

SENATOR HANSEN:
You just hit on the real question though, because there's so many poor people in Nevada who are struggling in so many ways. There's a lot of people that are struggling financially in the State and the difference between $3 per dozen and $6 per dozen based on that cage-free thing is a market-driven principle. But what you are saying about eggs being so vital for so many people is true. We talk a lot about poor people in Nevada, and this is one of the most fundamental opportunities they have to purchase one of the most valuable and inexpensive forms of protein.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
We will now hear testimony in support of A.B. 171.

MR. GOICOECHEA:
It goes without saying, but I would like to get on the record that the NDA is in fact in support of A.B. 171 as amended.

DOUG BUSSELMAN (Executive Vice President, Nevada Farm Bureau Federation):
It is important to have this bill processed so rapidly in order to get on top of the issue. We also greatly appreciate the priority that this bill is getting, and we understand that the Department of Agriculture will fulfill their responsibilities in bringing about the changes that need to be done.

PETER SABA (Nevada Restaurant Association):
We support A.B. 171 because it gives restaurants critical flexibility when egg supply disruptions drive costs to unsustainable levels. Some restaurants are paying 220 percent more for eggs because they cannot buy from the majority of the farms in the country due to current restrictions. More than 70 percent of eggs come from conventional farms, but Nevada restaurants cannot use them even when there's a shortage. This bill provides a temporary practical fix that helps restaurants secure more affordable options, stabilize costs and avoid severe disruptions. Without this flexibility, restaurants are left scrambling.

NICK SCHNEIDER (Director of Government Affairs, Vegas Chamber):
We are here in support of A.B. 171. As many of you know, we represent businesses, large and small, that employ about one in 3.5 working Nevadans. All these groups are feeling the effects of these rising prices.

Our mom-and-pop breakfast shops are feeling the effects of wage compression and on top of that, these rising egg prices shave razor-thin margins even thinner. On the other side, some of our largest members who have the ability to buy at scale and buy wholesale since the end of last year are now seeing increases of between 64 percent and 73 percent. And then, of course, for Nevada workers and their families, eggs represent a stable and affordable source of protein and access to eggs is essential for these families to be able to provide balanced meals.

I have just a little bit of data to add here. The January 3rd egg report from the USDA indicated that we saw a disproportionate impact towards cage-free eggs of about 56 percent nationwide. Beyond that, if you look at egg commodity pricing since the beginning of this year, it has increased by about 22 percent. All of this is just to say that this issue does not seem to be relenting, and we ask for your support on A.B. 171.

REBECCA GOFF (Nevada State Director, The Humane Society of the United States):
We're here today in support of A.B. 171. We understand the need to address egg shortages during this unprecedented disease outbreak while maintaining the cage-free egg law protecting animals from cruelty and Nevadans from food safety concerns. The Humane Society of the United States proposed the amendment to A.B. 171 because we believe that the Department of Agriculture should have the ability to address all factors potentially contributing to the current egg shortage.

I do want to address the question from Senator Scheible. The newest data from the USDA, which is looking at just the very first part of 2025, shows the opposite—that 71 percent of the avian flu outbreaks were in cage systems, whereas only 29 percent of the outbreaks were in the cage-free systems. That just goes to show that it is affecting all of the birds, not really limited to cage or cage-free. I just wanted to make that distinction.

MISTY GRIMMER (Nevada Resort Association):
As you might imagine, our properties buy and serve a lot of eggs. And so, we also are very much in support of A.B. 171.

ZOE HOUGHTON (Energy and Convenience Association of Nevada):
With over 1,500 convenience stores across the State which sell household necessities such as eggs, we appreciate this effort to combat rising egg prices during unforeseen circumstances such as the one we are experiencing today.

BRIAN WACHTER (Retail Association of Nevada):
First and foremost, we are thankful to Senate Majority Leader Nicole Cannizzaro, Speaker Steve Yeager, Governor Lombardo and Director Goicoechea, being able to bring this solution to a crisis because we are seeing the Legislature moving this quickly. We understand that causes a little bit of confusion, but you have our gratitude as retailers, and you are about to have gratitude from consumers.

I do want to address section 9.5 of the bill, which is the new amendment. We are a bit confused as the conversations that we had with the bill sponsor yesterday had indicated to us that the report was going to be inclusive of wholesalers and producers as well as retailers. We think the language is still broad enough that it might give the director the ability to do that. Why is that important? We're not particularly saying it is in this case, but in the last year we have seen the beef producers, sugar producers and potato producers all be subject to lawsuits on price collusion. As you know, this feeds into the ultimate price for consumers at the grocery store. We think that needs to be a holistic conversation as it is complicated how our food gets from our grocery store to our table. There's not one egg supply chain, there are dozens. Every single category of eggs is being hit. We do have a caveat in the amendment that if Grade B eggs are chosen, those already have a destination—they go into end products—so we will see a slight increase in the price of those eggs as a result of that particular action. Otherwise, this is a simple way, a little bit of a relief valve, for Nevada consumers.

CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Since there is no testimony in opposition or neutral on A.B. 171, I will entertain a motion to do pass.

SENATOR ELLISON MOVED TO DO PASS A.B. 171.

SENATOR HANSEN SECONDED THE MOTION.

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

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CHAIR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
"Winner, winner chicken dinner"!
Since there is no public comment, this meeting is adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

_____
Donna Crawford Kennedy,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

_____
Senator Michelee Cruz-Crawford, Chair

DATE_____

EXHIBIT SUMMARY				
Bill	**Exhibit Letter**	**Introduced on Minute Report Page No.**	**Witness / Entity**	**Description**
	A	1		Agenda
	B	1		Attendance Roster
	C	2	James Settelmeyer / State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources	Presentation
S.B. 21	D	8	Denise Beronio / State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation	Presentation of Bill
S.B. 21	E	16	Chris Perkins / Outdoor Recreation Roundtable	Support letter
S.B. 21	F	17	Matilda Guerrero Miller / Native Voters Alliance Nevada	Support letter