

Congressman Dean Heller

Statement for Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing on H.R. 406 and H.R. 1018

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of H.R. 409, a bill I authored to provide for the conveyance of Bureau of Land Management land Clark County, Nevada to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

The Las Vegas Motor Speedway is an important economic engine in Southern Nevada. Single races at the Speedway have traditionally brought in as much as \$200 million in economic activity in Clark County.

Though they have not been immune to this economic downturn, the economic activity the speedway brings to Clark County is more important than ever.

The purpose of this legislation is to simply provide for the conveyance of roughly 115 acres of adjoining BLM land to the Speedway for use specifically as a parking lot.

While in general I support the disposal of appropriate federal lands through the auction process, I believe the conveyance of the land in question to the Speedway at fair market value is an appropriate use of conveyance authority.

This parking lot is necessary because the draw of the Speedway creates huge backups on Interstate-15 as people wait to enter and exit the facility.

This is not merely an inconvenience to Speedway visitors, the backups hinder interstate traffic and transportation of goods, as well as local and tourism travel.

My bill will help alleviate standing traffic, which is good for air quality and congestion along the important I-15 corridor.

I am aware that the BLM has a few concerns about the legislation as it is currently written, and I look forward to working with them to address these issues prior to the bill going to markup.

One issue I do want to speak to is the BLM's concern over the sand and gravel on the parcel in question.

Given the air quality problems and priorities in Clark County, alleviating the traffic issues associated with the Speedway is the highest and best use of the land.

I urge the members of this committee to swiftly act to pass this legislation.

I also want to speak to H.R. 1018, Chairman Rahall's bill to improve the management and long-term health of wild free-roaming horses and burros, which will also be heard today.

Nevada is home to our nation's largest wild horse population, and as such, I believe the goal of my colleague's legislation is important.

Overpopulation of non-native wild horse and burros has brought destruction to our range, which has led to the disappearance of native habitat and wildlife and as well as starvation and disease for wild horse and burros.

While they serve as an iconic symbol of the American West, wild horses are grass fed, non-native species and the range does not have the necessary forage to support them, even after they have overgrazed the land and damaged native habitat and wildlife.

As many of us here can attest to, there are no easy solutions on how to best manage wild horse populations, especially given limited budgets and suitable land.

I am, however, concerned about the provision of the legislation that would prohibit helicopter roundups.

An example where helicopter gathering is an important tool is the Sheldon Wildlife Refuge in my district.

The Sheldon Wildlife Refuge in my district is one of the places where helicopter gathering is an important tool, because it is one of the few in-tact native sagebrush ecosystems.

I oppose this provision because I believe the humane treatment of horses is important.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that this is the most humane method of performing the yearly roundup. Helicopter roundups are quicker and result in less stress to the horses than the typical horseback roundup because of the particularly rugged terrain.

These roundups are important because they provide a way by which the refuge managers can preserve the humanely gather wild horses and preserve native habitat for native species.

I look forward to working with my colleagues and the federal agencies to find solutions to best manage wild horse and burro populations in ways that are truly humane.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.