

STATEMENT OF ARLAN MELENDEZ
CHAIRMAN, RENO-SPARKS INDIAN COLONY, NEVADA
SUBMITTED BEFORE THE
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
REGARDING S. 2480: NEVADA NATIVE NATIONS LAND ACT
Wednesday, July 9, 2014, 2:30 PM
628 Dirksen Senate Building

Chairman Tester, Vice Chairman Barrasso and distinguished Members of the Committee on Indian Affairs. I am pleased to submit this testimony in support of S. 2480, legislation introduced by Nevada Senators Harry Reid and Dean Heller. We are also pleased that nearly identical legislation (HR 2455), introduced in a bi-partisan fashion by Congressmen Mark Amodei (R-NV), Dina Titus (D-NV) and Don Young (R-AK) has been introduced and was unanimously reported out of the House Committee on Natural Resources a few weeks ago.

Thank you for accepting this testimony of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony (the Colony) on S. 2480 and for considering our views. My remarks herein are mostly specific to the Colony's land expansion needs. The other tribes in this bill may be submitting their own written statements for the record, and their statements should be relied upon for more specific details pertinent to their land transfer requests. However, there are common themes among all our tribes which I would like to share. In my oral testimony I will be speaking not just on behalf of the Colony but on behalf of all the tribes in this important bill. I am honored speak on behalf of the Nevada Native Nations Lands Act Tribal Coalition, consisting of the following tribes:

- Elko Band of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians
- South Fork Band of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians
- Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe
- Duck Valley Shoshone Paiute Tribe
- Summit Lake Paiute Tribe
- Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
- Reno-Sparks Indian Colony

Expansion of Our Reservations Critical to Preserve Our Futures

Our tribes' membership numbers are growing and the carrying capacity of our current lands is very limited. It is only by being able to expand and consolidate our lands for housing, preservation and other purposes that our tribes and cultural practices can continue to thrive. While each tribe in S. 2480 has specific reasons for seeking to expand the lands of our reservations we are united in our need for better management and more effective use of these lands. We are fully capable of assuming these responsibilities.

We would also ask that you examine almost any map of Indian reservations in this country and you will see that through historic quirks of fate, the majority of land bases of the tribes in Nevada, particularly when compared to the land bases of many other tribes, are so small as to border on being non-workable. There are numerous million plus acre reservations in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona and New Mexico and many more reservations that are hundreds of thousands of acres in size yet the majority of Paiute and Shoshone tribes of the Great Basin ended up with almost nothing. In many instances our existing homelands are so small they don't even show up on some state maps. For instance the Elko Band has just 193 acres. The principal so-called "downtown" Reno-Sparks Indian Colony lands constitute a mere 27 acres. These are not viable land bases. We cannot house our people; we cannot attract business or engage in economically viable agriculture.

S. 2480 would put to effective use by tribes lands that are greatly underutilized and not being adequately managed. With the exception of a small parcel owned by the Forest Service, the lands in question are presently controlled by the Bureau of Land Management so transferring title to a different agency within the Department of Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs) is not going to, for instance, affect the local tax bases. In many instances Indian tribes have been able to undertake economic activities that have benefited both reservation and off-reservation economies and helped create jobs.

Nevada Native Nations Lands Act Preserves BLM Control Over Vast Area of Nevada

BLM administers nearly 48 million acres of public land in Nevada. We would like to emphasize that even with these lands transfers, BLM lands would still comprise 67 percent of the total land base of the state of Nevada, and that does not include the large percentage of land controlled by other federal agencies. In the aggregate over 80 percent of the land in our state is owned by the federal government. The transfers would only reduce BLM's total percentage of land owned state-wide by 0.20 percent (two tenths of one percent). Yet the transfer of this tiny percentage of land from BLM to BIA to be held in trust for our tribes would be one of the most important developments for our tribes in a generation. And the positive impact will be experienced by our peoples for generations to come.

Background on Reno-Sparks Indian Colony

In the 1880's, an urban Indian settlement made up of landless Indians from the regional Washoe, Shoshone and Paiute tribes started along the Truckee River next to the City of Reno. A land base of 20 acres was purchased in 1917 by the Federal government to provide a permanent home for this urban settlement. The Colony population grew along with the City of Reno. In 1934, the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony was established as a federally recognized Tribal government under the Indian Reorganization Act. By the mid-1980's, the City of Reno had grown and eventually engulfed the undersized lands of the Colony. The land base of the Colony, near downtown Reno, is now just 27 acres of densely packed homes in the residential area as well as additional commercial property. Less than three percent of the land base is designated as park and open space. The residential area is totally built out and could not accommodate another home.

In 1986, pursuant to a bill introduced by former Representative Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV), Congress transferred three sections of land north of Reno from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the Colony to address the need for additional community housing. Currently, this area, known as the Hungry Valley community, houses approximately half the Colony's population. The Hungry Valley community is seven miles west of the Spanish Springs community and 10 miles north of the City of Reno. The Colony has spent millions of dollars in public improvements and community development. For example, we have built homes; a water and sewer system; community buildings; and constructed Eagle Canyon Road from Pyramid Lake Highway to the Hungry Valley community. We also created a tribal utility district to supply water and sanitary sewer service to residents. The water system includes production wells, water tanks and a water treatment facility. The community sewer system provides for the treatment of all wastewater. The Hungry Valley Community Center we built is the primary public facility serving residents, with a volunteer fire department, offices for Housing Department, Utility District, Head Start Program, a gym, and meeting rooms.

When Congresswoman Vucanovich got the bill passed establishing the Hungry Valley Reservation she told us that if at some point in the future we needed to supplement the Hungry Valley land, that we should make such a request of the Congress. We are now doing exactly that after extensive cooperation and coordination with key stakeholders including Washoe County and the BLM. We are very pleased to have the support of the Washoe County government for our proposed transfer.

The Need to Supplement the Land Base of the Hungry Valley Residential Community

The Hungry Valley community is surrounded by BLM public lands to the west, north, and east. Directly to the south and southeast is an active open aggregate mining pit which conducts blasting on a regular basis. Many adverse activities are routinely occurring (in some cases permitted by the BLM, in other cases in violation of BLM regulations) on the lands adjacent to our residents' homes in Hungry Valley including:

- Unlimited off highway vehicle (OHV) recreation area.
- Loud and disruptive motorcycle events.
- Illegal dumping.
- Unauthorized creation of motorcycle race tracks.
- Military practice operation with simulated explosive devices. (Hopefully an activity that won't be repeated.)

These are not activities anyone would want to see in proximity to a residential area. While we are not against off road vehicles, we are concerned with the intensity of the activities adjacent to our native community and its impact on our quality of life. A buffer is needed and will be established by this legislation.

Proposed Land Transfer from BLM to BIA

As shown on the attached map, the Colony is proposing to acquire through a Congressional transfer approximately 13,434 acres from the BLM to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to be

held in trust for the Colony in order to expand and consolidate our land base at the Hungry Valley residential community. These 13,434 acres represent a minute fraction of the almost 48 million acres of BLM lands in Nevada, lands that were once the exclusive domain of Paiute, Washoe and Shoshone tribes of Nevada.

The local BLM staff are overwhelmed and unable to enforce their own regulations and ordinances in the area around Hungry Valley. BLM has told us that they don't have enough staff to effectively monitor all of the activities in the urban interface cover adjacent to Hungry Valley. Transferring this land to the BIA's jurisdiction to be held in trust for the Colony is important for the citizens of our tribe and for the surrounding communities. The current situation is untenable. Our residents should be able to live in peace and quiet and should not have to deal with unregulated off-road race tracks carved out near their homes. We have met with a majority of the Washoe County Commissioners, including all those who represent the immediately surrounding communities and as stated above, the County has endorsed our land transfer request.

In addition to public safety concerns, there are important cultural reasons why Hungry Valley is of great significance to us. We seek to manage this land so as to ensure for future generations that the open natural landscape that provides essential spiritual and traditional cultural support for our people will continue to be accessible and be properly managed. It is the intention of our tribe to preserve and manage these scenic, cultural and natural resources. In the past, the Hungry Valley region was a traditional link between Pyramid Lake and the Truckee Meadows. Many camps and cultural resources have been identified by past archaeological studies. Many elders and residents continue to use Hungry Valley for spiritual and traditional ways. Several prominent landscape features in the Hungry Valley area are used for traditional religious practices and are a source of medicinal plants.

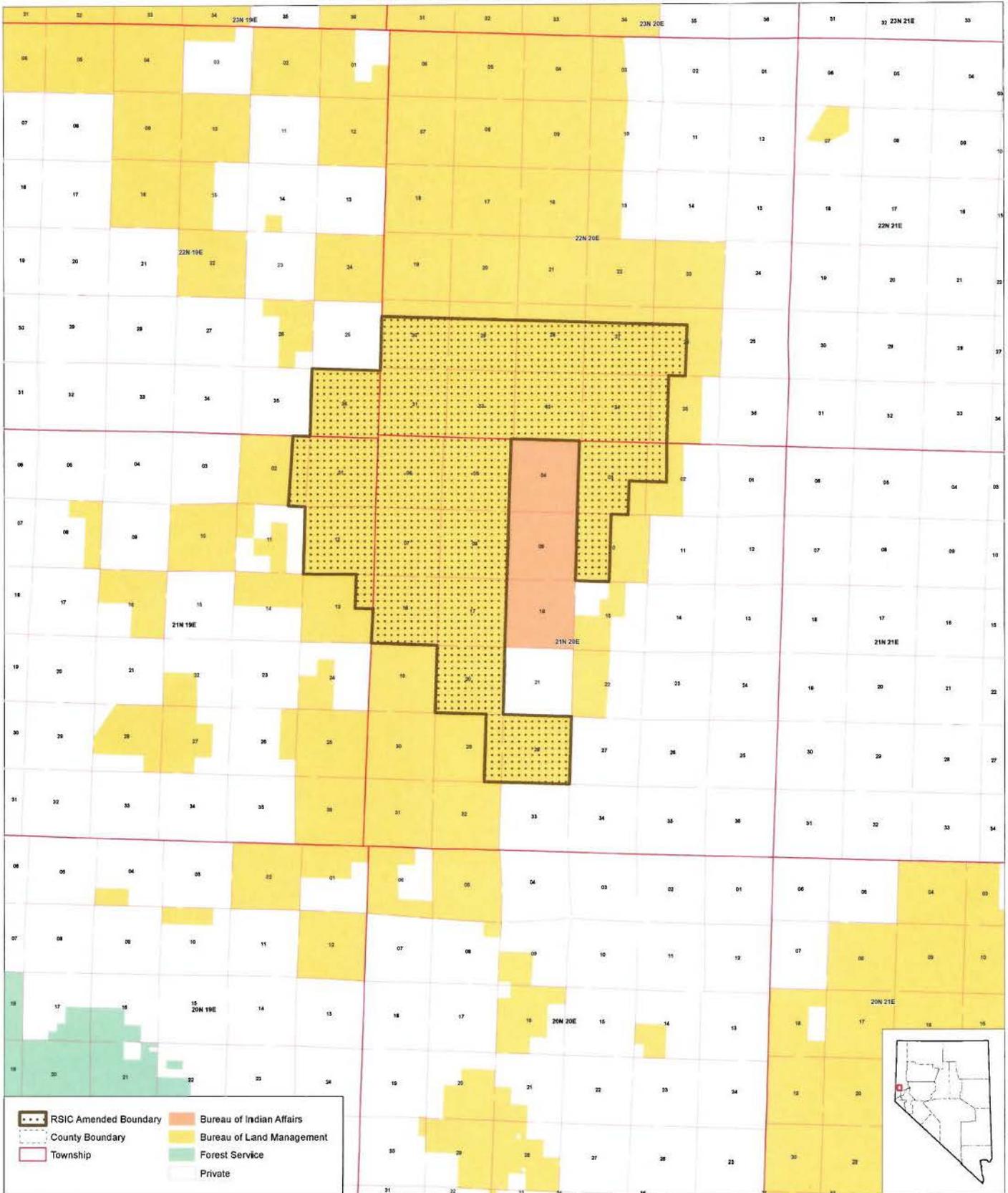
We are very proud of the many cooperative efforts we have entered into with the State of Nevada and with the governments that surround our downtown reservation as well our existing Hungry Valley lands. We assure the Congress that this spirit of good will and cooperation will continue and that all parties in the local and surrounding areas will benefit by this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I am pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Reno-Sparks Indian Colony Expansion

June 11, 2014

This map was prepared at the request of Senators Reid and Heller



0 1 2 4 Miles

1:30,000

Map is intended to be plotted at 34 X 44 inches

No Warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.