

**Testimony of
The Honorable John Ensign
United States Senator**

Thursday, April 26, 2007

**STATEMENT OF JOHN ENSIGN BEFORE THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS CONCERNING S. 462, THE
SHOSHONE-PAIUTE TRIBES OF DUCK VALLEY WATER
RIGHTS SETTLEMENT ACT**

Mr. Chairman, Senator Thomas, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this important hearing on S. 462, The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley Water Rights Settlement Act. It is my pleasure to provide written testimony in support of this measure. I also wish to thank Senator Harry Reid for his leadership on this bill and for the work of Tracy Hartzler-Toon, a staff member for this Committee

The Duck Valley Indian Reservation is the homeland of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. The reservation, established by Executive Order in 1877, encompasses approximately 290,000 acres across Nevada and Idaho, including the Owyhee River and two blue line streams. In the 1930s, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes' fishing industry was damaged, as the area salmon runs were ruined with the construction of the Bureau of Reclamation's Owyhee Irrigation Project Dam. Salmon fishing was an integral part of the Tribes' economic and cultural livelihood.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs oversaw the Duck Valley Indian Irrigation Project. The project encompassed 12,000 acres of land that became the Wild Horse Reservoir, the primary water storage facility located fifteen miles south of the Reservation. The project provided very little, if any, economic benefit for the Tribes. Finally, after years of negotiations, all parties involved have reached an agreement.

S. 462 achieves two things. First, it ratifies the Owyhee River Settlement in Nevada that was reached in 2006. Additionally, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes would receive \$60 million. This money would be allocated for the acquisition of land and water rights, and create and maintain water-related

projects. These projects will assist the Tribes economic development by producing a functional irrigation system; promoting wildlife habitat restoration; and development of fish hatcheries. This legislation provides the Shoshone-Paiute people with long-term economic security, more opportunities for prosperity, and a foundation to become more economically self-sufficient.

I applaud all the groups for coming together to reach an understanding on these difficult water rights issues. The Elko County Commission, the State of Nevada and Governor Jim Gibbons, upstream water users and the Tribes.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to pass this legislation and addressing any concerns.