

TITLE: NEVADA WILL GET EVEN SWAP FOR GROOM LAKE LAND DEAL

PUBLICATION: Las Vegas Sun

DATE: Feb. 3, 1995

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Nevada is likely to get 4,000 acres the military owns within state borders in exchange for giving up an equal amount of land near a secret base under a deal negotiated by Sen. Richard Bryan.

The Air Force wants the land to tighten security around the top-secret base 120 miles north of Las Vegas. The base, dubbed Area 51 or Groom Lake, has been used to test advanced U.S. aircraft, including U-2 spy planes and the F-117A stealth fighter.

Included in the proposed swap is Freedom Ridge, which provides an unobstructed view of the base about 12 miles away.

The equal exchange was agreed upon by Bryan, D-Nev., and Air Force Secretary Sheila Widnall last month. The agreement responds to public criticism that the military was grabbing more land and offering Nevada nothing in return.

It was reported incorrectly earlier this week that Bryan secured the Air Force's promise that the military would return Nevada land it owns for that which it bombs in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

Nellis Air Force Base wants ownership of 107,000 acres of the federally protected land that it presently uses for target bombing practice. The Desert National Wildlife Refuge consists of 1.5 million acres northwest of Las Vegas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the entire refuge, but the Air Forces activities keep it from acting as caretaker of the bombed land.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., proposed the land swap as a way to strike a balance between the need to expand and strengthen Nellis and protect threatened wildlife.

Reid is fighting to keep the proposed swap within state boundaries, just like the Groom Lake exchange. Last year, environmental groups criticized the proposal because the military could have assumed ownership of the Nevada land in exchange for giving up land in another state.

Reid originally authored legislation for the Desert Refuge land exchange. But once the Republican Party assumed control of Congress, the senator chose to pursue the swap through the Clinton administration.

[End of Article.]

Notes:

The Groom Base is actually about 90 air miles north of Las Vegas.

The 4,000 acre swap and AF's request for a 107,000 acre bombing range are technically unrelated. It is possible to support the 107,000 acre action while opposing the 4,000 acre one. (The article seems to mix the two together in a confusing manner.)

-- Glenn Campbell

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