

Nevada Land Withdrawal Meeting

Las Vegas 3/2/94

Statement by Col. Bud Bennett, Nellis Range squadron commander:

"I know that as concerned citizens you have many questions about why the Air Force wishes to have an additional 3,972.04 acres of land. I'm afraid that I can't answer many of those questions, but let me explain a few things.

"The Nellis Range Complex, or the NRC, is a very valuable resource for the military, and we consider the range complex to be a national treasure. On it, we train and we test and we learn. The NRC is unique in that it's the largest piece of real estate in the United States where withdrawn land is overlapped with restricted airspace.

"We need a safe place to practice where we are not interfering with commercial aircraft, where we are not over populated areas, where we can shoot guns and drop bombs and do other things that permit us to be the best air force in the world. We need a secure place where the bad guys cannot readily gather information about our systems, or our tactics. And that's what the Nellis Range Complex represents to us.

"Withdrawals and restrictions of access to selected geographical areas are not done capriciously. Rather, for the military these actions are taken in the interest of national security to protect the technological edge of U.S. military capabilities and enhance effective military operations and training.

"In the late 1970s, all lands used by the military had to be identified and revalidated. The Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986, with an amendment in 1988, withdrew the land currently in the Nellis Range Complex.

"Included in these limited land withdrawals are portions of the Nellis Range Complex which support critical Department of Energy and Department of Defense programs. The most recent annual security review affirmed the need for continued classification of these areas. The United States recently identified the need to withdraw the White Sides-Freedom Ridge area. This request is currently being processed by the Department of the Interior and is the subject of this hearing.

"When the Nellis Range Complex withdrawal occurred in 1988, certain higher elevations near the east side of the range were not included in the withdrawn area. The continually increasing visits by people to this area has posed a concern for public safety and the safety and security of activities on the range.

"When someone is on White Sides or other nearby areas, altitude and route changes have to be made by aircraft to avoid harming them and to prevent disclosure of operational matters. Some missions have to be delayed or canceled. This impacts the effective use of the Nellis Range Complex.

"The area proposed to be withdrawn was looked at very carefully, and in discussions with BLM we were told to keep the amount to a minimum. We carefully did so, selecting several thousand acres less than was originally roughed out....

(Shows charts and summarizes withdrawal process.)

"The Air Force has taken almost a year evaluating the matter, staffing the package, consulting with BLM and other agencies and considering other options. Land withdrawal was deemed to be the best solution....

"We're having this hearing and the previous Caliente meeting because we want to hear the concerns of our neighbors. Now, I can't discuss certain matters. I can't discuss specifically what we're doing on the Nellis Range Complex. I can

tell you that we do not intend to reuse the proposed withdrawal area except for a buffer security area.

"I can tell you that the Air Force takes the environment seriously and works with the respective state and federal agencies to ensure that we don't abuse the environment. The desert research Institute is conducting the environmental assessment of this proposed withdrawal, and as many of you know, DRI is a well-respected environmental organization affiliated with the University of Nevada and with the state. The internal draft environmental assessment has been sent to BLM and is presently in review.

"For those of you who believe we still need a strong military, I hope you understand that lives are saved by keeping tactics and training and capabilities closely held. For those who believe there should be no secrets, nothing I can say will change your views. However, I respect your right to express your views.

"Thank you very much for letting me give you a little background, and I'll very carefully listen to your comments."

----- Headers -----

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