



Senator Harry Reid  
Lloyd D. George Building, Suite 8016  
333 Las Vegas Blvd., South  
Las Vegas, NV 89101

December 3, 2010

RE: National Monument Legislation for the Upper Las Vegas Wash

Dear Senator Reid:

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, a national non-profit conservation organization with 315,000 members and on-line activists in Nevada and across the nation, I am writing to urge you to continue to support the establishment of a national monument to protect the paleontological, biological and cultural treasures of the upper Las Vegas Wash.

This area represents the last great opportunity for conservation in the Las Vegas Valley and would correct a grievous mistake made when it was designated for disposal under the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 (“Clark County Lands Act”).

There has been a very open and transparent public process among the varied interests in defining the boundaries, character and nature of the proposed monument. The Center and other environmental groups, Nellis Air Force Base, Clark County, the Cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, and others have met frequently in a process convened by the National Parks Conservation Association to engage in frank dialogue and search for common ground and interests. I am proud to be able to state that I believe we have arrived at a point of consensus and now is the time for Congress to act decisively in designating this area.

The area is tremendously rich in paleontological resources, not only from the last ice age, but from a previous ice age over 170,000 years ago. As such it is tremendously important for advancing the understanding of how ecosystems responded to periods of global warming, and is very important for informing the science regarding the current warming.

The proposed area is also home to the Threatened desert tortoise, a species whose recovery, while mandated by the Endangered Species Act (“ESA”) is in serious jeopardy. Prior to the Clark County Lands Act, this area was designated as an area to be “intensely managed” for conservation under the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan and Incidental Take Permit. The Wash is also home to rare plant and animal species such as the LeConte’s thrasher, Bendire’s thrasher, burrowing owl, Las Vegas bearpoppy, Merriam’s bearpoppy, and the Las Vegas buckwheat, a species the Center has petitioned for listing under the ESA and which was found to be warranted for listing but currently precluded due to other priority species’ needs.

The upper Las Vegas Wash serves as a vital segment for the Las Vegas Valley trail system, largely funded through Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act monies, connecting the Las Vegas Wetlands Park to BLM and National Forest lands to the north.

A monument would offer irreplaceable educational experiences for all levels of schooling, K-12 and higher education, as well as for the community at-large. It would also add to and bolster the growing eco-tourism sector of our economy. An envisioned UNLV and Nevada Research would be located adjacent to the monument and would offer the opportunity for a museum to hold the artifacts recovered, and extensive research and scientific study.

Development of the upper Las Vegas Wash would cause incompatible intrusions into the Nellis Air Force Base's flight patterns and operations. We can ill-afford any decline in Nellis' mission as it is a key non-tourism economic engine for our state's economy. Creation of a national monument would protect and secure Nellis' interests.

One concern we do have is the possible compromise of the areas values by an ill-advised transmission being advocated by Nevada that would bisect the monument. We know there are viable options for the transmission of renewable energy that do not cut through the area proposed as a national monument. We are confident that the Nevada Congressional Delegation will not inappropriately site a transmission corridor within an area that has so much economic and community-enhancing potential.

With regards to the federal agency most suited to provide the needed protection and management, we feel the National Park Service is best suited due to its organic act and mission, expertise with urban and urban-wildland situations and its established funding mechanisms.

Sincerely yours in conservation,

Rob Mrowka  
Ecologist and Nevada Conservation Advocate