

Nevada Tri RAC
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Public comment
Laura Leigh for Wild Horse Education

Members of Nevada RAC's,

Many of you know me. I have participated in RAC meetings and have organized presentations on fertility control of wild horses and burros.

For years I have worked within the law and to the extent allowed by the BLM. In 2014, I dropped significant litigation to take steps toward a collaborative process to address the multiple issues facing our state.

Since 2014, our state has seen the human climate deteriorate faster than many of our public lands. A press release might state a "quelling" of tensions as State Director John Ruhs leaves to head to his new post in DC, however, I have experienced the exact opposite.

I am not in the room today. At the last meeting held by a BLM board in Elko, I gave a presentation about volunteering and fertility control. After the presentation, as the room filled with those that only came for public comment, I was harassed. I was harassed by some of those responsible for the "increasing tension" in our Nevada. Those individuals had participated in instances where they appeared to violate multiple codes of the federal regulations and one individual had even engaged in, and was determined by the agency, to be running livestock in trespass over an extended period of time.

In order to participate as a BLM volunteer, I had to refrain from visiting the area of contention. The area of contention was one where I had actively engaged to create the largest fertility control program in the nation. I was told to "trust" BLM leadership and that the investment in time and energy in that plan would not be lost. We would move ahead to address those difficulties and that they would address the infractions and potential physical dangers. To this date, that program sits stagnant, two years later.

I know those that had engaged in those 'alleged adverse' activities, and those that supported them, protested my involvement as a volunteer for BLM. I know they protested any involvement by me in any form. One of them even boasted on social media that a deal was struck with the state office to get me out.

Instead, I worked vigilantly, as a BLM volunteer, devoting almost all of my time to creating other opportunities to move fertility control forward in other areas. For seven months I jumped through hoops that other volunteers that do fertility control never face. I did every single task requested of me and more. That was the only opportunity afforded to me by the BLM to address any issue, even though there were multiple avenues available, and I engaged in good faith.

As we prepared to do a presentation on the plan in summer of 2016 for a RAC, I know the county was putting pressure on BLM to "get me out." Eureka County even presented a line item to the State Legislature to that effect.

At that juncture I was effectively cut off from communications. My involvement with projects ceased and none of my questions as to why were answered. A team I had assembled to carry out a task was left sitting in the dark, that created yet one more piece of contention.

I was given no opportunity to address any grievance, real or imagined. A Freedom of Information Act request filed in October as to the nature of protests against my involvement has yet to be answered.

I operated as a volunteer. I racked up considerable expenses. BLM was supposed to reimburse part of those expenses. At the time of this "blackout" I was owed a considerable sum of money and my organization was left with no project, no explanation and no funds. The funds have since been reimbursed, months later, but the hardship was real. It left my organization scrambling and in limbo, all because we entered into "collaboration" with BLM.

I know of no other interest in Nevada that has been treated so poorly. Certainly no rancher, miner or developer.

The litigation I dropped had to do with two issues; a right to access and document roundups in the state of Nevada and fixing deficits in the program as outlined by the National Academy of Sciences.

A roundup in Nevada saw me with no reasonable access. I became vocal. After a court battle that lasted over 4 years and almost a year working out a settlement with our past director Amy Lueders, dropping that litigation to create an environment of trust, meant nothing. The credibility of years of effort and the contention I had to address within advocacy because of the trust I extended to Amy Lueders, was not even worth an honest conversation or sincere effort by BLM.

After everything that has happened no other interest in this room would sit silent.

The State of Nevada BLM will hand all of you a report that states 100 wild horses were given fertility control in 2016. They wont tell you how many of those are appropriately timed retreats. They wont tell you how many o f those should have been retreated this spring to stop out of season births. They wont tell you how many should have been retreated in 2016. The report wont state that we could easily have reached 300 treatments and that the number could have even been much higher. They wont discuss the obstacles, internally and externally. If you, like me, try to address those issues you might find yourself uncomfortable with the treatment you receive.

I made a request to BLM prior to the Tri RAC asking if they could ensure that I would not be harassed as I was at the last meeting. I got no reply from the state office when I asked if they could ensure I would be safe if I participated in this meeting.

I am not in attendance because I do not want to be harassed by those that feel they have every right to harass me and I have no right to respond. I am not in attendance because if I respond, BLM will shut me out of participation on projects I have invested years in creating. Simply making this comment and asking for your help, could get the door closed permanently. I am expected to stay silent when others act inappropriately and possibly illegally. I am expected to stay silent when others behave with a lack of courtesy and professional integrity.

For my interest, wild horses, the environment over the last two years has deteriorated to the point that I do not feel comfortable at a RAC meeting, something I participated in many times over the last several years.

At last years Tri RAC, I talked about a conversation I had on a two track road with a permittee in Winnemucca. The permittee has not always been open to listening to a wild horse advocate. The conversation ended with us shaking hands and his saying "I look forward to working to solve these issues." I had said I hoped that we could take the spirit of that conversation into practice, all of us.

The environment has not improved, it deteriorated. That conversation on that two track, that inspired such hope, is nothing now but a distant memory.

I respectfully ask the members of the RAC to formerly adopt a policy that recognizes that all Nevadans have a right and expectation to participate in public forums. An environment of respect and common decency, regardless of our differences, is how we in Nevada handle our business. I ask the RAC to tell BLM that will it not tolerate inequity in process, intimidation and any conduct that reinforces, encourages and fosters unlawful actions.

In our Nevada all of our voices are important. Public land management is to include all interests represented at the table and a safe environment for all voices, no matter how small. Process is not just for those with a formal paycheck and a big bottom line. Process should not simply serve the bullies.

Thank you.
Laura Leigh
Reno, NV