

**Statement of
Jamie Connell
Acting Deputy Director
Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining
S. 757, Multispecies Habitat Conservation Plan Implementation Act
April 25, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 757, which amends the Mesquite Lands Act of 1986 in order to renew and extend certain authorizations which had expired in late 2011. The BLM supports the goals of S. 757 to provide for the economic development needs of Mesquite, Nevada, and for the implementation of habitat conservation plans in Clark County and in Lincoln County, Nevada. The BLM notes that existing authorities, such as sales under the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA), allow BLM to achieve similar purposes through the development of Resource Management Plans and include opportunities for public comment.

Background

The Mesquite Lands Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-548) afforded the City of Mesquite in eastern Clark County, Nevada, the exclusive right to purchase certain parcels of public land, at fair market value, for a period of years. In a series of amendments over the last 17 years, the Mesquite Lands Act was amended to add additional parcels, authorize funding to develop a habitat conservation plan for the Virgin River, and to direct a conveyance to the City. The authorizations under the Mesquite Lands Act expired in late 2011. The Lincoln County Land Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-298) similarly authorized the use of certain funds for development of a habitat conservation plan in Lincoln County. While the City of Mesquite acquired approximately 7,700 acres of public lands under the Mesquite Lands Act, as amended, it was not able to complete all of the acquisitions it sought in the prescribed time period.

S. 757

S. 757 extends certain authorizations in the Mesquite Lands Act, as amended, for an additional ten years to November 29, 2021. The bill also allows for the use of certain funds for the implementation (in addition to the development) of habitat conservation plans for the Virgin River in Clark County as well as for a habitat conservation plan in Lincoln County. It also extends the withdrawal of the lands from all forms of location, entry and appropriation under the public land laws, including mining laws, and from operation of mineral leasing and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights.

The BLM supports S. 757 and its goal of providing for the long-term economic development needs of the City. It would allow more time to complete the environmental reviews (and to develop possible mitigation of impacts) of proposed land uses on the parcels. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working cooperatively with the BLM in the development of the habitat conservation plan for the Virgin River. The additional authorizations in S. 757 to implement habitat conservation plans will enhance the Department's habitat protection efforts in Clark County and in Lincoln County, Nevada.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on S. 757. I will be glad to answer any questions.