

Mason Valley Conservation District County Weed Proposal

In NRS 548.105, the Nevada Legislature states “It is hereby declared, as a matter of legislative determination, that persons in local communities are best able to provide basic leadership and direction for the planning and accomplishment of the conservation and development of renewable natural resources through organization and operation of conservation districts” (emphasis added). Nevada’s Conservation Districts (CDs) are governmental entities, much like school boards, directed by locally elected volunteer residents and founded, along with 3,000 CDs nationally, in 1937 on the philosophy that conservation decisions and actions are best made at the local level with a focus on voluntary, incentive-based actions. In Nevada, where the federal government administers and manages more than 85% of the land, CDs serve a vital role to connect private and public interests. NRS Chapter 548 gives CDs specific authorities that allow them to be the best mechanism to plan and administer work done to answer local conservation needs. On average, conservation districts (CD) in Nevada leverage every \$1 of state funding received into \$30. In the Smith Valley and Mason Valley CDs, each \$1 of state funding returned \$35.72 of work to Lyon County lands.

For the last seven years, Mason and Smith Valley Conservation Districts (CDs) have coordinated an extremely successful watershed scale program addressing all State of Nevada recognized noxious weeds on both private and federally managed lands located on the East, West, and main stems of the Walker River. This extraordinary project is unlike any other, in that, our stakeholders understand we must have a comprehensive strategy for the entire riparian corridor because weeds use the river as a vector for establishment and, most critically, are not stopped by borders.

All noxious weed treatment locations are recorded with a GPS unit with each point including information on species identification, plant stage/phenology, abundance (stem count), distribution, gross area infested, treatment needed, type of ground cover, signs of ground disturbance, if treatment was applied and land ownership. This data is then entered into the comprehensive GIS database maintained by the Districts and can be uploaded into EDDMapS, the Nevada Department of Agriculture statewide noxious weed database.

The Districts have generated numerous partnerships for this project by securing direct funding from the Nevada Department of Agriculture, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and US Forest Service (USFS) as well as in-kind services from private landowners, Walker River Basin Cooperative Weed Management Area, and Nevada Department of Wildlife.

In the arena of land management, there are often many entities performing the same functions, such as weed control, resulting in diverting and diluting of limited funding and human capacity. In Lyon County, for example, a tax-funded weed control district has been established to combat noxious weeds in addition to the Districts efforts outlined above. Some of the agricultural producers in the County have undertaken noxious weed treatment for themselves. In order to address the “shotgun” approach being taken by many entities on weed control, and in recognition of the unique role CDs are in to synergize weed control efforts, the Nevada Legislature empowered weed control districts and conservation districts to formally join their efforts. In NRS 555.206(1), “the board of county commissioners of the county and the supervisors of the conservation district may enter into an agreement for the supervisors of the conservation district to serve, ex officio, as the board of directors of the weed control district”

and NRS 555.206(3), "supervisors of a conservation district serving ex officio as the board of directors of a weed control district pursuant to this section shall ensure that any money collected by the weed control district pursuant to an assessment levied pursuant to NRS 555.215, and any other money appropriated or granted to the weed control district from any source, is expended only for the purposes of NRS 555.202 to 555.220, inclusive." The Eureka County Commissioners have taken advantage of this relationship and designated the Eureka Conservation District as the Eureka County Weed Control District Board of Directors. By Eureka County's own account, this has removed duplication of efforts, increased efficiency, removed the need for an additional board, and streamlined fiscal matters. Eureka County is available to discuss how this has worked if you would like to reach out to them.

The Smith and Mason Valley CDs propose that Lyon County weed control efforts, including funding, be administered through the CDs. We assert that this relationship will pay dividends and be a benefit to Lyon County and its residents. We request entering into an agreement with Lyon County on all weed control efforts and to review this partnership in 5 years. At that time, if the partnership is not working, we can amend the agreement or terminate the agreement under NRS 555.206(2).