



**Written Statement of Jenifer Davidson, County Manager
Douglas County, Nevada**

**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Legislative Hearing: Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200)**

July 15, 2026

On behalf of Douglas County, Nevada (County) and the Douglas County Board of County Commissioners, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the *Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200)*. Specifically, I would like to thank Senator Cortez Masto for her leadership and Senator Jacky Rosen for her support. The County is very pleased to see the Subcommittee hold a hearing on this legislation, which has enjoyed bipartisan support from our Nevada Congressional delegation since its inception.

Why the Douglas County Lands Bill Must Become Law: A Twenty-Year Community Effort Nearing the Finish Line

Douglas County, Nevada is home to the Carson River Valley and part of the Lake Tahoe Basin. It sits at a crossroads shaped by geography and history. It is the birthplace of modern Nevada, home to the state's first town, first ranches, and first autonomous government. Yet, most of the land within the County is federally owned, a reality that has constrained flood protection, public recreation access, and economic development for the County and tribes for decades. Coordinating even routine improvements with federal land managers has been slow and cumbersome. This legislation will improve the management of the Carson Valley floodplain, enhance stormwater management, increase local economic development opportunities, expand regional public recreation, and protect the agricultural heritage and important tribal cultural resources within Douglas County.

The *Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200)* is the product of a remarkable, sustained public process: roughly two decades of planning and six years of formal negotiation involving the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, state agencies, local towns and improvement districts, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, and more than 100 stakeholder groups. Hundreds of meetings since 2009, open houses, and continuous coordination through multiple sessions of Congress (dating back to the 113th Congress) have shaped a bill that reflects the values and priorities of the entire community.

The Douglas County Board of County Commissioners has unanimously endorsed its framework, and it has enjoyed consistent bipartisan support from Nevada's congressional delegation, including our current champions Senators Cortez Masto and Rosen and Congressman Mark Amodei. This is not a new or untested proposal. It is a mature, thoroughly vetted compromise that simply needs Congress to act.

In general, the *Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200)* does the following:

- Advances flood control and stormwater management through the conveyance of federal parcels to ensure we can build the infrastructure needed to strengthen our community's resilience and protect the Carson River floodplain
- Enhances public recreation and economic development opportunities for the County and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
- Provides the County the ability to responsibly manage land development by directing the Secretary of the Interior to work directly with the County before any federal lands can be disposed of or sold to avoid conflicts with local planning needs
- Provides for the conveyance of federally owned cultural sites to the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
- Designates the Burbank Canyons Wilderness that also allows for the continued protection of habitat for a distinct population of Bi-State Sage Grouse

This legislation has been thoroughly vetted by both the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee through several Congresses—it's time for Congress to enact this important bill as the issues it helps to resolve are becoming more urgent.

Enhancing Flood Protection and Stormwater Management

The most urgent driver behind this legislation is flood protection. Douglas County's Master Plan aims to preserve the community's rural character through conservation easements that protect floodplain function, rural heritage, historic ranching operations, and wildlife habitat. To date, nearly 19,000 acres of resource-rich ranch land have been conserved through a combination of programs and funding sources. Like other Nevada counties, Douglas County is surrounded by federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

I am proud to have worked for the County in service to my community for nearly 20 years; however, it saddens me to admit that if my local government tenure were measured in 100 year flooding events, my time with the County arguably will have spanned more than 500 years. Unfortunately flooding is our reality.

Development in the County historically occurred adjacent to the Carson River. Beginning in the 70s and early 80s, there was a shift in the development pattern of our community. As more and more people chose to move to Douglas, the construction of homes moved further east from our town centers to neighborhoods adjacent to federally managed lands. Almost as soon as those neighborhoods adjacent to public lands were developed, homeowners in these areas began to be impacted by alluvial flash flooding. Although many of these areas have since been studied and FEMA mapped, most of the homes were constructed in areas that were not previously designated as floodplain and many today still exist outside of the floodplain and are not required to have flood insurance.

In 2014 and again in 2015 the Johnson Lane neighborhood experienced back to back alluvial fan flash flooding events where large volumes of fast moving water flowed through washes from the Pine Nut Mountains into the area. Each time these events deposited mud and debris on private property and public infrastructure, causing thousands in damage.

In 2023 a rain on snow event in March again caused flash flooding along much of the east side of the valley. This time the alluvial fan flash flooding combined with localized and river flooding inundating public infrastructure and ultimately threatening the Towns of Minden and Gardnerville. This event is estimated to have cost the County, Towns, and General Improvement Districts in the area tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

Most recently, on September 25, 2025, a four foot wall of water trapped the residents of the Ruhenstroth neighborhood, closed Highway 395, and damaged 14 homes. On that day not a drop of rain fell over the residents of Ruhenstroth, instead the storm occurred over public land to the east directing water into the community through Smelter Creek. Alluvial flash flooding in Ruhenstroth is not new; however, the significance of this flooding event was sharply increased by the recent Connor fire, which had burned 26% of the 14,400 acre drainage basin. For the record, I have attached with my statement a presentation with additional information about these recent flooding events in Douglas County.

In response to this recurring risk, the County has completed multiple drainage area studies and worked with subject matter experts to develop comprehensive drainage plans. In 2024 these plans were combined into a comprehensive Douglas County Stormwater Master Plan. In total the County has identified over \$100 million in flood control projects and ranked these projects by priority for implementation.

S. 4200 would convey 6,047 acres of BLM land to the County for public purposes, with about 5,232 of those acres intended for flood control and detention projects in the Pine Nut Mountains. These parcels are key to the County's stormwater management plan, and the conveyance would let the County implement locally driven, federally facilitated solutions that protect lives, improve watershed health, and reduce disaster recovery and mitigation costs. Because BLM currently lacks the financial and staff resources to install the necessary flood detention infrastructure during storm events, the conveyance of these lands would allow the County to best manage the land for flood protection.

The legislation matters because working through BLM's administrative Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease process, acre by acre, would take decades. The conveyance instead gives the County direct access to install flood protection and perform stormwater maintenance under its adopted local plan.

For 150 years, ranch land along the Carson River has served as a "safety valve," spreading floodwater over pasture and open land with little or no harm to nearby towns. In 2017, a 20-year FEMA flood event inundated nearly 20,000 acres of Carson Valley ranch land and damaged homes and private property. Just days after this flood event, residents were conducting business as usual. This ranching-built and ranching-maintained system is far more efficient than one requiring significant government upkeep, saving millions in federal and local dollars by avoiding the need for a traditional levee project.

It is likely this open land has protected thousands of Douglas County residents and saved hundreds of millions of dollars over decades.

In the southern part of the County, BLM similarly protects hundreds of acres of ranch land through conservation easements acquired under other federal programs. We are proud of our ranching heritage, and **S. 4200** will help retain this efficient system. But easement funding has grown scarce in recent years: last year's record snow raised fears of another major flood, and while the flooding was contained, managing flood flows on properties near federal land remained a concern.

S. 4200 identifies 31.5 acres of USFS land for disposal and sale, as these parcels are already surrounded by existing development. The bill directs how USFS and BLM disposal proceeds are used: 85% of sale revenues may be used by the Interior for certain purposes, including flood control that would enable the purchase of conservation easements to protect the Carson River Floodplain and to preserve the rural character of the County; 10% can be used by the County for general budgeting purposes, with the intent to use such funds for stormwater management. Such funding can also help to implement important local goals and policies set forth in the Douglas County Master and Open Space Plans, which prioritize protecting permanent open space, enhancing recreation and access to public lands, and retaining the character of our community and the quality of life that attracted many of us to live here.

Finally, federal land eligible for disposal under the current BLM resource management plan must be jointly nominated for economic development through a process set by the County and the Secretary of the Interior to ensure Douglas County has a seat at the table in deciding when and where future federal-land development occurs, so it doesn't conflict with the stormwater plan. Ultimately, **S. 4200** sets in place coordinated land-use policies and common-sense mechanisms to allow the County to continue protecting the floodplain from encroachment and to preserve the County's agricultural heritage for the future.

Enhancing Public Access to Recreational Opportunities and Improving Management of Infrastructure

Douglas County is home to vast outdoor beauty, and recreational opportunities remain a high priority for our residents. Our economy leans heavily on tourism tied to its proximity to Lake Tahoe. The bill conveys BLM and USFS lands for public parks, public buildings, water resource infrastructure, and all other uses authorized under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. Many of the parcels identified in the bill are in need of improved management and infrastructure—such as trailheads, campgrounds, and parks—that limited federal resources cannot adequately maintain, all of which are needed to support that recreational demand. Specifically, **S. 4200** would convey 1,730 acres of USFS land to the County to enhance recreational opportunities, providing the public a chance to enjoy these outdoor spaces. With these lands conveyed to the County for public recreation purposes, the County can oversee daily management to ensure that these facilities and other recreation spaces are responsibly used, well maintained, and available for residents and visitors.

Under the bill, the BLM and USFS parcels designated for conveyance to Douglas County can only be used for public purposes, not development. The United States would retain a reversionary interest in these lands, meaning the parcels will automatically transfer back to federal ownership should the

parcels ever be used for non-public purposes. Should Douglas County ever desire to use these parcels for non-public purposes, the County would be required to go through a separate and future public process to purchase the reversionary interest from the United States.

S. 4200 further directs the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to issue special use permits on parcels (188 acres) that are identified as critical for water infrastructure tanks and flood control purposes, including the capture, storage and release of flood waters. In prior versions of the bill, these lands were designated to be conveyed directly to the County. However, in meetings with the USFS, the County agreed that these parcels should remain with the USFS, with the bill directing that they be managed for these important purposes. Given the backlog and lack of resources the USFS has to process Special Use Permits, the County is pleased to see the bill include a timeline for issuance of these permits, recognizing the need to have water infrastructure and flood protections in place as soon as practicable.

S. 4200 would also convey 67 acres of USFS land to the State of Nevada for the Lake Tahoe-Nevada State Park. This would resolve two inholdings and the state would use the land for the creation of a public park and for the conservation of wildlife and natural resources. If any of these lands cease to be used for public, recreational, or environmental purposes, they revert to the United States.

Honoring a Partnership With the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California

From the outset, Douglas County has worked directly with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe Tribe) to ensure the bill reflects tribal priorities. The Washoe Tribe identified roughly 2,669 acres of BLM and Forest Service land including sites in the Pine Nut Mountains containing cultural resources essential to preserving its heritage and other lands important for economic development. The bill conveys these federal lands into trust.

A particularly meaningful piece is the Dance Hill area, currently under Forest Service ownership, which holds both significant cultural and religious meaning for the Tribe and popular recreation trails for the broader community. Earlier versions of the bill proposed a cooperative management arrangement. At the Tribe's request, the bill now bifurcates the area, conveying roughly 724 acres containing the most significant cultural sites directly to the Tribe and roughly 1,084 acres to the County for recreational management. The County supports and agrees with this approach. This ensures tribal members have reliable access for cultural and religious practices while preserving public recreational uses nearby.

We are pleased this partnership has resulted in the continued support of the Washoe Tribe for this legislation. On July 9, 2026, the Washoe Tribe provided the County a copy of its letter of support to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in support of this bill. In addition, Washoe Tribe Chairman Smokey provided a statement of support that reads as follows:

“On behalf of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, I express our support for the Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act. This bill provides for the transfer of approximately 2,500 acres of federal land to be held in trust for the benefit of the Washoe Tribe. The lands designated to the Washoe Tribe come from many years of work and negotiations from prior Washoe Elders and Tribal Council members, most of whom have passed on. This

meaningful action supports tribal sovereignty, restores Washoe connections to the lands, and will provide new opportunities. We appreciate the collaborative effort that led to this legislation and look forward to continued partnership to ensure these lands are managed with Washoe cultural values and benefits the entire region.”

I have attached that statement of support and letter to my statement to be included in the record.

Balancing Conservation and Access at Burbank Canyons Wilderness Area

Many residents of Douglas County and the surrounding areas are outdoor enthusiasts. It is critical to find an appropriate balance between OHV recreation and conservation. **S. 4200** strikes this balance. The bill designates 12,392 acres of BLM-owned land as the Burbank Canyons Wilderness. However, the legislation will permanently leave open all existing roads so that recreational access can continue. This wilderness designation helps preserve prime habitat for the Nevada/California Bi-State Sage Grouse populations. Even though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has withdrawn its proposed listing of the Nevada and California Bi-State Sage Grouse, **S. 4200** helps retain this decision by continuing protection of this habitat. Finally, **S. 4200** releases 1,065 acres from the wilderness study area, excluding them from the proposed wilderness designation. The County worked with stakeholders that include The Wilderness Society and Friends of Nevada Wilderness on this designation. I have attached for the record letters of support in support of designating the Burbank Canyons Wilderness area.

Why Congress Should Act Now

The *Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200)* stands on an exceptionally strong foundation. It reflects two decades of open public process and six years of thoughtful, formal multi-stakeholder negotiation, and it has earned unanimous local government support, steady bipartisan congressional sponsorship, and the shared endorsement of the Washoe Tribe and conservation organizations. Just as encouraging, the bill thoughtfully includes reversion clauses to safeguard how conveyed land is used, and delivers a real, timely solution to flood risks that have already caused damage and could return.

In short, **S. 4200** is vital to our community. I urge its swift passage through Congress and signing into law.

Douglas County Lands

Bill Information:

LEGEND

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Bureau of Land Management

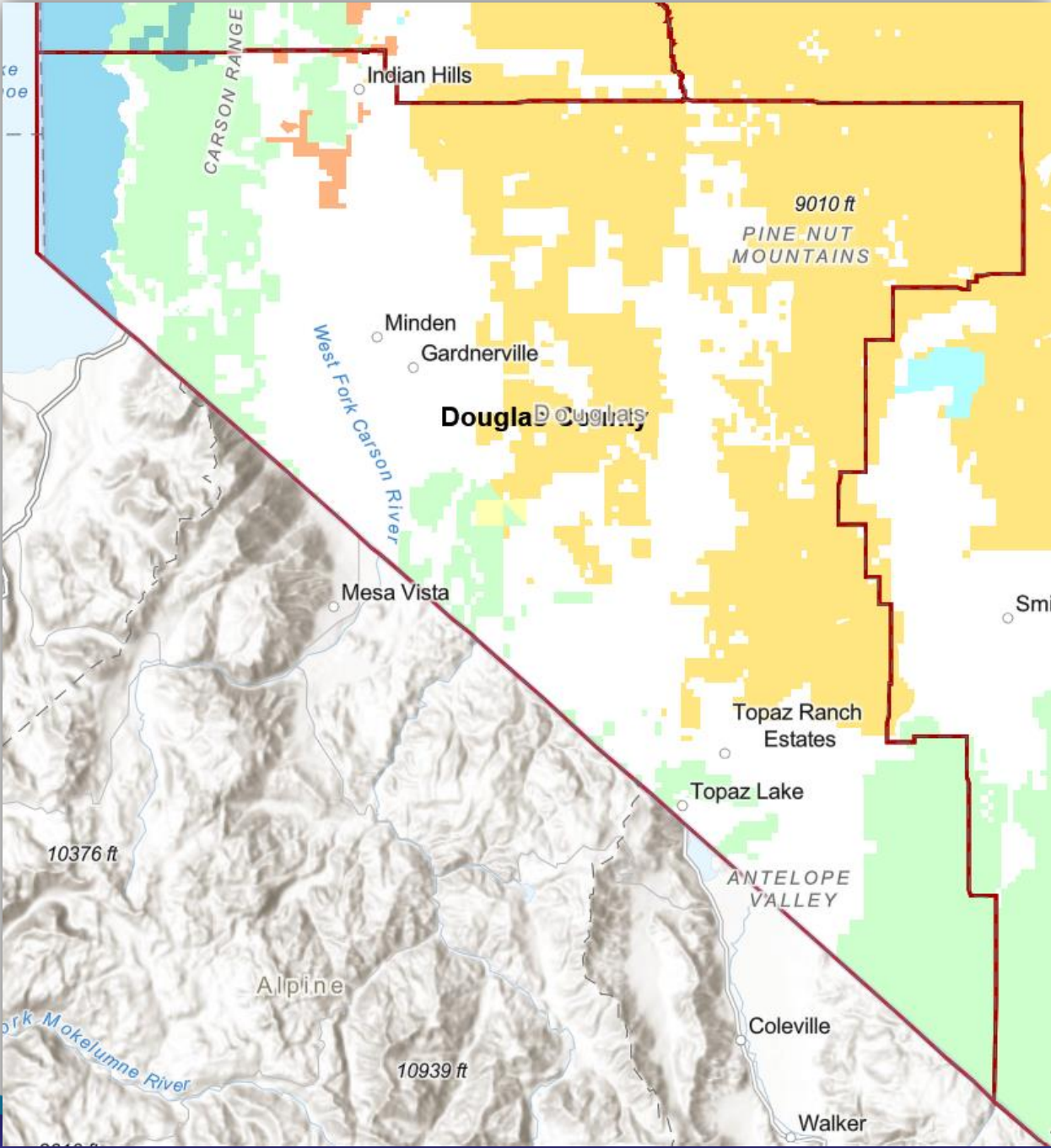
Bureau of Reclamation

Forest Service

N

No Scale

~65% of the County is under Federal Control

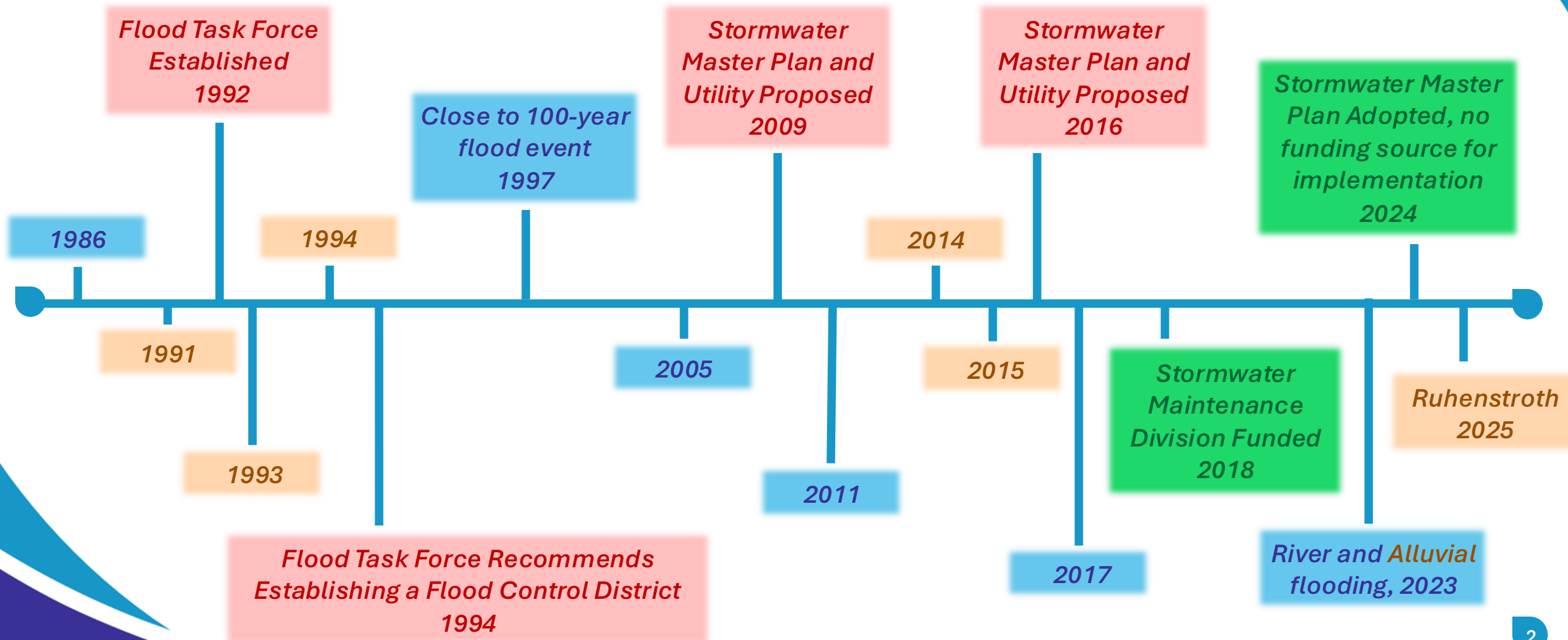


RAIN ON SNOW/ RIVER FLOODING

PROPOSED ACTIONS

ALLUVIAL FLASH FLOODING

SUCCESSFUL ACTIONS



SMELTER CREEK IN RUHENSTROTH
September 25, 2025



Video courtesy of Chris Garrison



SMELTER CREEK IN RUHENSTROTH
September 25, 2025



Photos courtesy of Teri Wass

 PINENUT CREEK IN FISH SPRINGS
July 2014



Videos courtesy of JT Humphrey





Find address or place



**Town of
Minden**



**Location of
Dangberg
Reservoir Dam**



BUCKEYE CREEK FLOOD *affected area*



JOHNSON LANE AREA *flood depth animation*

JOHNSON LANE AREA *July 2014*



 JOHNSON LANE AREA
July 2014



 *the aftermath*

STEPHANIE DETENTION BASIN
Constructed 2023

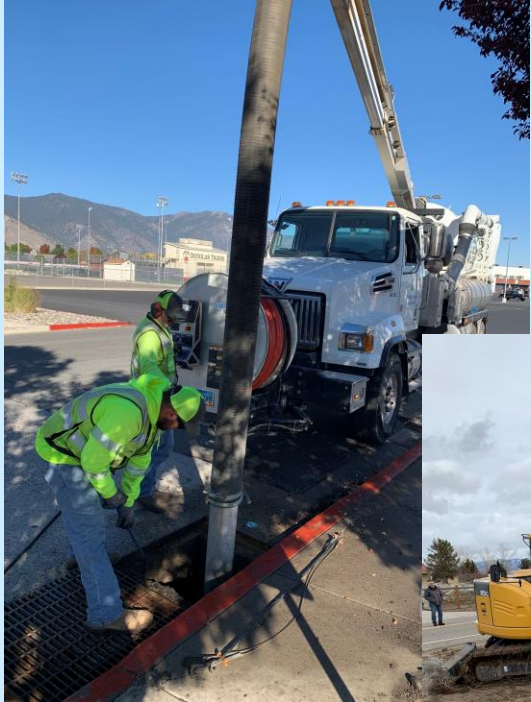


SKYLINE DETENTION BASIN
Constructed 2023

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2018

Douglas County Stormwater Department funded



2018 - Present

Area Drainage Master Planning in
Areas of Focus

2023

Johnson Lane: Pinenut North
Basins Constructed

2024-2025

Acquired Fish Springs Redhawk
19-acres and DenMar 40-acres
for flood control/open space

2025

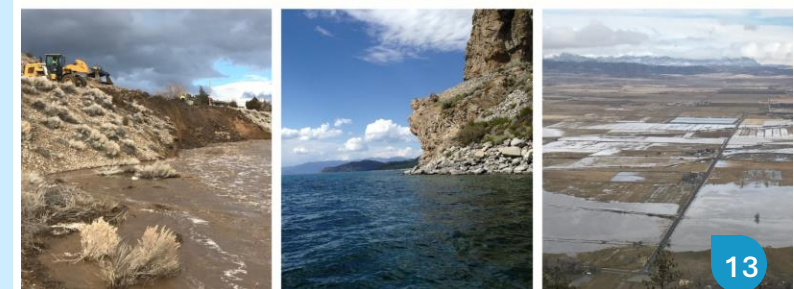
Johnson Lane Pamela Flood
Control Grant was awarded

2025

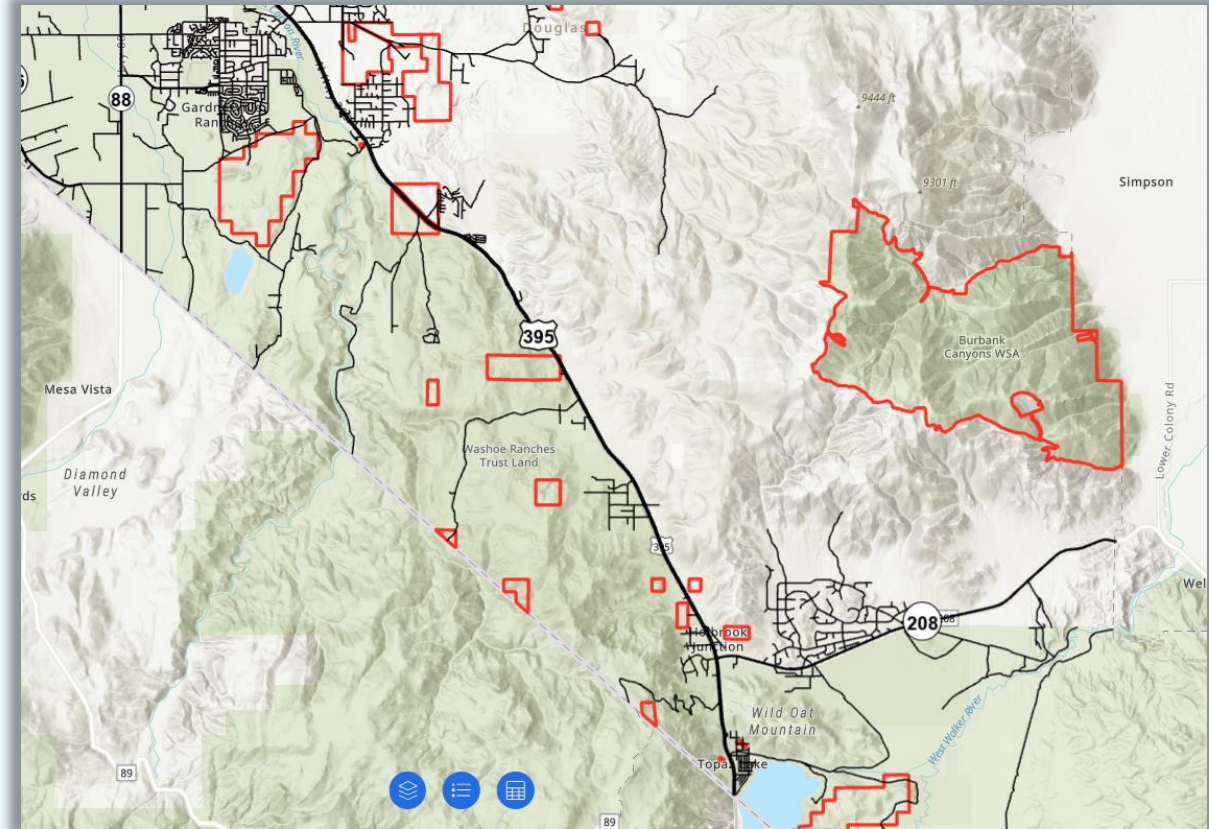
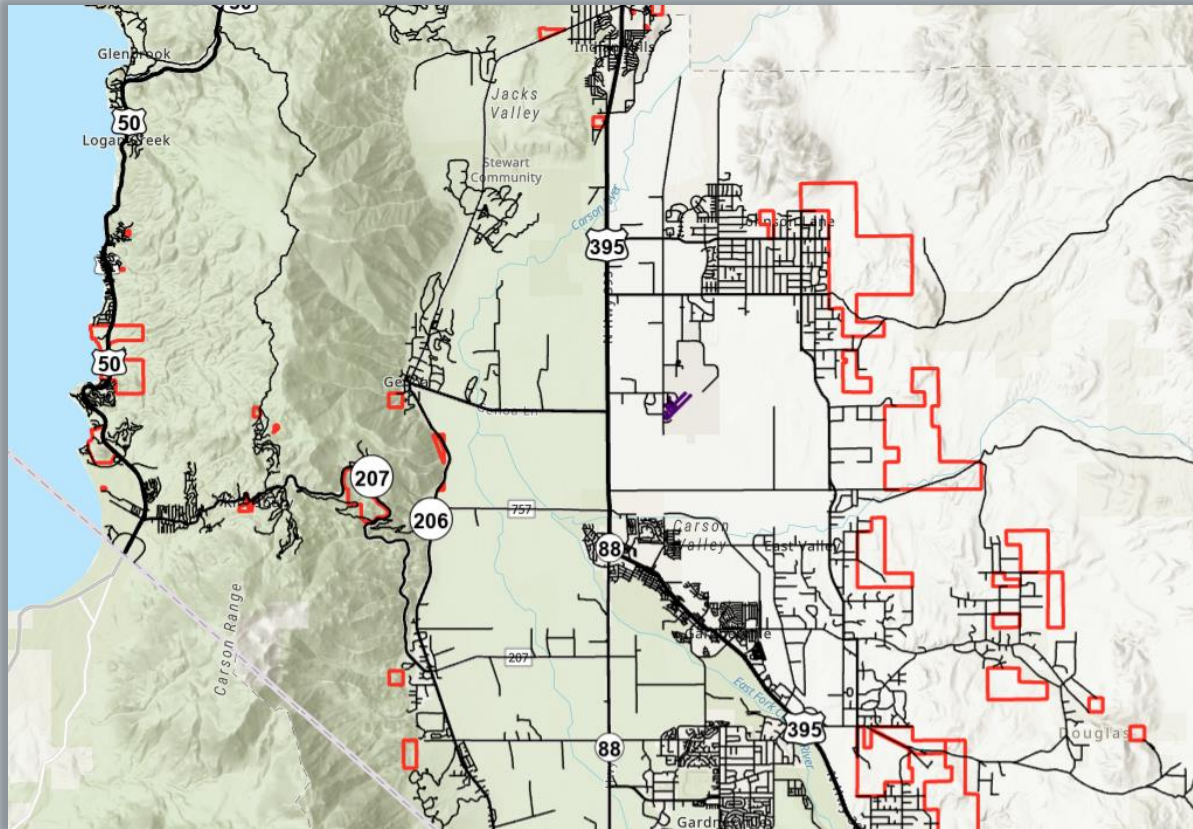
Created Douglas County
Stormwater Utility, working to
create equitable rates

2024

Adopted Stormwater Master Plan



FUTURE CRITICAL LAND INVENTORY



Proposed Lands Bill parcels



Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
919 U.S. 395 North
Gardnerville, NV 89410
Tel. (775) 265-8600, Fax (775) 265-6240

The Honorable Mike Lee, *Chairman*
The Honorable Martin Heinrich, *Ranking Member*
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, *Chairman*
The Honorable Jared Huffman, *Ranking Member*
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California — Support for the Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200/ H.R. 2317)

Dear Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Heinrich, Chairman Westerman, and Ranking Member Huffman:

On behalf of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California ("Tribe"), I write to express continued support for the *Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 4200/H.R.2317)*, and to respectfully urge your Committees to advance this legislation to enactment. This bill represents a meaningful opportunity to strengthen tribal sovereignty, restore the Washoe People's connection to our ancestral homeland, and deliver lasting benefits to the entire Carson Valley region.

This legislation is the culmination of many years of collaborative partnership between the Tribe, the Douglas County Board of County Commissioners, and Nevada's congressional delegation. Since 2009, Washoe Tribal leaders have worked hand in hand with Douglas County officials to craft a balanced, locally driven bill that reflects shared priorities—economic development, responsible land management, and the preservation of the cultural sites that are central to who we are. The Tribe is deeply grateful for Congressman Mark Amodei and Senator Cortez Masto's steadfast commitment in bringing this measure forward, and we are proud to stand with our partners in support of it.

The Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act delivers enduring benefits to the Washoe Tribe:

- **Return of ancestral homeland in trust.** The bill provides for approximately 2,669 acres of federal land in Douglas County to be held permanently in trust for the sole use and benefit of the Tribe, meaningfully expanding our land base and reuniting the Washoe People with lands important to our history.

- **Protection of Dance Hill.** The legislation conveys 724 acres known as *It-goom-mum teh-weh-weh ush-shah-ish* (Dance Hill), a Traditional Cultural Property essential to our cultural and spiritual identity, for cultural and ceremonial purposes. This land adjoins the Tribe's Dresslerville Community, providing seamless access for our members.
- **Preservation of cultural assets.** The bill contains important provisions for the preservation and protection of Tribal cultural resources, safeguarding sacred and ceremonial sites for future generations.
- **Advancement of tribal sovereignty and self-determination.** By placing these lands in trust and enabling the Tribe to manage them consistent with Washoe cultural values, the bill creates new economic development opportunities for our people while benefiting the broader region.

The Washoe Tribal Council has taken formal action in support of this effort. At its meeting on April 27, 2018, the Council adopted **Resolution No. 2018-04-WTC-035**, expressing tribal governmental support for the Douglas County Lands Bill. Consistent with our governing procedures, that resolution was read aloud, debated, and adopted by the Council, and it authorized the Tribal Chairman to prepare and transmit letters conveying the Tribe's support to the appropriate federal, state, and county authorities. That formal support remains firm today.

The lands designated to the Tribe in this bill reflect the vision and perseverance of the Washoe Tribe. We respectfully urge the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee to advance the Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act without delay.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (775) 265-8600 with any questions.

Respectfully,



Serrell Smokey

Chairman of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California

cc: The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto, United States Senate
 The Honorable Mark Amodei, United States House of Representatives
 Mark Gardner, Chairman of the Douglas County Board of County Commissioners

September 14, 2020

Senator Catherine Cortez Masto
Senator Jacky Rosen
Congressman Mark Amodei



FRIENDS of NEVADA WILDERNESS

RE: Letter of Support for the Douglas County Economic Development and Conservation Act (S. 2890)

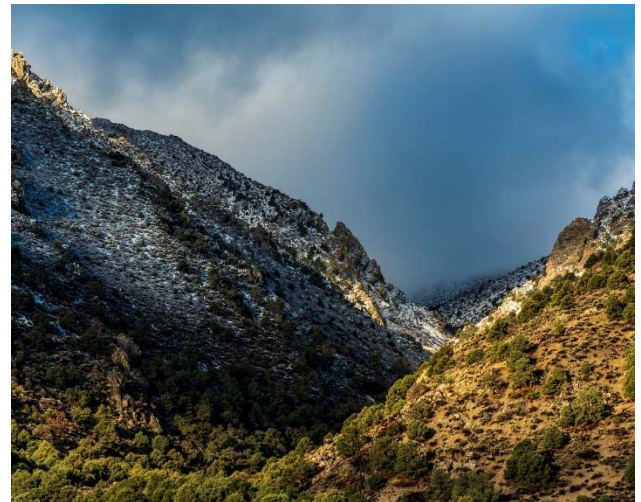
Dear Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, Senator Jacky Rosen and Congressman Mark Amodei:

This letter is to offer Friends of Nevada Wilderness support for S2890, especially the portion of the bill that designates Burbank Canyons as Wilderness.

Friends of Nevada Wilderness began working with Douglas County and other stakeholders a decade ago. We appreciate the efforts of the Nevada delegation over these years working with local elected officials, various stakeholders, the Washoe Tribe and land management agencies to resolve numerous public lands opportunities and issues within Douglas County.

While this bill addresses many important issues the one that has been most important for Friends of Nevada Wilderness is Wilderness designation for the small but beautiful Burbank Canyons. Many of our members have enjoyed hiking and camping in the area and love the wildlife found here. Over the years our members have also relished working in partnership with the Carson City District BLM doing volunteer projects in the Burbank Canyons area.

Thank you for all you are doing to ensure passage of S 2890 passed this year. It is heartening to see our delegation continuing to work across party lines for Nevada.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shaaron Netherton".

Shaaron Netherton
Executive Director
Friends of Nevada Wilderness