

Dear Congressional Delegation:

Elko County is writing in regard to the land swap proposed by Kroenke Ranches, which was discussed at a Nevada Wildlife Commission meeting on August 11, 2023. Rather than an administrative process which includes a NEPA process and a broad spectrum of stakeholders, Kroenke Ranches has chosen to pursue Congressional action to effect this swap. Elko County has several concerns about this proposed swap, and until those concerns are addressed the Board of County Commissioners cannot support this proposal and would request that you oppose any legislation granting this swap until these concerns are adequately addressed.

### **Public Access**

The most concerning omission from the proposal is any plan for maintaining public access. There are millions of acres of public lands located outside the boundaries of the proposed swap, with no mention of preserving access to them should the swap be granted. There are County roads that cross these areas that will remain County roads, but there are also BLM roads, and no mention of whether those roads would continue to be administered by the BLM.

The presentation from Kroenke Ranches has one slide on recreation and access which suggests that the current plan is for access to be controlled by Kroenke Ranches. It offers non-motorized public access in the Loomis Creek area, and permit-based public access on private lands in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

First, the presentation does not make clear how Kroenke Ranches would guarantee this access. Without enforceable grants of right of way these promises are ethereal and it would be irresponsible for the Elko County Commission to rely on them on behalf of the public.

Second, Kroenke Ranches has not done any stakeholder outreach to the groups who would be most affected by these limits on access. Recreational users like hunters, fishermen, hikers, photographers, off-roaders, and plein-air painters all rely on access to public land. Mineral exploration, ranching, and other economic users also require access to land with locatable minerals. The public comments at the Wildlife Commission meeting made it plain that no other groups have any more information than Elko County does regarding how access will be affected or how those effects will be mitigated.

For the last thirty years Elko County has strongly advocated for increased public access to public lands. The Elko County Board of Commissioners cannot support any proposal that does not include substantial and enforceable guarantees for access to public lands located beyond the boundaries of the Kroenke Ranch properties, or that results in reduced access for users.

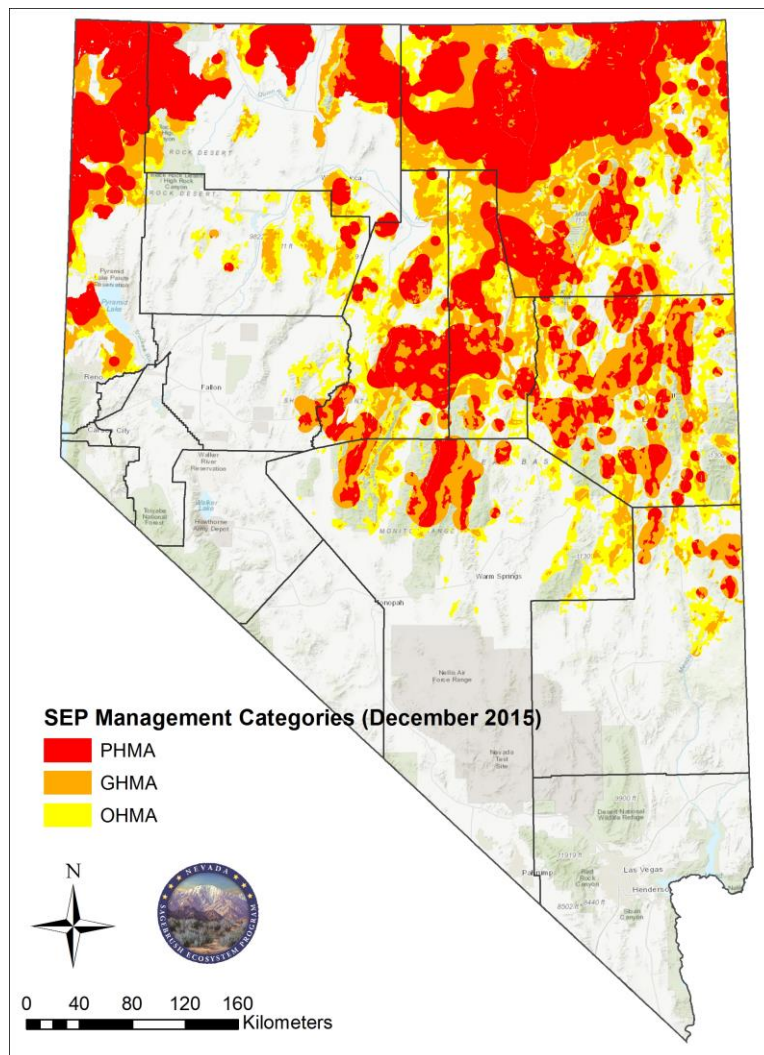
### **Hunting Access**

Although related, it is important to note that the alteration of the public lands available for hunting in the proposed area is an important issue that has not been addressed by the Kroenke Ranch presentation, and without further clarification and enforceable guarantees, Elko County cannot support the proposed swap.

According to the University of Nevada, Reno, big game hunting contributes 9.3 million dollars per year to Elko County's economy. Area 7, which contains the land in question, has a quota of 940 resident mule deer tags alone. It contains some of the County's most valuable and longest-used hunting sites. The current proposal would alter both the access and available habitat currently open to hunters in the area. As pointed out above, there has been no outreach to the affected groups, and Kroenke Ranches has made no effort to determine how this will affect individual hunters or the economy as a whole.

### Wildlife Habitat

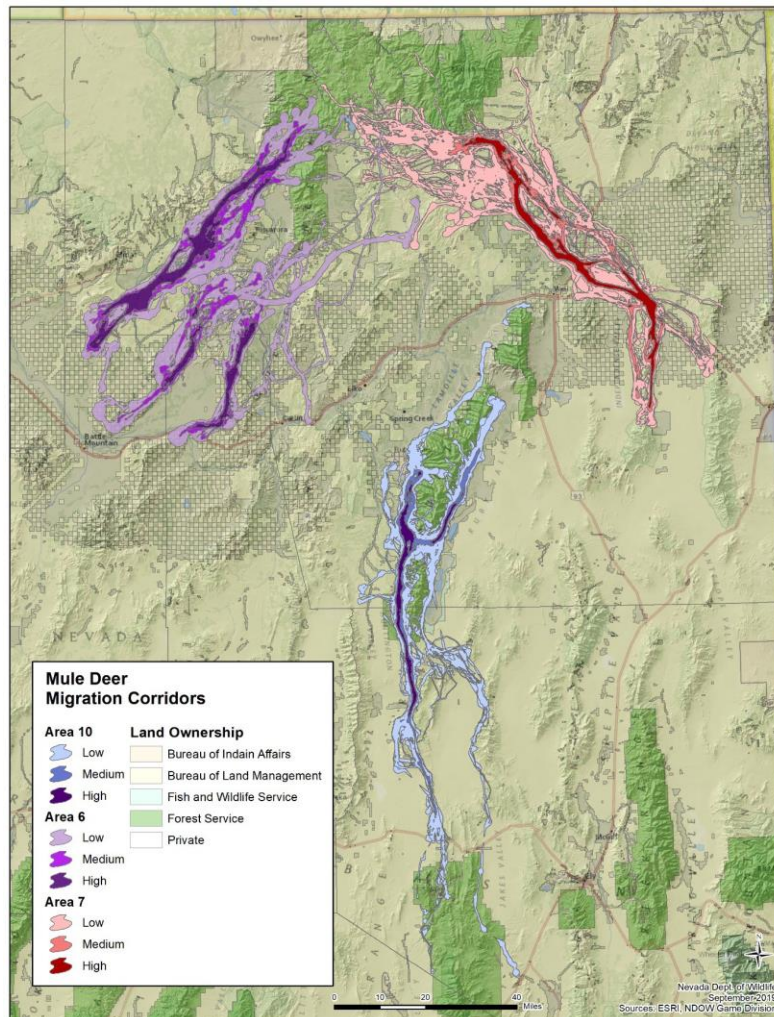
The area of the proposed swap is biologically important for a number of species that are important to both Elko County's economy and environment.



As you can see from the figure above, provided by the State of Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Program, the area of the proposed swap is in and next to prime sage grouse habitat (labeled PHMA). The state, county, and land managing agencies have worked hard to implement plans to avoid a listing of the Greater Sage Grouse, and the plans in effect all require careful management

of sage grouse habitat to have a chance of working. A wholesale transfer of land by Congress would bypass the processes in place that these stakeholders have worked to implement.

This area is also in the middle of one of the major mule deer migration corridors. As mentioned above, big-game hunting is a major economic activity in Elko County, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife hasn't analyzed the effects the proposed swap would have on these corridors. The map below shows local migration corridors.



The bottom line in Elko County's view is that Kroenke Ranches has put together a proposal with no public input that would greatly affect the local economy and environment. Under current laws, a swap of this kind would require a lengthy NEPA analysis with a chance for input by all stakeholders and a robust analysis of any changes to the natural and human environments. The effort to avoid this process and analysis by going straight to Congress raises concerns that have not been addressed.

Without analysis of the impacts the proposed swap would cause, without enforceable agreements that would ensure continued access to areas essential to local economic activity, and without a

robust public outreach process that engages stakeholders in a meaningful way, Elko County cannot support the current proposal.

Because of the potential for impacts to public access, hunting access, and to wildlife, Elko County is demanding a spot at the negotiating table as this proposal is further developed. Unless these concerns are addressed to protect the interests of the County and the public at large, Elko County urges its Congressional delegation to oppose any legislation that may be brought forward to effect this land swap.