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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Nevada Legislature Sends Strong Bipartisan Message to Congress  
Opposing Military Expansion in Wildlife Refuge**

**Carson City, NV** – In a nearly unanimous bipartisan vote, Nevada state legislators have adopted a resolution telling the U.S. Congress they are strongly opposed to the U.S. Air Force's plan to expand the training facility at the Nellis Test and Training Range (NTTR) into more of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. The 2.9 million-acre bombing and training range currently sprawls across three counties in the southern part of the state. The Air Force now wants another nearly quarter million more acres. The U.S. Congress is expected to act on the proposal next year.

Political and public opposition is strong because the proposed expansion would leave the military in control of even more of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, the largest wildlife refuge in the lower 48 states. It was established in 1936, primarily to protect habitat for the desert bighorn sheep, the Nevada state mammal.

The military already controls half of the 1.6 million-acre Desert Refuge and has closed much of it to the public. The proposed expansion would give the Air Force control of another 300,000 acres, including the Sheep Range mountains, which the Nevada Department of Wildlife describes as "irreplaceable" habitat in the "heart" of the refuge. In addition to one of the largest and most important bighorn sheep herds in the American Southwest, the Desert Refuge is home to the imperiled desert tortoise and hundreds of other mammals, birds, reptiles and native plants.

"The military's plan would eliminate wilderness protection from almost a million acres of the refuge," resolution sponsor **Assemblywoman Lesley Cohen** said during her testimony on the measure. "It would threaten the survival of the desert bighorn sheep and the desert tortoise and cut off public access to areas of great cultural, spiritual and recreational value. This resolution sends the message that Nevadans won't stand for it."

“The Desert refuge was created more than 80 years ago to protect some of the most unique wildlife habitat in the country and allow generations of Americans to explore and appreciate this special place,” added resolution sponsor **Senator Melanie Scheible** during her own testimony. “Expanding the military testing area into the refuge would decimate irreplaceable petroglyphs, sand dunes, and wild animal populations. This resolution has bipartisan support to make Nevada’s stance clear: we oppose expansion into the Desert National Wildlife Refuge.”

The resolution was co-sponsored by Assembly members Sarah Peters and Howard Watts, III, and Senators Julia Ratti, Chris Brooks, James Ohrenschall, and David Parks.

“I want to thank Assemblywoman Cohen, Senator Scheible, and all of the legislators who supported the protection of our beloved Desert Refuge,” said **Shaaron Netherton, Executive Director of Friends of Nevada Wilderness**. “The military wants to expand and shut the public out of one of the most remote and wild places that Nevadans and all Americans can now freely access for recreation. We understand the military’s need for training facilities, but the Air Force already has nearly 3 million acres of land in the area. Enough is enough. The public must not be fenced out of this special place.”

**Patrick Donnelly, Nevada State Director for the Center for Biological Diversity**, told legislators that the Desert Refuge is “a gem of the Mojave Desert in Las Vegas’ backyard.” He described the area as one of the least disturbed and most intact ecosystems in the southwest United States. “It’s of global importance to preserve the Mojave Desert ecosystem”, he testified. “We must not allow the Air Force to industrialize any more of the Refuge.”

**Larry Johnson, President of the Coalition for Nevada’s Wildlife**, told legislators in the public hearing that he is Native American by heritage and an outdoorsman by passion. “When you find that big arrowhead and know you’re not the first native sheep hunter that has traversed this country, it’s pretty special,” he testified in support of the resolution. Johnson also explained the marked difference between hunting for bighorn sheep in the area already controlled by the military and the area targeted for expansion. Already hunters in the controlled area are subject to ordinance training, background checks and other restrictions, including no opportunity to scout the area prior to the hunt. He told legislators hunters should not face additional restrictions on land now freely accessed by the public.

In a statement from **Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, Board Director Mario Walther** said, “Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, its membership, and the sportsmen and sportswomen of Nevada strongly support the strength and readiness of our nation’s military. However, we also believe that Nevada’s wildlife resources deserve an inclusive stakeholder driven approach in the development of public land. Nevada Bighorns Unlimited applauds the passage of this resolution and looks forward to working to ensure that Nevada wildlife has a voice throughout the process.”

**Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter Director Brian Beffort** said, “The resolution of opposition from the Nevada legislature reflects the widespread belief that the Desert National Wildlife Refuge should not be used for intensive military training, including bombing practice. The Desert Refuge, with its pristine wilderness, thriving wildlife, and cultural connections should be preserved. National defense must be balanced with conservation where possible-- and this is that opportunity.”

The resolution also notes the potential impact on the town of Beatty, NV, saying substantial encroachment by the military would negatively affect the local economy including ecotourism and mining.

The resolution was approved by the Nevada State Legislature with overwhelming bipartisan support: the final vote tally was 58-3. Specifically, the resolution asks Congress to oppose any military expansion in the Desert Refuge and to work collaboratively with all interested parties to come up with a compromise that enhances military training and provides essential protections for wildlife and outdoor recreation.

See the full text of Assembly Joint Resolution 2 [here](#).

Find more information on Desert National Wildlife Refuge [here](#).

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