

Reid Remarks On President Obama's Basin And Range Monument Designation

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"I can't think of a more perfect and peaceful place than the Nevada desert. It feels right. It feels like home."

Washington, D.C. – Nevada Senator Harry Reid spoke on the Senate floor today on President Obama's designation of the Basin and Range National Monument in Nevada. Below are his remarks:

Cowboy poet Georgie Connell Sicking conveyed my feelings for the Nevada desert in her poem, "Nevada's Subtle Beauty."

*Have you gone outdoors one morning after a summer rain,
With a gentle breeze blowing across a black sage valley
And smelled the earthy sagey freshness, none like it on this earth.
It sure makes life worth living, and you know when God was giving,
He didn't short-change Nevada.*

*Have you ever in the afternoon watched the mountains changing colors,
From the shadows as they grow from brown and black to tan and violet,
Or sometimes the deepest blue.*

*Ever changing, ever different, they seem to smile, then frown,
Waiting for sky colors to be added as the sun goes down.*

*If these things I mention you have seen and felt and known,
Beware, for Nevada has a hold on you and will claim you for her own.*

I can't think of a more perfect and peaceful place than the Nevada desert. It feels right. It feels like home.

Last Friday, President Obama permanently protected over 700,000 acres of land in eastern Nevada as the Basin and Range National Monument – which photographer Tyler Roemer has captured beautifully in these pictures. The land that President Obama designated as a monument, two basins and one range, is the perfect example of the stark beauty of the Nevada desert.

This monument is an area where the Mojave Desert meets the Great Basin and Joshua trees and cactus give way to sagebrush. This monument is an area that is home to desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope. This monument is an area that provided food and shelter for Native Americans, and where one can see their history today in incredible rock art panels called petroglyphs. This monument is an area that reflects our pioneering western history—from early explorers to the ranching that still exists.

I visited this area in 2007, after I had been informed of a four-decade-old art project in the middle of the desert. While going to see the work of art, I also saw the unique beauty of the Nevada desert. After I completed the trip, I became passionate about doing something to protect and preserve this incredible work of art and the stark beauty of the desert – both of which are priceless.

In the center of Basin and Range National Monument is City, a grand modern art sculpture the size of the National Mall, part of which you can see in this photo from the Triple Aught



Foundation.

The creator of City is internationally renowned artist Michael Heizer, who has been working on the project since 1972. The New York Times has called City – quote – “the most ambitious sculpture anyone has ever built, one of those audacious improbable American dreams at the scale of the West, conceived for the ages.” The canvas for Mr. Heizer’s art is the untouched desert land of the Basin and Range, which makes it all the more beautiful.

When I first spoke to President Obama about protecting this area, he said “Describe it to me.” I couldn’t. I still can’t. You just have to experience it. And that is why this National Monument designation is a win for today and future generations – so they can all experience it. By using his authority under the Antiquities Act, President Obama has helped preserve the life, history and culture of Nevada – the land I love.

As Steve Sebelius wrote in his Sunday column in the Las Vegas Review-Journal: “Preserving the land from development was the right thing to do. History will bear that out, long after the wails of the disaffected have ceased to echo through the desert canyons of Nevada’s newest monument.”