

**as if delivered live*

Statement of Senator Harry Reid
on Introduction of the *Las Vegas Valley Public Lands And Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act of 2012*
June 27, 2012

MR. REID. Mr. President, today I rise with my colleague Senator Heller to introduce the Las Vegas Valley Public Lands and Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act of 2012. This legislation will designate the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument in southern Nevada, expand the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, set aside lands for the expansion of Nevada institutions of higher education, and make thousands of acres available for private development and job creation in the Las Vegas valley.

I am proud to lead the introduction of this important bill, which has been years in the making. The hallmark component of this legislation is the establishment of the Tule Springs Fossil Bed National Monument. The proposed monument is supported by the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, Clark County, the Governor of Nevada, the State of Nevada's Division of State Parks, the National Parks Conservation Association, Protectors of Tule Springs, and thousands of Nevadans.

By designating the Tule Springs area a national monument managed by the National Park Service, we will conserve, protect and enhance this unique and nationally important resource. Nevadans, tourists, scientists, and school children will visit the monument to enjoy its scientific, educational, scenic and recreational values for decades to come.

The proposed monument is located in the northern part of the Las Vegas Valley, bounded by the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, the Red Rock National Conservation Area, and the Spring Mountain National Recreation Area. The Tule Springs area is recognized as having the largest assemblage of Ice Age fossils in the Southwest.

Over 400 paleontological sites have been discovered, providing a record of human activity dating back 11,000 years ago. Scientists have uncovered fossils of the giant Columbian mammoth, ground sloths the size of small cars, the American lion, and camelops. These great prehistoric mammals called North Las Vegas home for thousands of years.

Efforts to protect the paleontological treasures contained within the Las Vegas Wash began early last century. In 1933, the first fossil expedition in Tule Springs unearthed prehistoric bones that became known as “Tule the Baby Mammoth.” In 1962, scientists conducted the famous “big dig,” employing radiocarbon dating for the first time in the United States, which in turn dated Ice Age fossils from 23,800 to 28,000 years old. Despite this significant concentration of important fossil resources in the proposed monument, only a fraction of the area has been studied. Many more prehistoric treasures will be found in the decades to come.

The proposed Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument is the product of many years of work. Recognizing the threats to the area from off-road vehicles, vandalism, and dumping, a coalition of environmentalists, tribes, academics, and retired Park Service employees formed in the mid-2000s to seek federal protection for Tule Springs.

The Protectors of Tule Springs collected over 10,000 signatures, and local and national conservation groups launched a campaign to garner public support for adding the site to the National Parks System. In 2010, a Park Service reconnaissance report commissioned at the request of members of the Nevada congressional delegation found the site suitable for inclusion in the Park System.

The monument will also benefit the local economy. Proponents of the monument estimate that it will generate tens of millions of dollars for the regional economy within the early years of operation, bringing tourists and researchers from around the world to visit this one-of-a-kind place to explore fascinating natural history.

The stakeholder agreement to establish the proposed monument includes making a modest amount of public lands available for private development in the Las Vegas Valley, and the designation of two 640 acre job creation zones for the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas for master planned commercial development.

Furthermore, the legislation makes land available for the future expansion of campuses within the Nevada System of Higher Education, while increasing the size of the Red Rock National Conservation Area. It conveys land to Clark County for flood control for the future Ivanpah Valley Airport, it expands the Metro Police Training Facility by 80 acres to enhance public safety and the facility’s security, and allows the U.S. Forest Service to remedy mistaken trespass situations in the Spring Mountains area. Finally, it conveys 1,200 acres to Clark County to establish an off-highway vehicle recreation park, and designates public lands surrounding the park as an off-highway vehicle recreation area to help keep riders off of sensitive lands and habitat.

Mr. President, the Las Vegas Valley Lands and Fossil Beds National Monument Act is an ambitious piece of legislation, built on years of stakeholder input. It provides for balanced development and job creation within the Las Vegas Valley, while protecting vital natural and scientific resources that should be made more accessible for the public's enjoyment and education.

By making long-term and forward-looking improvements to public land management and stewardship in the Las Vegas Valley, I believe we have crafted a bill that will serve the best interests of Nevadans.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to move this important legislation through the legislative process.