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National monuments memo cited

Keith Rogers

By KEITH ROGERS

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Rep. Dean Heller says he is worried about an Interior Department **memo** that calls for carving two **national monuments** out of parts of central and Northern Nevada to protect American Indian cultural sites and habitat for sensitive wildlife.

"The fact that this administration is already circulating internal **memos** to bypass Congress and the public process is troubling," Heller, R-Nev., said in a news release Tuesday. "There should never be a rush to develop proposals that will have long lasting impacts on the local communities."

Two undated entries from the **memo** list Heart of the Great Basin with ranges in Nye County and Owyhee Desert in Nevada and Oregon as areas the Interior Department is considering for designation as **national monuments**.

The Heart of the Great Basin contains "a globally unique assemblage of cultural, wildlife and historical values. ... Thousands of petroglyphs and stone artifacts provide insight to the area's inhabitants from as long as 12,000 years ago," one entry reads. The area contains creeks, aspen groves and habitat for sage grouse and pika, an alpine rodent.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that populations of American pika were most at risk in Nevada, citing global warming as the primary threat to the species. Nevertheless, the wildlife service decided not to list the pika for Endangered Species Act protection because the rabbitlike animal isn't in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future. Pika populations are found in nine other Western states.

The second entry describes Owyhee Desert as an unprotected region in Oregon and Nevada that is "home to the world's largest herd of California bighorn sheep, elk, deer, cougar, redband trout, sage grouse and raptors."

"The Owyhee Desert is one of the most remote areas in the continental United States, characterized by juniper covered deserts, natural arches, mountains and ancient lava flows. The many branching forks of the Owyhee River form deep, sheer-walled canyons between desert wilderness and entice river runners from around the nation," the **memo** reads.

Lynn Davis, manager of a conservation group advocating creation of a fossil beds **national monument** near Tule Springs in the northern Las Vegas Valley, said her organization was "completely unaware of these two areas being considered for any protective status."

In contrast, the Tule Springs area "has been going through a very public, very open process to examine it with community support as a **national monument**," said Davis, program manager for the Nevada Field Office of the nonprofit **National** Parks Conservation Association.

A call to an Interior Department spokesman regarding the **memo** was not immediately returned late Tuesday.



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Nevada: Heller concerned over memo on national monuments

Heller says Interior Department bypassing public

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