

Hans-n-Harry's Garden of Astroturf

Stroke of the Pen, Law of the Land, Kinda (Not) Cool.

By Dave Skinner

In early May, U.S. Rep. Crescent Hardy, a freshman Republican representing the rural parts of southern Nevada, announced that he had copies of yet another “Draft—Internal—Privileged” document of uncertain origin but rather clear intent regarding “*Establishment of the Basin and Range National Monument*.”

In case you didn't already know, “basin and range” is a geologic term popularized by writer John McPhee, which describes Nevada's landform...and thus, Nevada.

At issue are “approximately 704,000 acres” in south-central Nevada. The draft has the usual boilerplate about preserving “antiquities” such as petroglyphs, artifacts, old mining sites, and Clovis points, but the real excitement comes last: “The location of a recent work of art...reflects the rugged landscape and confirms its importance as a unique geologic area. The artist Michael Heizer chose the area for his work ‘City,’ begun in 1972 and now nearing completion.”

It turns out the 71 years' young Mr. Heizer built a career out of digging holes, dumping bags of lime powder on the desert, and trenching dry lakebeds, eventually buying three sections in Garden Valley at \$30 per acre, where he gouged out “City.” Want to see it? Fly Google Earth to “City, Hiko, Nevada.” Also try “Double Negative, Nevada.”

In a nutshell, Heizer's dirt work echoes the Atacama “space alien” geoglyphs in Chile—kind of ironic since his property is right next door to Area 51, hmmm?

Of course, as is usual for private lands within monuments, “City...shall be part of the monument, upon acquisition of ownership or control by the federal government,” which will then go about “preventing harm to the artwork, including activities to

improve drainage and to prevent erosion, consistent with the care and management of the objects identified above.”

Because some aging “willing seller” artiste wants to unload his white elephant on taxpayers, 704,000 acres need to be monumentized? Um, not really. From the secret draft proclamation: “[N]o new rights-of-way for electric transmission or transportation shall be authorized within the monument.”

Anyone paying attention to Nevada politics knows about the controversial Yucca Mountain nuclear-waste dump and the

and Rep. Dina Titus (D-Vegas) reintroduced the legislation during this Congress.

No national monument has ever been designated without a tidal wave of “grass-roots” public support, of course, so for Basin and Range that support comes from a Facebook page with a first post on January 5. The protectbasinandrange.org (and .com) website was registered Dec. 26, 2014, by the Conservation Lands Foundation in Durango, Colo. Ring a bell? It should, as CLF is the 99.40 percent “publicly supported” entity established by Swiss tycoon Hans Wyss, with help from

former Interior secretary Bruce Babbitt, to designate and then politically defend Antiquities Act designations. Co-funder Hewlett Foundation gave \$500,000 to CLF in 2014 so that CLF “would continue support for its successful efforts to encourage the president to create new national monuments on public land” and “demonstrate broad public support for several more” including “outreach to build support for this campaign.”

Friends of Gold Butte is another group that's been around longer. It raised \$2,935 in 2009, its first year. By 2012, it had pulled down over \$152,000, with \$141,000, or 92 percent, from Pew Trusts, Western Conservation Foundation, and, yep, CLF.

So, those green grass roots sprouting in Garden Valley? That's Harry Reid's Astroturf, watered with Hans Wyss' money. ■

Editor's Note: In a White House ceremony July 10, President Barack Obama proclaimed the creation of the five-acre Waco Mammoth National Monument in Texas, the 331,000-acre Berryessa Snow Mountain NM in California's inner Coast Range, and of course the 704,000-acre Basin and Range National Monument in southern Nevada—over a million acres.



planned railroad from Caliente to the site near Beatty—which would run smack through the middle of the proposed monument. Coincidence? Here's another: Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV and a Yucca opponent) introduced the Garden Valley Withdrawal Act in September 2014 taking out 805,100 acres from all entry, leasing or patents. He