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EDITORIAL: Putting people last

Extremists give Lincoln County the shaft

Carpetbagging "environmental" groups have convinced U.S. District Judge David Hagen to delay a scheduled auction of some 6,300 acres of federally controlled land in Lincoln County near Mesquite, so that greens and bureaucrats can spend years traipsing through the desert, counting tortoises.

On Monday, Judge Hagen ruled that before the Bureau of Land Management can dispose of the land, as authorized by the federal Lincoln County Land Act of 2000, the agency must complete an environmental impact statement. As a result of this decision, the BLM has canceled the auction, which had been slated for August.

Mind you, the good folks in Lincoln County (pop. 4,000) would like nothing better than to conduct the auction, sell the property, and put it on the local tax rolls. Roughly 98 percent of the land in the county is in government hands, and with so little property in private hands to generate revenues, times are so tough there the taxpayers had to lay off the county manager.

But no. Three out-of-state environmental groups have abused the litigation process and placed the fate of endangered tortoises -- which may or may not be situated on the land in question, and for which millions of acres have already been barred to meaningful human use -- above the welfare of the actual people of Lincoln County ... not to mention those who might move there and pay taxes if the land were made available for development.

BLM officials say the EIS process could take as long as a couple of years, due in large part to the necessity of conducting hearings to receive thoroughly predictable public "input."

And if, at the end of this process, the EIS concludes the

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land sales can go forward? You can bet the greens will be ready to file another round of lawsuits to impose further delays, protesting the results of the very EIS process they now demand.

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Said attorney Christopher Krupp of the Western Land Exchange Project, representing the three out-of-state environmental groups: "BLM acts as though its role is to expedite the rapid development of southeastern Nevada." Well, it should be.

In a better world, Mr. Krupp and his cohorts would be forced to compensate the people of Lincoln County for the tax revenues they'll forgo as a consequence of this lawsuit.

Since that won't happen, at the very least, individuals or organizations with absolutely no connection with Southern Nevada or her people should lose their standing to bring lawsuits that prevent us from becoming stewards of our own lands. The Endangered Species Act -- for starters -- must be revamped, if not repealed entirely.

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