
DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHIEF

FROM: John W. Crockett
Deputy Chief
National Forest System

SUBJECT: Ecological Restoration Institutes

FILE CODE: 5100

ISSUE / RECOMMENDATION:

Formal designation of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) as the host institution for Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI), pursuant to Public Law 108-317, the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2004, and consistent with congressional direction and funding provided in Public Law (P.L.) 119-74, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which provides not less than \$1,400,000 to establish a new SWERI institute in the State of Nevada.

Option 1: Designate UNR as the host institution for the Nevada Southwest Ecological Restoration Institute.

- Pros:
 - Aligns with congressional appropriations direction in P.L. 119-74.
 - Enables timely obligation of appropriated funds.
 - Expands the SWERI capacity to better address restoration and wildfire challenges in Nevada, the Great Basin, and Sierra Front.
 - Builds on the established governance, collaborations, and work planning models of the existing institutes.
- Cons:
 - None identified.

Option 2: Delay designation of the Nevada institute.

- Pros
 - Allows additional time for review of designation procedures.
- Cons:
 - Delays implementation of congressional direction for the establishment of the Nevada institute.
 - Risks slowing coordination with partners and the development of restoration work.
 - Impedes timely obligation of appropriated funds.

Recommendation: Option 1: Formally designate UNR as the host institution for the Nevada Southwest Ecological Restoration Institute, consistent with the congressional appropriations direction in P.L. 119-74.



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UNR is well positioned to carry out the intent of the Act by adding capacity that builds on and expands the successful work of the existing SWERI, and by collaborating with federal, state, Tribal, academic, and non-governmental partners to apply science-based restoration treatments that reduce wildfire risk and improve ecosystem health across the interior West.

BACKGROUND:

Public Law 108-317, the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2004, was signed by the President on October 5, 2004. The goal of this legislation is to promote the use of adaptive ecosystem management to reduce the risk of wildfires and restore the health of forest and woodland ecosystems in the interior West. The Act established a network of Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes to “enhance the capacity to develop, transfer, apply, monitor, and regularly update practical science-based forest restoration treatments that will reduce the risk of severe wildfires, and improve the health of dry forest and woodland ecosystems in the interior West” in collaboration with land managers, research organizations, and other affected entities who design and implement restoration treatments.

In 2005, the Secretary of Agriculture formally designated three universities as host institutions for the original institutes in Arizona (Northern Arizona University), Colorado (Colorado State University), and New Mexico (New Mexico Highlands University). These institutions were determined to be the most appropriate locations to carry out the intent of P.L. 108-317 by advancing collaborative restoration science and applied management across the interior West. For more than twenty years, the SWERI network has demonstrated success advancing forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction throughout the interior West and beyond by applying a unique adaptive ecosystem management throughout the interior West and beyond by applying a model that bridges research, management, and policy to develop locally appropriate science-informed restoration actions on the ground.

Recently, P.L. 119-74 was passed and provides \$8 million to the SWERI program, including \$6.6 million to the three original institutes and \$1.4 million to establish an additional institute in the State of Nevada. The law also directs the Forest Service to coordinate with Northern Arizona University, New Mexico Highlands University, and Colorado State University and the State of Nevada to provide an update to the Interior Appropriations Subcommittees regarding actions taken to establish the Nevada institute.

The establishment of a SWERI institute in Nevada aligns with the purposes of P.L. 108-317 and expands the SWERI network to better address forest and woodland restoration, wildfire risk reductions, and applied science needs in the Great Basin and surrounding landscapes.

The UNR, has demonstrated capacity, leadership, and partnerships necessary to host the Nevada SWERI and to collaborate with the existing SWERI and federal, state, Tribal, academic, and local partners. UNR is home to Nevada’s only Forest Ecology and Management Program, with extensive faculty expertise in the ecology and management of woodlands and forests of the Great Basin and eastern Sierra Nevada. UNR maintains longstanding partnerships with the Humboldt-

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Toiyabe National Forest, Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, Nevada Division of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other non-governmental partners. UNR faculty and other partners have already begun coordinating with the existing SWERI through development of the Nevada Forest and Woodland Restoration Institute within the Nevada System of Higher Education.

DECISION BY THE CHIEF:

Approved: _____

Option 1: Option 2:

Disapproved: _____

Discuss with Me: _____

Date: _____