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Cortez Masto unveils alternative for naval air station expansion

By Jeniffer Solis

An effort to triple the size of a naval air station near Fallon continues to draw ire from conservationists, tribes and rural county officials but some groups are amenable to an alternate plan.

Last week, Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto [proposed an alternative](#) to a Navy proposal to take more than 660,000 acres of public land for bomb testing and military training activities.

The Fallon Naval Air Station already covers nearly 230,000 acres including four bombing ranges and a ground training area for the U.S. Navy SEALs.

The Congressional legislation that authorizes the Navy to occupy most of the land is set to expire in 2021 and will need Congress to renew the land withdrawal.

But Navy officials say the existing acreage is insufficient to train pilots with modern weaponry and want to expand to more than 890,000 acres — almost triple its current size.

About half of the proposed new acreage comes from expanding the Dixie Valley Training area about 40 miles east of Fallon in Churchill County that includes Dixie Valley, the only known habitat of the Dixie Valley toad.

The plan would also expand the Bravo 20 range, placing it adjacent to the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, an important resting area for migrating birds.

Tribes, environmental groups, rural officials, cattle ranchers and others have objected to various aspects of the proposed expansion, fearing loss of land, damage to the environment, and loss of economic opportunities.

Cortez Masto developed a draft of her alternative proposal with those concerns in mind, according to her office.

“This alternative to the Navy’s expansion proposal will meet the needs of service members who serve at NAS Fallon, while also prioritizing recommendations and input from conservation groups, outdoor recreation industries, sportsmen, farmers, ranchers, and local county and tribal governments in Pershing, Douglas, Lander and Churchill counties,” said Cortez Masto in a statement.

All together the [169-page draft bill](#), dubbed the “Northern Nevada Rural Land Management, Conservation, and Military Readiness Act,” could potentially transfer an additional 400,000 acres out of public hands across the state for military use and local economic development. However, unlike the Navy’s proposal, Cortez Masto’s bill would [not hand control](#) of the Dixie Valley Special Management Area or Sand Springs Mountains to the Navy, provides

compensation for those affected by the expansion including tribes, and creates new protected areas.

The proposal will now be referred for consideration in the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020.

Environment

The bill would add about 890,000 acres of land as natural conservation and wilderness areas across rural Northern Nevada and removes about 300,000 acres of land from oil and gas leasing in the Ruby Mountains.

However, some environmental groups have remained critical of the expansion despite compromises.

“Cortez Masto’s bill would be one of the biggest land grabs in Nevada’s history,” said Patrick Donnelly, Nevada state director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Nevadans have clearly expressed their opposition to this military land seizure, yet the senator has rolled out the red carpet for the Navy to drop bombs on our public lands.”

While Cortez Masto’s bill would cut the Navy expansion by about 51,000 acres in the Bravo 20 range it would still give the Navy nearly 167,000 acres adjacent to the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge.

“The bombing-range expansion would do significant harm to central Nevada’s wildlife. Bombs would be dropped on important bighorn sheep and mule deer habitat and increasing low-level overflights would have devastating effects on birds,” Donnelly said. “The irreplaceable aquatic habitat at Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, a vital stopover on the Pacific flyway, would be severely harmed by overflights, likely disturbing migratory and breeding birds. The refuge is Nevada’s largest winter habitat for bald eagles.”

Other environmental groups are less critical. Friends of Nevada Wilderness have worked with county lawmakers and the Nevada congressional delegation for years to develop improved versions of the [Pershing County Lands Bill](#) and [Douglas County Lands Bill](#), which have been rolled into the draft legislation.

“These are all bills that we have been involved in and would really like to see them passed,” said Friends of Nevada Wilderness Executive Director Shaaron Netherton. “We’re grateful to the senator for continuing to care about getting these passed because they are really important conservation bills.”

Full implementation of the Navy’s proposal for the expansion “would be horrible and disastrous,” said Netherton, adding that Cortez Masto’s proposal is a vast improvement.

“We’ve never been fans of more land being taken from the public for the military,” said Nertherton. “I would rather not have any expansion of the Fallon Naval Air Station. Nevada’s already lost so much public land to the military.”

Cortez Masto’s proposal would also prevent the Dixie Valley Special Management Area — about 248,000 acres — and home of the Dixie Valley toad from being withdrawn by the Navy, however, the Navy would still be able to conduct limited training activities.

Tribal

Dating back to 1959, the Navy has contaminated over 6,000 acres of the Walker River Paiute Tribe’s reservation. Cortez Masto’s proposal includes a \$20 million payment from the U.S. Navy as compensation for those historical harms, as well as replacement lands for the tribe.

The proposal would withdraw about 92,000 acres of land to protect tribal cultural resources, including placing nearly 11,000 acres in a trust for the Fallon Paiute Tribe and about 3,000 in trust for the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada in Douglas County. Funds for the Navy and Interior to pay for three full-time tribal positions to facilitate tribal access and identify cultural resources would be available under the proposal.

The Fallon Paiute Tribe have been battling the expansion since 2016 and say they will carefully evaluate the proposal and consider any good faith effort to strengthen it and better protect the tribe’s interests.

“The Tribe has long opposed expansion, because it would allow bombing on our ancestral lands and deprive the Tribe of access to areas that are essential to its culture and way of life,” read a statement released by the tribe. “The Navy has already destroyed our origin site at Fox Peak with its target practice, and bombed our most important medicine rock, which is now in the Bravo-20 range. The expansion proposal deepens these wounds and threatens similar harms over hundreds of thousands of acres.”

“The Tribe understands that the Navy has exerted great political pressure and that Senator Cortez-Masto has attempted to create what in her view is an acceptable compromise. However, we have the most to lose from expansion and remain deeply concerned that any benefits of the proposal come at the Tribe’s expense.”

While the Fallon Paiute Tribe remains opposed to the proposals, another tribe has expressed support.

Amber Torres, chair of the Walker River Paiute Tribe, said that while the alternative isn’t perfect, it does represent a solution that gives tribes a voice at the table.

“We, as the Walker River Paiute Tribe, want to thank Senator Cortez Masto for her commitment to resolving our historical grievances for contamination of our reservation lands. We appreciate her outreach to help us find a solution, and we hope that Congress will approve our settlement before the end of the year,” Torres said.

The proposal would also create at least three new National Conservation Areas – Fox Peak, Grimes Point, and Pistone-Black Mountain, an area of cultural significance to the Walker River Paiute Tribe and others.

Rural Counties

Several rural counties, including Churchill, Lander, Mineral, Pershing and Nye, would be affected, and rural residents fear the Navy’s proposal does not do enough to mitigate the [economic impact of the range expansion to rural communities](#).

The expansion would permanently close off portions of active federal grazing permits surrounding the Fallon range, which ranches use to feed their livestock.

Cortez Massto’s proposal would offer mitigation payments to impacted mining claims, grazing allotment, and water claim holders as well as compensation to private landowners whose land is seized by the Navy.

Churchill County would be the most impacted under the Navy’s proposed expansion.

“In the case of ranchers that have lost either water rights or grazing claims you have to make them whole somehow. These are not willing sellers,” said Pete Olsen, chair of the Churchill County Commission. “The Navy has to do these things first rather than dragging people along. Maybe you don’t live long enough to get compensated, we are trying to make sure the Navy is an honest broker.”

The senator’s proposal would also convey land to Churchill, Douglas, and Lander county for economic growth opportunities. It also requires the Navy to allow and manage access on select withdrawn lands for game hunting, outdoor recreation, geothermal development, grazing, mining and flood management.

“Nobody gets everything you want, and we certainly don’t. It doesn’t fix everything the way we want it,” said Olsen, adding, however, that the bill does take a look at what rural residents demanded.



[Jeniffer Solis](#)

Reporter | Jeniffer was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada where she attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas before graduating in 2017 with a B.A in Journalism and Media Studies. While at UNLV she was a senior staff writer for the student newspaper, the UNLV Scarlet and Gray Free Press, and a news reporter for KUNV 91.5 FM, covering everything from the Route 91 shooting to UNLV housing. She has also contributed to the UNLV News Center and worked as a production engineer for several KUNV broadcasts before joining the Nevada Current. She’s an Aries.

Some lucky photographer in California captured a hummingbird sharing a water fountain with 4 bumble bees!!! 🐝🐝🐝🐝



[Janice Hammett Smith](#) ·



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[buzzfeednews.com](https://www.buzzfeednews.com)

[Native American Voters Could Shift The Election In Nevada. This 22-Year-Old Isn't So Sure Her Vote Really Counts.](#)

[“If I do vote, it’s not really going anywhere because the Electoral College is just going to choose anyway,” Maria Martinez, a member of Nevada’s Walker River Paiute Tribe, told BuzzFeed News.](#)

Pendley's BLM decisions in Western states targeted for rollback

By Jacob Fischler



Sage grouse in flight in Elko County. (Photo by Jearred Foruria/Bureau of Land Management, Elko District)

A federal judge's ruling that the acting head of the Bureau of Land Management was serving unlawfully in that position could have implications for dozens of decisions the agency made across the West during the past 15 months—including in Nevada, Arizona and Colorado.

After the judge's Sept. 25 ruling that William Perry Pendley had been unlawfully acting as director of the BLM since July 2019, conservation groups and state governments in affected areas have been working to identify agency actions that could be overturned as a result. Tuesday, a coalition of 60 conservation groups, led by the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation, [listed 30 site-specific decisions](#) that the groups said should be reversed.

The list included two Nevada sites, five in Colorado and two in Arizona.

In addition, the groups raised questions about the contentious move of BLM headquarters last year from Washington, D.C., to Grand Junction, Colo.

In a federal suit that Montana Gov. Steve Bullock brought against the BLM and Pendley, U.S. District Judge Brian Morris ruled that only a presidentially nominated and Senate-confirmed director could lead the agency.

President Donald Trump appointed Pendley to be deputy director for policy and programs in July 2019. That position did not require Senate approval.

The suit focuses on two major decisions in Montana but has implications throughout BLM's jurisdiction, mainly across 12 Western states.

“Obviously, if he was acting illegally in Montana, he was acting illegally everywhere,” said Tracy Stone-Manning, the National Wildlife Federation's associate vice president for public lands. Stone-Manning previously worked for Bullock.

It remains unclear, though, how decisions outside Montana might be successfully challenged.

Monday filings

Another quartet of conservation groups—the Center for Biological Diversity, the Western Environmental Law Center, Western Watersheds Project and WildEarth Guardians—asked to join the Montana suit on Monday.

The Nevada actions the groups are targeting for reversal are:

- Approving plans for the Gemini Solar Project near Las Vegas on May 11.
- The Nevada and Northeastern California draft supplemental environmental impact statement for Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation, published Feb. 21.

The Arizona actions the conservation groups are targeting for reversal are:

- Allowing livestock grazing at Sonoran Desert National Monument, approved on Sept. 29.
- Approving a 150-mile transmission line from Maricopa County to Riverside County, Calif., on Nov. 21, 2019.

The Colorado actions the groups are targeting for reversal are:

- The resource management plan for Browns Canyon National Monument, approved July 27.
- The resource management plan for Uncompahgre Field Office, approved April 10.
- An amendment to the travel and transportation management resource management plan for the White River Field Office, approved Feb. 7.
- A designation of three areas of critical environmental concern in Southwest Colorado, approved Jan. 29.
- The Northwest Colorado draft supplemental environmental impact statement for Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation, published Feb. 21.

They said if allowed to join, they would provide a list of decisions that should be overturned, including a decision last week to allow livestock grazing at Sonoran National Desert in Arizona.

Melissa Hornbein, an attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center who led that effort, declined to comment until the judge rules on her request.

In a court filing Monday, Bullock said the agency should set aside resource management plans for the Montana sites and an amendment for a third site.

The federal government argued Monday that none of Pendley's actions should be overturned.

In the specific resource management plans Bullock challenged, Pendley had delegated decision-making and took no formal role in the decisions, the government said. The state also failed to show it was harmed by any of the decisions, the government said.

Stone-Manning said it shouldn't matter if Pendley delegated decisions. The delegation itself was an improper use of authority and he likely had influence over the subordinate to whom he delegated decisions.

“Some of these policies were signed by Mr. Pendley and are therefore unlawful on their face and must be set aside,” the Tuesday letter said. “Others were not signed by Mr. Pendley but issued under his direction and approval, and so must be set aside absent any additional showing on the part of BLM that they are lawful.”

Bureau-wide policies

In addition to site-specific decisions, the National Wildlife Federation coalition said certain policies and rulemakings should be overturned. Among those was a break from the fees oil and gas developers must pay to operate on federal lands, which has separately come under scrutiny.

The BLM put that policy in place in an effort to keep oil and gas exploration afloat during the COVID-19 economic downturn. The Government Accountability Office [said Tuesday](#) the policy was inconsistently applied in different states.

The conservation groups also raised the issue of the BLM moving its headquarters last year from Washington to Grand Junction. It's unclear how much control Pendley had over the move, but he acted as the public face of the decision.

The Trump administration and supporters of the plan, including Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., sold it as a way for the bureau to move closer to the lands it oversees. Opponents have said it undermined the BLM's professional workforce based in Washington.

The letter only calls for a “review” of the move. Stone-Manning said the ruling could allow for BLM employees who did not make the move to win their jobs back.

“Hundreds of people lost their jobs because they chose not to make the move,” Stone-Manning said. “Who signed that paperwork? Was it William Perry Pendley? And if so, do those people have some recourse to get their jobs back? I don't know, but it's a question that needs to be answered.”

A Department of Interior spokesman did not return a message seeking comment Tuesday.



Jacob Fischler is a national correspondent for States Newsroom.



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Donald Trump Jr. to host Native coalition launch Mary Annette Pember ict

The campaign event is set to take place Thursday in Williams, Arizona. President Donald Trump's campaign is launching the "Native Americans for Trump Coalition" on Thursday with an Arizona event featuring Donald Trump Jr.

The gathering at the rodeo grounds in Williams, west of Flagstaff, is free to the public, and registration is required, according to coalition [information online](#). Doors open at 12 p.m., and the event begins at 1:30 p.m. MST.

Michael Woestehoff, Navajo, who regularly [blogs](#) about gains for Indian Country during the Trump administration, indicated he will attend.

In his blog, Woestehoff writes that Native American accomplishments with Trump include creating the [Presidential Task Force](#) on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives; signing the Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act; awarding over \$273.4 million through the [Justice Department](#) to improve public safety and serve crime victims in American Indian and Alaska Native communities; and signing a bill into law granting federal recognition to six tribes in Virginia — the Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Upper Mattaponi, Rappahannock, Monacan and Nansemond — as well as the Montana Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

Some well-known Navajo politicians also have expressed support for Trump's reelection, including Myron Lizer, Navajo Nation vice president; Karen Bedonie, former Republican candidate for U.S. House in New Mexico; and Elisa Martinez, former GOP candidate for U.S. Senate in New Mexico.

"Re-electing President Trump will ensure better economic opportunities, safer communities, and a healthy environment for Indian Country and all tribal generations for generations to come," Woestehoff wrote in [Medium](#).

The campaign event is one of three this week in Arizona for the president's eldest son. The first was a "Make America Great Again" event Wednesday in Tucson, and the other is a "Latter-day Saints for Trump" event Thursday in Mesa.

The events come a week after Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and vice presidential nominee Sen. Kamala Harris [met with several tribal leaders](#) in Phoenix.

(no news at "press time" of how this went)

WEWANTMOREHISTORY

by Greg Downs, Hilary N. Green, Scott Hancock, and Kate Masur

At historic sites across the United States on September 26, dozens of participating historians presented evidence to disrupt, correct, or fill out the oversimplified and problematic messages too often communicated by the nation's memorial landscape.

Esther O'Daye No new about how this went at "press time".

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