

Mayor uncomfortable with support for national monument

By Steve Ramirez/sramirez@lcsun-news.com Las Cruces Sun-News

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LAS CRUCES — Less than a week after county commissioners began to reconsider their support for the proposed Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, Mayor Ken Miyagishima said he now wants to seek revisions in the wording of a proposed council resolution supporting the monument proposal.

Miyagishima said he has several concerns with the existing wording of the proposed resolution, which council could take action on at its July 16 meeting. His concerns were that the Bureau of Land Management could try to acquire all state and private land within the boundaries of the proposed monument; that 38 private land owners with grazing allotments are apparently within the contemplated boundaries of the monument; that a water line for the village of Hatch is supposedly within the monument's boundaries; and that as much as \$2.5 million in State Trust Land could be lost.

"I did some homework, and this is what I discovered," Miyagishima said. "Now, I know what an investigative reporter feels like."

Based on his initial findings, Miyagishima added he would be "uncomfortable" supporting the monument proposal. However, he is willing to work toward compromises with supporters of the monument.

"I'm willing to compromise and let them accomplish what they want to accomplish," Miyagishima said. "After speaking with them, they initially appear to be willing to work on some pretty significant concessions, and I owe it to them to try to do that. But as it's now worded, I would be uncomfortable bringing it forward to the council."

Jeff Steinborn, a monument supporter, said he has spoken with Miyagishima and believes some of his concerns are based on misunderstandings.

"Of course, we're willing to address all reasonable concerns," Steinborn said. "...Unfortunately, there appears to be a misinformation campaign under way and we're working toward dispelling those misunderstandings. We look forward to his continued support."

When the national monument proposal was introduced several months ago, Miyagishima was one of the first elected officials to publicly endorse the proposal. But from a council work session, where the monument proposal was discussed about a month ago, Miyagishima said he discovered additional information that now has him thinking differently.

"The issue of the BLM apparently trying to acquire all state and private land within the monument's boundary is the biggest one to me," Miyagishima said.

But Steinborn said Miyagishima shouldn't worry.

"Federal law specifically states that it cannot impact state or private lands within the monument. It's pretty clear," Steinborn said. "We're certainly working to illustrate those issues to make people more comfortable with what's being proposed. We'll continue to work through this."

Miyagishima said he would elaborate further on his concerns toward the end of Monday's meeting, where comments from the mayor and council are reserved.

As for the meeting, itself, the council will consider formal adoption of a joint planning agreement with the State Land Office. State Land Commissioner Ray Powell is trying to improve relations between the land office and local government agencies within the state.

"Our mutual agreement to work together includes joint planning, master planning existing state lands within the city limits, joint review of annexations, joint marketing for economic development opportunities and much more," City

Manager Robert Garza said. "This relationship is particularly important to Las Cruces due to the large amount of state land in the Las Cruces area."

On the council's consent agenda is the award of a \$325,634 contract to Highland Enterprises, Inc., of Las Cruces, for planned improvements at the intersection of Del Rey Boulevard and Engler Road. An underpass that would extend Engler Road onto the city's East Mesa is currently under construction.

"As part of this state transportation department project, the city is responsible for improvements to the local roads adjoining the project limits of the new underpass," Garza said.

The council will also initiate the process to modify the city's Erosion Control ordinance by conducting a first reading of proposed updates. If the council agrees to bring the changes forward for formal consideration, a final vote on the revised ordinance could occur on July 16.

Steve Ramirez can be reached at (575) 541-5452 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) (575) 541-5452 [end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#). Also follow him on Twitter: [@SteveRamirez6](#).

If you go

What: Las Cruces City Council meeting

When: 1 p.m. Monday

Where: City Hall, 700 N. Main St.

ITV/Internet: The meeting will be televised live at 1 p.m. Monday on CLC-TV, Comcast Cable channel 20 and webcast live at www.clctv.com. Click on the "Meetings" link, and then on the "View event" link to access the webcast.

Information: City Clerk's Office, (575) 541-5452