

Elk, exotic animals on Nye menu

Commissioners hear concerns about both at March 5 meeting

By RICH THURLOW

TONOPAH — People with more vivid imaginations at the March 5 county commission meeting might have had visions of an elk being pursued down Calvada Blvd. by a lion. Such a scenario remains highly unlikely, though the topics regarding both were discussed consecutively.

Ken Thompson aired his concerns about the growing elk population in the state. The elk plan was approved by the Legislature during the 1995 session, and was turned over to the Nevada Dept. of Wildlife. The problem, Thompson said, is that NDOW is treating the 1995 measure as a mandate to increase elk herds, and that the plan to do so seems to change after every public meeting.

Increasing elk numbers chase away deer, Thompson said, and their forage takes away the equivalent of two grazing rights. Elk supposedly eat different vegetation than cattle, but Thompson said when one is hungry it will eat anything.

Expanded elk herds have caused considerable environmental damage in New Mexico as well as Yellowstone National Park, he said.

"There are too many elk, and we have had too little say in the matter," Thompson said. "I have no problem with having some elk, I just don't want the numbers they are talking about."

"What do you want us to do about it?" Commissioner Cameron McRae asked.

The goal, Thompson said, was for the commissioners to be aware of what is going on and to form an opinion in opposition to the plan. "The problem is too many people aren't aware of this problem," Thompson said.

Dr. Jim Marble of the county's natural resources office

will look into the matter, but there is no guarantee he'll reach the same conclusion as Thompson about the elk plan. Commissioner Joni Eastley said she has received calls in support of larger elk herds, while Chairman Jeff Taguchi said he could understand the concerns of ranchers.

The agenda item calling for establishing parameters for an exotic animal ordinance came next. Two recent events serve as the impetus for the law, including a bite suffered by a Pahrump man while feeding another person's big cat, as well as Karl Mitchell shooting one of his big cats when he determined it was becoming unstable while being moved from one location to another.

Chief Deputy District Attorney Ron Kent said work on a "state of the art" ordinance was still being researched, and there was nothing as yet to present to the commissioners. Chairman Jeff Taguchi said the issue regarded animal welfare as well as public safety, and that it was not his goal to prevent people from having exotic animals on their property.

Greg McFarlane and Susanna Kukol, though, could think of no reason that any new law was necessary.

McFarlane said "no pattern has been established" showing such a law was needed. The animals in question are inherently dangerous, he said, but there have not been a number of incidents that would justify a new law on the books. "This could hamper owners who are responsible," he said.

Kukol offered basically the same argument, saying any mishap with big cats occurred due to "stupidity," something that can't be eliminated through legislation.

Taguchi wrapped up the discussion by saying the participation by owners of exotic animals was welcome in the process.