

Military takeover of Nev. wildlife refuge angers conservationists



Bighorn sheep at the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. Photo/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Conservation groups are blasting a plan in Congress that could split Desert National Wildlife Refuge north of Las Vegas and hand half of it over to the U.S. Air Force.

The change, tucked quietly into the House version of a massive defense authorization bill now in conference committee, would make land withdrawals permanent for the Nevada Test and Training Range and put the Department of Defense in charge of almost 850,000 acres currently managed by both the Pentagon and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Attempts to get a Department of Defense comment on the plan were unsuccessful Wednesday, but the proposal's backers say it will save the military the time and expense of having to reapply for an extension every couple of decades just to keep using the land the way it has been used since World War II.

But environmental advocates worry it could curtail future wildlife research and management on that part of the refuge.

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