

Thus, land withdrawals for military purposes and other non-military projects like the Tahoe Reno Industrial Park and I-11 (another Canada-to-Mexico highway) tear up large areas that many Nevadans value while in-state officialdom usually accepts them without skepticism.

Following a major disaster at Lake Denmark Naval Ammunition Depot and nearby Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey in 1926 that left 21 people dead and the depot leveled, federal eyes were cast to other, less populated areas for a replacement. In 1930, the depot was reopened in Hawthorne, Nevada. That was at least done openly. In 2005, an obscure federal agency called the Defense National Stockpile Center chose that same site as the dump for federal stocks of mercury without ever informing the public plainly and clearly in advance what it was planning.

The Reno Army Air Base operated north of Reno from 1942 to 1945. In 1948, an Air National Guard Base opened on the site, becoming Stead Air Force Base in 1951. It closed down again in 1966, the airfield handed off to the City of Reno and other properties sold off to private buyers.

Over the years, as Stead evolved into its own community, it has often seemed that every time someone put a shovel in Stead ground, something nasty was found. On one occasion after construction equipment punctured a steel drum buried underground, the entirety of Stead was evacuated.

With that kind of history, Nevadans in Congress arranged in the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986 for a sweeping report on planned and proposed military projects in the state. It was unfortunate that it did not also mandate that past activities be included, so that some of the hazards in the state's military installations could have been identified instead of being inadvertently discovered from time to time, as at Stead.

The final report, *Special Nevada Report*, took five years to prepare and was delivered in 1991. It was compiled by the Air Force, Navy, and U.S. Interior Department, with input from the Army and U.S. Department of Energy. Assisting in its preparation were Science Applications International Corporation and Nevada's Desert Research Institute. Every effort was made to assure the report was incomprehensible to the everyday reader, from technical jargon to an oddball page-numbering system and no index.

**Officials  
are not always  
informed in the  
delicate ecology of  
a desert terrain.**

While the report contained hints of the difficulties Nevada faced in dealing with the federal government, such as a section titled "Objects and Armaments Dropped from Aircraft," it did little for the public. Those who persevered could find useful information, but as an example, there was little in the report on wide rumors of unexploded ordnance in and around the

Fallon Naval Air Station and other facilities. The term *unexploded* appears just four times in the report's 732 pages. Still, there were indications of occasional indifference for the lands that federal agencies were using: "Activities on and in the vicinity of NAS Fallon have eliminated a large portion of the native vegetation. No studies have been conducted which documents effects on plants, fish, and wildlife on and in the vicinity of NAS Fallon from activities associated with the Station. Activities on the bombing ranges of the FRTC [Fallon Range Training Complex] have disturbed native vegetation."

It is not easy to nail down exactly how much Nevada land is devoted to military uses, but the figure 2.9 million acres is usually cited. In the Navy withdrawal referenced by Amodei, the Navy is seeking to add 619,000 acres of federal land and more than 65,000 acres of private land to the Fallon Naval Air Station. That would be an increase of 23.5 percent in Nevada land controlled by the Pentagon—and does not even count the planned Air Force withdrawal.

Rep. Amodei is one of the more moderate Republicans in Congress. His interest in using the planned withdrawals to exploit other opportunities for local governments and business is a time-honored technique for U.S. House members.

But it does not need to stop there. The withdrawals can be an opportunity, not just for economic development, but for education of officialdom on the ecology of the Great Basin and the necessity of Nevadans being informed of hazards up front, before a project is approved. And it can be an opportunity to examine the notion of a state seeing a huge chunk of its acreage being shut off to its residents. Most states are smaller than Nevada. Imagine their reaction if the Pentagon came calling for such large swathes of land. □

The Special Nevada Report can be read at the University of North Texas Digital Library at [bit.ly/2INFTTE](http://bit.ly/2INFTTE).

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