

Testimony of Mary Coburn - December 27, 1994

I believe it was in September of 1994 that I first met Mary Coburn. She was doing work for John Fallon. John was operating one or two ranches which he was leasing west of Orovada (north of Winnemucca). The ranches were a part of the Garvey land holdings. At the time the BLM was threatening to cut John's permitted use because of alleged damage to Lahontan cutthroat trout habitat and John had hired Mary as a fisheries consultant regarding range and riparian condition. I was along hoping to learn more of the issue.

Later I had Mary and an associate do consulting work with regards to our own allotment. It was during one of her trips to our ranch that I conducted the following interview. Wayne Hage and others had told me of the lavish camping trips and drinking parties which the Forest people were throwing at Guffy's Camp on Table Mountain and another spot somewhere along the Walker River. And so, when I learned that Mary had worked for the Forest Service for a number of years, and that she had been stationed there at Tonaph during much of the time when such was going on, I ask her if it were true. This is what Mary told me:

"From what I saw and what I heard, I believe Jim Nelson probably had about \$300,000 set aside for pack trips and entertainment."

"His favorite places for taking people are Guffy's on Table Mountain and up Reese River. He probably takes a group up to Table Mountain four or five times a year and up to the head of Reese River about the same. They also go up the east fork of the Walker River a lot - that's where they take the politicians from Carson City mostly."

"They furnish a camp cook and all kinds of good things to eat and drink. Whenever I went there were only one or two of us that didn't drink. There was usually whiskey bottles and beer cans scattered all over. Even there at the Guard Station in Meadow Canyon they held big parties."

"Important people - those they usually invited were Willie Mollinie, Rose Strickland, County Commissioners and other politicians. That's what they keep all their horses for - taking people on pack trips. They show them how bad the cows are - they say, 'see what the cows did here and see what the cows did there.' Jim Nelson knows how to manipulate people. He knows how to get people committed to his agenda."

"The Forest Service is very military - you must say what they want and think the way they want - you must be indoctrinated - that's why they didn't like me - I was not dependable - I thought too much for myself. I could see that they were not following the law or their regulations. It was for that reason that I went back to obtain a background in law. I thought I might be able to change things."

"I had been with the Forest Service for twelve and a half years. I was with the Forest Service during most of the years of the conflict with Wayne Hage. I was there when Berry Davis,

Jim Nelson, and \_\_\_\_\_ Gantze discussed how they would use the Meadow Canyon Allotment as an example of how range improved when cattle were removed. They wanted to use Wayne Hage as an example to show other ranchers what would happen if they did not comply. I did a lot of the fishery inventory on the Meadow Canyon Allotment. It was not a scenario where damage was found and so it was determined that the cattle must be removed. It was more of a situation where we did our work after the cattle were removed in order to justify the removal. In other words, they were doing these studies after the fact in order to justify their actions.”

“An example of how bad it was - we tried to use the Meadow Canyon Guard Station pastures as an example of comparison but the utilization inside the Guard Station pasture was greater than it was on the Allotment. Their data was faulty. They would intentionally do their transects at crossings or places that were not representative of the actual condition of the stream. When determining soil conditions, they would hunt for spots to show what they wanted to show.”

“I was the one who put the files together to be used by the attorneys. I didn’t like it - they didn’t have a good argument. I didn’t feel good about it.”

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When I asked Mary if she would put her testimony in affidavit form she said:

“I don’t feel I want this kind of testimony documented - not unless I can see that it will help. I don’t want to get personal. Jim Nelson is a not a good person. He will see that I don’t get work. He will see to it that I am not used as a consultant. He knows how to hurt a person’s career. I would like to keep things quiet. I don’t want him to know that I am working for you. There is a guy who was forced out of the Forest Service by Jim Nelson. He now works for the BLM in Ely. He could tell you about Jim Nelson but he can’t, he’d lose his job.”

End of testimony.

