



# LAS VEGAS BUSINESS PRESS

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## Buckwheat bucking businesses in North Las Vegas

During these challenging times, businesses and individuals are tightening their belts, examining their expenditures and cautiously watching the latest economic indicators. It's not business as usual.

The housing and construction industries have taken a beating. Aside from the subprime loan disaster that was the impetus for our current downside, escalating land prices and rising construction material costs have made development more expensive. Add environmental restrictions and the costs of building master-planned communities, and commercial/industrial developments have spiraled upward.

In 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service moved to conserve almost 8,000 acres of land after a government botanist discovered more than 1,000 Las Vegas buckwheat and more than 500 Las Vegas bear poppy. Now the Nevada Division of Forestry is exploring the listing of Las Vegas buckwheat on the critically endangered species list. Unlike bear poppy, buckwheat generally can be transplanted, although state biologists believe moving it could jeopardize the plant. In this time of fiscal slowdown, what we don't need are more restrictions repressing development and commerce. In North Las Vegas, environmental restrictions already hindered development when the bear poppy was listed as a critically endangered plant species. Olympia Group had to set aside 300 acres as a conservation area when environmentalists found the endangered plants in the area. The discovery threatened to hold up the sale of the land by the Bureau of Land Management. Olympia paid \$639 million for 2,675 acres in 2005 after North Enterprises, a joint venture between American Nevada Co. and Del Webb, bought 1,940 acres from BLM for \$47 million.

Most of us embrace environmentally sound policy for the sake of current and future generations. We are paying attention to those things that affect



Sharon Powers

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our quality of life: air quality, energy reliance and conservation, recycling efforts to address landfill issues, and the need to live and build green. More importantly, we need to examine the mechanisms in place that give these government agencies the ability to thwart the continued economic growth of our cities. Critics will say that we need to preserve any plant species that are deemed endangered at any cost. They will also say that the slowdown in growth is a good thing.

Of course, many of these are the same people who moved here in the last five years and now want to shut the door. Growth in our communities has created the viable business climate that we've all enjoyed for so many years; we need to continue to be responsible in that growth and allow our respective cities to develop.

The North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce opposes the proposed listing by the Nevada Division of Forestry for the Las Vegas buckwheat (*Eriogonum corymbosum* var. *nilessi*) as a critically endangered species. In the interest of providing opportunities for small-business development within the city, any additional regulatory intrusion is a deterrent to potential business owners. The presence of known plants or the possibility that plants could occur on properties within the city, regardless if suitable habitat is even present on these properties, may affect North Las Vegas' small-business development potential.

Any project on public or private land that results in disturbance to an occupied habitat or the loss of individual buckwheat plants would require a permit from NDF. Economic impacts to property owners with buckwheat plants on their property would include the cost of delays and lost business opportunities during the processing of the NDF permit and the cost of any necessary mitigation measures. These requirements may pose a significant economic burden on or restrict expansion of small-business enterprises in North Las Vegas and anywhere in the valley where these plant species exist.

Sharon Powers is president and CEO of the North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce.

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