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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BOARD AGENDA MEMO

MEETING DATE: June 3, 2025

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Carissa Cyr, Senior Management Analyst

SUBJECT: Resolution designating the Kneebone Ranch and Cemetery, located at 14936 Spenceville Road, Penn Valley, CA 95946 (APN 002-040-016), within the Spenceville Wildlife Area, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-06

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution.

FUNDING: N/A

BACKGROUND: On May 16, 2025, the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission (NCHLC) voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to designate the Kneebone Ranch and Cemetery, located at 14936 Spenceville Road, Penn Valley, CA 95946 (002-040-016), within the Spenceville Wildlife Area, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-06. Specifically on May 5, 2025, Karen Hill, on behalf of the Kneebone family descendants, applied to the NCHLC requesting the site of the Kneebone Ranch and Cemetery be considered and designated as a County historical landmark. The current owner of the property, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, signed and consented to the application and approved placement of a plaque at the site.

As outlined in the attached supporting documents, The landmark will honor the Kneebone Family, early pioneers of the county. Joseph Kneebone Sr. emigrated from Cornwall, England to California in 1867, where he acquired a 1,595-acre ranch near the historic town of Spenceville. He established a thriving teaming business, working alongside his sons, Andrew and Joseph Jr., to haul freight using 20-mule team wagons guided by a single "jerk line" to a lead animal. From the 1860s through the 1890s, they transported goods from Wheatland to Virginia City via the old Henness Pass Road. Joseph's wife, Mary Ann Reed Kneebone, arrived in Spenceville in 1871 with their children William, Joseph Reed, and Esther, while their eldest son, Andrew Reed Kneebone, remained in England to complete his education and later joined the family in 1875. Today, five members of the original pioneer Kneebone family including Joseph Sr., Mary Ann, Joseph Jr., Richard, and Mary Kneebone are buried on the hill overlooking the family ranch.

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The Kneebone family embodied the spirit of early teamster transportation and ranching in Nevada County during the late 19th century. Their work was instrumental in supporting the Northern Mines and fostering the growth of local commerce, agriculture, and surrounding communities. Their legacy is deeply connected to the Comstock Strike in Virginia City and the vital transportation routes of the time, including the Henness Pass Road and the historic covered bridge at Bridgeport. The Kneebone families of Spenceville and Bridgeport share a strong bond of both commerce and lineage, representing a remarkable story of pioneer achievement, and, like many such stories, one marked by both triumph and tragedy.

With this information, there is no doubt that the Kneebone Ranch and Cemetery should be designated as a Nevada County Historical Landmark. Therefore, the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Resolution designating the Kneebone Ranch and Cemetery, located at 14936 Spenceville Road, Penn Valley, CA 95946 (002-040-016), within the Spenceville Wildlife Area, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-06.

Approved: Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff
Submittal Date: May 20, 2025