



Statement of Bob Fulkerson, PLAN
Las Vegas Water Grab DEIS Hearings
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Sparks High School

It is fitting to hold this hearing on The Las Vegas Water Grab a few miles upstream where one of the first massive water diversion projects in the US started, about 110 years ago.

Senator Frances Newlands read the diaries of John Wesley Powell's trip down the Colorado River, and convinced President Teddy Roosevelt to create the Bureau of Reclamation, which created the Newlands Project to divert water from the Truckee River to the Lahontan Valley shortly thereafter.

It was the end of the 19th century, and the 20th century seemed to hold in store limitless water and other natural resources available for plundering. The Las Vegas Water Grab is born out of these 19th-century ideas. Yet even in this 21st-century world, some still cling to the myths that water is infinite and that our only salvation lies in rampant development at any cost.

The current financial crisis provides an opportunity to take an honest look at what has proved to be an unsustainable economic model.

Nevada's recession has been like a war on many of the people who live here. TS Eliot wrote about WW I that "we had the experience but missed the meaning." He might say the same thing about our state history of booms that have gone bust, especially as we desperately try to dig our way out of the current financial collapse.

Nevada can't afford the water grab. Las Vegas is the second-most tax regressive city in the country. Increased fees to pay for the pipeline will add to the hardship of working class ratepayers and those on fixed incomes. And cash-strapped local governments, some on the verge of bankruptcy, don't need additional liabilities.

I can empathize with the few who say we desperately need those 900 construction jobs that building the pipeline will create. But at \$3.5 billion for the whole project, that equates to \$3.9 million per job. Nevada can't afford to build a pipeline for a mere 900 jobs--likely a decade or more away from being created--that will destroy a vast portion of the state.

But we can afford to put our people back to work building public infrastructure, neighborhood by neighborhood, to make Las Vegas more livable and sustainable.

Retrofitting southern Nevada with the most water-efficient devices and investing in public transit and energy efficiency would create far more jobs at less cost than the pipeline. Why not set our sights creating the first truly sustainable, 21st-century metropolis in the world?

Instead, we have Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a 19th-century project that reads like an execution order for a revered soul mate who has never done us wrong. It describes the tortured, inevitable death of our beloved Great Basin.

It speaks of wiping out hundreds of miles of creeks and springs, polluting the last clean air basins in the country with tens of thousands of tons of fugitive dust, and killing off once-flourishing communities of fish, wildlife, birds, and plants.

Eastern Nevada's rural economy, as fragile as its desert ecology, will also likely collapse. Once proud and self-sufficient Native Americans, ranchers, farmers and other rural dwellers will flock to the cities as water refugees, or hopelessly cling to their dry land as colonial possessions of Las Vegas. How can this be analyzed in a DEIS?

Since my first hike to Mt. Moriah 30 years ago, I've returned again and again for the only way I know how to sustain my soul and to renew my connection with a power greater than myself. Last year I celebrated turning 50 by spending five days alone on that amazing mountain, backpacking my way up one creek and down the other. I've been blessed to backpack and tour all over the US and in many other countries, and nowhere in the world is there a place like the northern Snake Range.

For water grab proponents to say that the lifeblood of this mountain—its water—is an “unused resource” is blasphemy, stupidity or blind arrogance. Look at these pictures of Hendry's and Hampton Creeks I took last year. Does that water look ‘unused’ to anyone? It was put there to sustain life, not to end up on lawns in Las Vegas.

Drive around any Las Vegas neighborhood and you'll see water running down the sidewalk. Is this the fate of Great Basin creeks and springs? To end up wasted in some Las Vegas suburban gutter, or as reclaimed water on a golf course?

The BLM can satisfy its legal obligation to protect our resources for current and future generations by selecting the “No Action Alternative”.

If not, rest assured we will continue to fight this abomination in the courts, in Congress, Carson City, in the voting booth and in the streets. Nevada can't afford to kill itself with this project.