

REC'D - BLM - NSO

9:00
A.M. OCT 13 2011

P O Box 374
Datil NM 87821
October 10, 2011

Mr. Bob Abbey, Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW
Rm. 5775
Washington DC 20240

RE: SNWA Pipeline Right-of-Way

Dear Mr. Abbey:

The proposal by the Southern Nevada Water Authority for a right-of-way application for a 300-plus-mile pipeline to export more than 57 billion gallons of water a year from Great Basin aquifers should be denied.

On the face of it, moving water from a sparsely populated area to an urban center appears viable, and technically it certainly is. The question is: are there concerns other than technical feasibility?

I'd like to address several of those concerns.

Number One. What does the transport of that water from the local area to a burgeoning urban area do to those two areas? The water would go to the Las Vegas Valley, where it would promote and facilitate unsustainable urban growth in the driest desert in the country. Obviously it benefits Las Vegas, but for how long? Short-term – and by that I mean a 40-year period – solutions abound, including this one, but what will this solution mean for the long term? Where this particular solution has been tried the end result is disaster for the “from” area, and eventually no water for either area. Water that has sustained rural populations, economies, wildlife and the environment for eons is gone and there is no longer water to sustain life. Las Vegas will also find itself without that source of water, and must once again look elsewhere.

Number Two. The really pertinent question then becomes: are there other solutions to the water need? The answer is a resounding YES! And the other solutions should be tried first:

- 1) Limit unsustainable development
- 2) Put conservation measures in place
- 3) Price water nearer its true value.

OK. So what can the BLM do regarding the proposal to send the water from rural northern Nevada through BLM land to Las Vegas? Say NO! This project is ill-conceived from every point of view. This decision should not be based on the political consideration of where the most people reside. It should be based on the overall picture whose elements are: water, rural culture and economy, wildlife, the

environment, and sustainable development. And here let me say that I concur with all the arguments presented by the Center for Biological Diversity, a copy of which is below.*

Number Three. Why, you may ask, does someone in New Mexico want to weigh in on this project? Because rural people throughout the West are facing similar threats to their local water resources. Wherever that threat occurs it must be stopped or whole cultures and communities will disappear.

From my reading about water availability throughout the world it appears, based on historical experience, that piping water long distances is not the best solution to water scarcity. Please do not give permission for a pipeline right-of-way through BLM land. Or to put it another way: please do not enable this project by allowing a means for it to go forward.

Yours sincerely,



Carol Pittman

Cc: State Director Amy Lueders, BLM Nevada Office
Project Manager Penny Woods

*Dear Director Abbey, Nevada State Director Lueders and Project Manager Woods,

Please uphold the Bureau of Land Management's public-trust mission and responsibility to the American people "to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations" by denying the right-of-way for the Southern Nevada Water Authority's proposed groundwater development pipeline.

According to the BLM's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, this project that would export 57 billion gallons of groundwater annually from rural Nevada and Utah to Las Vegas through a 300-mile long pipeline would cause irreversible, unacceptable impacts on entire ecosystems, wildlife, recreation, agriculture, tribes and rural communities. Several species of desert fish and springsnails would likely be driven to extinction, while others, such as the greater sage grouse, Bonneville cutthroat trout, Columbia spotted frog and others, would face immense threats and risk to their survival and viability.

The DEIS does an admirable job of cataloging the devastating effects on the Great Basin ecosystem from the huge, long-term and unsustainable groundwater withdrawals. But the document is deeply flawed because it fails to examine viable alternatives to the project, such as enhanced conservation in the Las Vegas Valley, as well as ocean desalting, which SNWA admits will be part of Las Vegas' water supply in the future. A recent Pacific Institute study concluded that greater water-use efficiencies and improved conservation measures would meet Las Vegas' needs for the foreseeable future, making the pipeline unnecessary.

Please choose the No Action Alternative and deny the permits for this wrong-headed and destructive groundwater mining project. Help Las Vegas find a more sustainable water future.