

Back to:
June 18, 2013

Abby Johnson: Pumping plan would harm both eastern and Southern Nevada



- [⏪](#)
- 1 of 1 images
- [⏩](#)

Tomorrow, Nevada's only national park celebrates the release of the U.S. Mint's newest "America the Beautiful" quarter.

George Washington's newest flip side is a bristlecone pine, one of the world's oldest living things. It's in Great Basin National Park, best known for limestone caves beneath the majestic peaks of the Snake Range near Nevada's border with Utah.

Bristlecones thrive on adversity. They live the longest in the most challenging terrain — the north side of craggy peaks, withstanding the coldest of windswept temperatures, overlooking the Great Basin's arid high desert.

It is ironic that this desert survivor is being celebrated at a time when its home turf is at risk from the massive water exportation proposed by the Southern Nevada Water Authority. The SNWA proposes building a pipeline to pump the underground water from the desert valleys surrounding Great Basin National Park and several valleys to its south to slake the thirst for unsustainable growth in Clark County.

At what cost? Fifteen-and-a-half billion dollars. That's 62 billion America the Beautiful quarters. Does this "water grab" make sense, as in dollars and cents?

That question was raised and considered last Thursday during a hearing in Nevada district court in Ely. Opponents of the pipeline project appealed the Nevada state engineer's decision to allow the SNWA the right to pump 84,000 acre-feet of water annually, forever, from Spring Valley (west of GBNP) and Cave, Dry Lake and Delamar Valleys.

The judge asked whether water can be considered a benefit to ratepayers if it is so costly to obtain. Nevada's deputy attorney general, defending the water engineer's decision, explained that residential water rates in Las Vegas are expected to rise to \$90 per month to pay for this project. The Bureau of Land Management's record of decision on the pipeline project disclosed that Nevada taxpayers will be the backup plan if Las Vegas defaults on the project.

The SNWA is confident that it can make it all work, if it just gets permission to pump enough water to fill up the 7-foot pipeline. Despite assurances and promises from the SNWA and the State of Nevada, eastern Nevada residents believe that once the pumping begins, there will be no way to stop the pipeline flow or the impacts, until the region is bled dry of water. Promises of large-scale mitigation are not reassuring. Each breach of promise is likely to take costly court action to remedy. This has been the expensive experience of Inyo County, Calif., with Los Angeles and the infamous Owens Valley water-exportation project.

The harsh reality is that there is not enough water in the high desert valleys to make this project affordable or viable for Las Vegas ratepayers. Add in the environmental and economic devastation for eastern Nevada. The total cost is more than Nevada can afford.

The Shoshone Indians and the bristlecone pines have co-existed for thousands of years. Residents of the valleys surrounding the national park are survivors, too. The key to survival for both eastern Nevada residents and Southern Nevadans is not the mutually assured destruction of the water grab. Instead, like the bristlecone, living within our means and conserving resources must sustain us and ensure survival for the long haul.

Abby Johnson is a resident of Carson City, and a part-time resident of Baker. She consults on community-development and nuclear-waste issues. Her opinions are her own and do not necessarily reflect those of her clients.

©2005 - 2014 Swift Communications, Inc.