



GREAT BASIN WATER NETWORK

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NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE, COUNTY SLAM VEGAS WATER GRAB STUDY

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management failed to take a “hard look” at the possible negative impacts on Utah and the Wasatch Front of the Southern Nevada Water Authority’s proposed groundwater pumping and pipeline project, according to the State of Utah and Salt Lake County.

The project “has great potential to impose negative impacts on the state’s air quality, water quality, wildlife, economy, and health of Utah’s citizens” and “the NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] process used by the BLM to prepare this document does not meet the regulatory requirements for informed agency decision-making,” according to Utah’s comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Clark, Lincoln and White Pine Counties Groundwater Development Project.

Salt Lake County took aim at the study’s analysis of potential air quality impacts due to increased dust storms created by the loss of vegetation from groundwater withdrawals. “These potential air quality changes will limit future options for resource and economic development in Utah,” the County commented, noting that the Environmental Protection Agency has deemed Salt Lake County a non-attainment area for PM 10 particulates like dust.

The increased amount of particulate matter caused by the pipeline project “may jeopardize federal funding for highways and mass transit,” and dust on the mountain snowpack could result in “a shortened ski season in the Wasatch Mountains [which] would have a severe economic impact in Salt Lake County.” The County argues that the draft EIS didn’t take into account the air quality impacts of the project on pre-existing regional activities like the Rio Tinto/Kennecott Utah Copper’s Cornerstone Project. “The amendment to the State Implementation Plan to allow for increased [mining] production may have to be revisited in the future” due to increases in dust emissions from the pumping.

Utah agrees, stating that air quality impacts are “unacceptable” with the potential to result in “significant costs to the state’s economy,” including EPA penalties and costs to tourism due to worsening regional haze over Utah’s National Parks.

Steve Erickson, a spokesman for the Great Basin Water Network, which represents over 250 groups and individuals protesting water rights applications for the project, welcomed the state and county comments. “It’s helpful and gratifying that our local governments have joined the chorus of boos for this inadequate study of an ill-conceived project,” he said. A preliminary analysis by the BLM indicates that they received 500 to 600 specific comments and over 20,000 email messages opposing the SNWA pipeline project.

Both governments were critical of the proposed monitoring and mitigation measures the BLM suggested would minimize project impacts. Regarding those plans, the state said they must identify “trigger points” for

stopping pumping and the County wrote “it is arbitrary and capricious for the BLM to conclude that the proposed agreements can or will mitigate the foreseeable adverse impacts to air quality in Salt Lake County.”

The state concludes that the draft EIS is “substantively and structurally deficient,” lacking in “thoroughness, clarity, and the best scientific information available,” and does not “satisfy the ‘hard look’ requirement of NEPA.” “The NEPA process is so segmented... that the entire Project is never truly considered as a whole,” the State of Utah writes. “The project cannot proceed until SNWA has been granted water rights.”

In related action, Millard and Juab Counties and the community of Eskdale, Utah on Monday presented their case to the Nevada State Engineer against SNWA water rights applications in four Nevada valleys. Great Basin Water Network began their case against those applications on November 1. Live internet broadcast of the hearing, which continues through November 18, can be viewed on State Engineer’s website at www.water.nv.gov.