



Great Basin Water Network

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VEGAS PIPELINE FOES SUE FEDS

A broad coalition of citizens' groups, Native American Tribes and rural governmental entities filed [suit](#) today in the United States District Court in Las Vegas seeking to overturn the United States Department of Interior's decision to approve the Southern Nevada Water Authority's Groundwater Development Project and issue a right-of-way for a nearly 265 mile-long pipeline to suck billions of gallons water away from rural areas and convey it to Las Vegas.

Fresh off their big win in Nevada state court that voided all previously granted water rights for this highly controversial project, White Pine County, Great Basin Water Network, the Goshute and Shoshone Tribes, and their allies are taking the fight to a new level, requesting that the Federal District Court of Nevada "void the validity" of the Bureau of Land Management's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) and "suspend and enjoin any operation on the right-of-way" pending full compliance with federal environmental laws and trust obligations to the Tribal Plaintiffs.

The Plaintiffs challenge the BLM's December 2012 Record of Decision, claiming the agency failed to take a "hard look" at the impacts of the project, failed to consider reasonable alternatives, failed to prevent unnecessary or undue environmental degradation, and failed to properly consult with and evaluate and mitigate impacts to Tribal resources.

"The federal government has failed in its trust responsibility, therefore the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation have no recourse but to file against the Department of Interior and the BLM for failure to protect our interests, which is a legal and moral obligation of the highest fiduciary standard. We cannot look the other way when the future of our people and homelands are in the hands of those who have their priorities mixed up," said Chairwoman Madeline Greymountain of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation.

The Swamp Cedars Massacre Site in White Pine County's Spring Valley is an example of this failure. According to Chairwoman Greymountain, "To our people's detriment, SNWA was awarded clearance to destroy our Tribe's most sacred of all places, the Swamp Cedars Massacre Site. It is the location of three different massacres of our Indian ancestors, and the location of the largest recorded massacre of Indian people by the United States government in all of U.S. history. Sadly, SNWA aims to destroy this site completely, calling their destructive wake 'succession.' "

Abby Johnson, President of the Great Basin Water Network, said the project would be “the biggest groundwater pumping project ever built in the United States and it would have devastating hydrological, biological and socioeconomic impacts across vast areas of eastern Nevada and Western Utah. In approving the project and the pipeline ROW, BLM ignored its own science and conclusions that the environmental impacts would be irreversible, irretrievable and widespread. That’s arbitrary and capricious decision-making,” she said.

The Plaintiffs, which also include the Sierra Club, the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority, Utah Audubon Council, Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment, Utah Rivers Council, and Salt Lake League of Women Voters, argue that the BLM did an inadequate analysis of the potential for drastic impacts upon air quality downwind of the project area. The drawdown from SNWA’s proposed pumping would dry up springs, wetlands and riparian areas, and public rangelands by dropping the water table by dozens to hundreds of feet, threatening the regional economic viability of ranching and tourism, and jeopardizing senior water rights. “The future of rural communities and wildlife in the massive target zone is at stake,” said Susan Lynn of GBWN. “The \$15 billion project will be exceptionally risky and costly for both rural residents and Las Vegas ratepayers.”

Simeon Herskovits, of Advocates for Community and Environment, the attorney for the groups, said, “All the scientific modeling, including SNWA’s own model, shows that the proposed groundwater pumping will have devastating effects on both existing water rights and sensitive environmental resources throughout a broad region encompassing a number of hydrologically connected valleys. The proposed mitigation plan relied on by the BLM for protection of federal resources is woefully vague and inadequate and has little to no hope of success.” Herskovits said.

“BLM’s decision was inconsistent with numerous environmental laws and federal policies, with their trust obligation to Native American Tribes, and with their own Resource Management Plan for the Ely District. Therefore, the BLM’s EIS should be invalidated by the Court.” Herskovits said.

Background

The Central Nevada Regional Water Authority is composed of representatives of eight Nevada counties: Churchill, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Lander, Nye, Pershing, and White Pine.

The Center for Biological Diversity also filed suit today. CBD argues that the BLM approved the project despite acknowledging adverse impacts on wildlife in the region, including sensitive species like greater sage grouse, Moapa dace, numerous Great Basin spring snails, and four species of toads and frogs. CBD is a member of the Great Basin Water Network (contact Rob Mrowka at 702-249-5821).