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LONG CALLED FOR ALTERNATIVE TO WATER GRAB PIPELINE IMPLEMENTED

As reported in the Las Vegas Review Journal on Friday, the Bureau of Reclamation, Southern Nevada Water Authority and other Colorado River Basin states have secured an amended treaty with Mexico regarding the handling of Colorado River surpluses and shortages and the ability for Mexico to store its water in Lake Mead if it so desires, with the potential of raising the elevation of Lake Mead by 15 feet.

“We are pleased that the Southern Nevada Water Authority is listening to its customers and looking for alternatives to the ill-conceived central Nevada groundwater development project and its bank-busting price tag of \$15.7 billion and rising cost,” said Abby Johnson, president of the Great Basin Water Network. The Water Network and others opposed to the pipeline have long called for other options for providing Las Vegas with its needed water, such as renegotiation of the “Law of the River,” increased indoor as well as expanded outdoor conservation, importation or trade for desalinated water from Mexico or elsewhere on the Pacific coast, and efforts to plan for a sustainable, thriving and livable Las Vegas through limits on sprawl and smart growth.

“While this treaty is a positive step, it clearly does not go far enough,” said Johnson. “As mentioned in the news report, the Water Authority missed a significant opportunity for a long term solution, that being desalinization. We can only hope the water authority will aggressively pursue that option.”

Details of the over 300 mile groundwater development pipeline project revealed in Nevada state engineer hearings and in an environmental impact statement prepared by the Bureau of Land Management clearly show that an economic, environmental and cultural catastrophe would occur if the project were to go forward.

“The \$15.7 billion price tag is only for the construction of the project, and does not include the vast monitoring and mitigation measures promised by the water authority to deal with pipeline impacts,” said Rob Mrowka a Las Vegas resident

and Great Basin Water Network board member. Mitigation measures associated with the Owens Valley pipeline in California mount to tens of millions of dollars each year. Despite the pledges of jobs, the actual number of projected jobs is actually quite humble - in the peak year of construction only 1314 jobs would be created and that figure then steadily declines to 377 jobs in the project's twelfth and final construction year.

"Aside from the horrific economic costs, there are dire impacts to Nevada's natural cultural and rural heritage," Mrowka continued. Depending on the alternative ultimately chosen by the BLM in the up-coming record of decision, over 200,000 acres of iconic Great Basin sage and shrub lands will be converted to largely grass and forb lands, dominated by fire-prone noxious weeds and invasive species, with a resulting loss of habitat for mule deer, elk, pronghorn, sage grouse and hundreds of other species. Meadows, wetlands, springs and streams will dry and fade away, taking with them trout, desert fish and springsnails, ultimately leading to the extinction of dozens of species. The lives, traditions and well-being of rural communities, ranching families and native people will be irreparably harmed by the exportation of the underlying ground water upon which they depend.

Mrowka continued, "In February 1994, general manager Pat Mulroy, in an interview with the High Country News, stated that the Las Vegas pipeline was "the singularly most stupid idea anyone's ever had"". "Let's hope she has once again gained that level of clear and sane thinking and will once and for all set aside the ridiculous pipeline idea in favor of less costly and more enduring solutions."