



August 15, 2008

## Two Cents Worth: Awaiting next water, wilderness steps...

I signed on over a year ago as an unpaid guest columnist to write a few columns about the Walker River Basin Project which is so important to our lifestyles in Mason and Smith Valleys.

I had no idea what that entailed when I volunteered for the task.

Writing commentaries once again (and a few related news stories along the way) has been educational, motivating"» just plain good for this retired newspaperman.

Hopefully, readers have also gained something from these efforts.

If nothing else, I hope you know more about the lifeblood waters of the Walker River and related wilderness/lands bill issues, as well as the backhanded political games so often played by our own elected representatives.

This is now Guest Editorial #53, and things have quieted down considerably, as we all await the release of draft legislation on the Walker River Basin Project.

Still, I have a few things to talk about, so here are a few random thoughts and comments"».

Coal-fired plants nixed

It appears that a proposal calling for construction of two coal-fired electric plants in White Pine County is pretty much dead.

U.S. Senator Harry Reid expressed his opposition to the plants, and it appears that, in some way, water is the key to the abandonment of the projects.

A source in the area reports the power company was quickly purchasing several ranches near the sites planned for construction of the coal-fired plants.

But that activity has reportedly stopped, and some of those ranches are actually being sold back to the previous owners at a greatly-reduced prices.

So how is water involved?

Sources report since the Spring Valley water pipeline project for southern Nevada was granted huge quantities of water from the White Pine area, there may not be enough left to guarantee operation of the coal-fired plants.

Senator Reid, our very own "green" lawmaker, gets his way again.

6.1 billion gallons to Las Vegas challenged

A petition has been filed by opponents of a state decision to allow 6.1 billion gallons of water a year to be pumped from three rural Nevada valleys and piped to Las Vegas.

The Reno Gazette-Journal says representatives of the Great Basin Water Network and other groups,

and individuals opposed to the Southern Nevada Water Authority pumping plan, filed a petition in district court in Ely charging that the pumping from Delamar, Dry Lake and Cave Valleys would be excessive.

The petition says State Engineer Tracy Taylor overestimated the amount of water that can be drawn from those valleys, didn't evaluate impacts on existing water rights and the environment, and didn't reserve enough groundwater for future economic development in the valleys.

SNWA's request was for more than 11 billion gallons of groundwater per year, and at a July 9 hearing, argued it is entitled to the water.

The Gazette-Journal added that the State Engineer trimmed that request to around 6 billion gallons, but there are those who still contend Las Vegas got almost everything it really asked for.

The State Engineer said use of the water in the approved amounts "will not unduly limit future growth and development" in the three valleys in Lincoln County; but before any water is pumped, he wants to see more biological and hydrologic studies.

He added that the pumping could be halted if it proves to be "detrimental to the public interest or is found to not be environmentally sound."

These are the first valleys to be tapped for the massive pipeline project.

The Gazette-Journal story also says two Utah counties have filed an appeal in the same Ely courtroom challenging Nevada's decision limiting their involvement in a late 2009 hearing on SNWA plans to tap 16 billion gallons of groundwater a year in Snake Valley on the Nevada-Utah border.

Las Vegas greedily uses the argument to state officials that if it is not granted these huge amounts of groundwater for its pipeline project, Nevada's economy--and thus all Nevadans--will be adversely affected.

There is no concern about what adverse effects the rest of Nevada might experience.

Just goes to prove the old adage: "Whiskey's for drinkin'; water's for fightin'."

Endangered Species Act extinct?

An Associated Press news story on Tuesday of this week says parts of the Endangered Species Act may soon be extinct.

The Bush administration apparently wants federal agencies to decide for themselves whether highways, dams, mines, and other construction projects might harm endangered animals and plants.

New regulations would not require the approval of Congress and would reduce the mandatory, independent reviews scientists have been performing for 35 years.

Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne said the changes are needed to ensure that the Endangered Species Act would not be used as a "back door" to regulate the gases blamed for global warming.

The reported changes would apply to any project a federal agency would fund, build or authorize.

Could that include water projects like that being legislated for the Walker River Basin?

How about any wilderness proposals?

Great Salt Lake & mercury

Have you ever visited and swum (or bobbed) in Utah's Great Salt Lake? It's a well-known fact that swimmers bob in the water like corks.

The lake is also teeming with tiny shrimp called "sea monkeys".

And now, scientists are concerned about the heavy amounts of toxic mercury found, inexplicably, in the lake.

What type of danger the mercury content there creates, and the source of the poison, remain a mystery, apparently. How much danger the mercury poses to the millions of migratory birds that feed on the lake is under investigation.

Three years ago, U.S. Geological Survey tests indicated the Great Salt Lake had some of the highest mercury readings ever recorded in any body of water in the United States.

The state has warned people not to eat certain kinds of ducks because of the mercury concern.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service knows there is a mercury problem, but doesn't yet know how big that problem is.

Studies have been undertaken this summer, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the state to the tune of \$280,000, for the initial phase of what is expected to require multi-year research.

#### Candidates & wilderness

Political candidates on both sides of the aisle will be asked by both wilderness/lands bill proponents and opponents to take a stand on that "hot potato" issue.

And how these candidates respond to those direct questions may well translate into a vote for or against them come November's general election.

Hold their feet to the fire over this volatile issue"»don't let them off the hook"»don't let them talk all the way around the issue"»don't let them ignore it.

These candidates owe us a clear cut answer, and then have to accept the consequences.

This is an obvious question for County Commission candidates, as well as Congressional candidates. Make sure you ask it.

#### "Electile Dysfunction"

I don't believe I'm all alone when it comes to not feeling particularly supportive of either 2008 candidate for the U.S. Presidency.

While surfing the web this week (if what I do can even be labeled as "surfing"), I came across a political cartoon that pretty well summed it up for me.

The cartoon showed the characterization of an obviously depressed Uncle Sam holding a map showing Florida as a red state and the two words "Electile Dysfunction."

The definition followed as "the inability to become aroused over any of the choices for President put forth by either party in the 2008 election year."

--Jim Sanford is a longtime Mason Valley resident and former Editor and Publisher of the Mason Valley News. Contact him via e-mail at [sunny091929@aol.com](mailto:sunny091929@aol.com).

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