

NPS Coordinates Study Of Proposed Water Diversions In Nevada

The NPS Water Resources Division has undertaken coordination of technical efforts by NPS, the USFWS, BLM, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (hereafter referred to as "the bureaus") to conduct hydrologic studies related to water rights applications filed by the Las Vegas Valley Water District (LVVWD) in Nevada. If approved, LVVWD's applications for additional water for the growing city of Las Vegas would allow water diversions from 4 counties in east central and southern Nevada and from as far as 200 miles from Las Vegas.

The water would be diverted primarily from aquifers in the carbonate rock province, which encompasses local, intermediate, and extensive regional groundwater flow systems. Groundwater flow systems in the province feed springs, streams, and lakes; yield water to wells; and support threatened and endangered species, vegetation, wildlife, fish, wild horses and burros, recreation, and other resources of concern to the Bureaus.

The NPS filed 130 protests with the Nevada State Engineer's office because of possible effects in Death Valley National Monument (DEVA), Lake Mead National Recreation Area (LAME), and Great Basin National Park (GRBA). Both DEVA and LAME contain springs that are fed by regional groundwater flow systems that could be tapped by LVVWD. At GRBA, water for administrative and visitor facilities could be threatened.

A project of this magnitude will require considerable study and preparation to examine adequately the potential effects. The USGS's Nevada District Office, is providing technical assistance to the Bureaus. In addition, a private consulting firm has been contracted to assess potential effects on Bureau water rights and water resources and to assist the Bureaus in preparing for and participating in State water right hearings and discussions with LVVWD. Assessments will require the use of ground water flow models of various scales to examine potential effects to Bureau water rights and resources associated with the groundwater flow systems.

By adequate preparation and participation in the State's administrative proceedings, the NPS is afforded the best prospect for ensuring that its water rights and related resources will be protected.

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