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November 22, 2011

Subject: Deny the SNWA Water Rights Applications

Mr. Jason King, Nevada Division of Water Resources
901 S. Stewart St. Suite 2002
Carson City, NV 89701

Dear Sir:

As a regular visitor to Nevada, I am writing to you because I care deeply about the Great Basin and all the plants and animals that live there, and am appalled at the Southern Nevada Water Authority's request to pump and export 57 billion gallons of water annually from our aquifers in central and eastern Nevada. Why would we pump our water to southern Nevada to support unsustainable growth when there are viable means of meeting the water needs through increased conservation, smart growth management and desalination options?

Nevada's "interbasin water transfer statute," NRS 533.370(6), currently requires the state engineer, you, to deny an application for an interbasin transfer of water if he finds that the proposed transfer would not be "environmentally sound" for the basin being diverted.

While the definition of "environmentally sound" is absent in the statute, it seems only reasonable to deem the water authority's request as such, given the catastrophic and irreversible impacts that would occur as a result of this groundwater extraction, as documented in the Bureau of Land Management's "draft environmental impact statement" for the pipeline proposal.

Water tables would drop by 200 feet; 192,000-plus acres of prime Great Basin shrubland habitats would be dried, destroyed and converted to dryland grasses and annuals, supporting invasive species like cheatgrass and Sahara mustard. Eight thousand acres of wetlands would be destroyed along with 310 springs and 125 miles of perennial streams.

The toll on species would also be staggering, and some species of desert fish and springsnails would go extinct. Widespread harm to other species would occur, including the imperiled greater sage grouse, southwestern willow flycatcher, Columbia spotted frog, pronghorn and elk.

These applications threaten the very natural heritage of the Great Basin in eastern Nevada and western Utah. Please deny the authority's water-right applications based on the severe, environmentally unsound impacts they would cause. In light of other options available to the authority for meeting reasonable water demands, they should be off the table.

Sincerely,


Robert A. Rutemoeller

STATE ENGINEER OF NEVADA
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