

OCTOBER MARKS ONGOING 30 YEAR WATER WAR

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By Kyle Roernik

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This month marks the 30th anniversary of the ongoing fight to stop one of the largest-ever water grabs in the history of the nation.

In October 1989, the Las Vegas Valley Water District applied to take more than 260 billion gallons of water annually throughout the Great Basin – with much of the focus on Eastern Nevada and Western Utah’s Pleistocene-era aquifers.

The plan was simple: Have the State Engineer grant the applications for water, get Congress to carve-out a Right of Way on federal land, pump the water and deliver it to Las Vegas via a 300-mile, \$15.5 billion pipeline (2011 dollars).

Science has shown that the annual pumping would devastate the ecosystems and economies of Eastern Nevada and Western Utah — drying up creeks, springs, wetlands and aquifers while killing plants, wildlife, and communities that currently rely on the water.

So far, things have yet to work according to plan for proponents. The project was slated to deliver at least 58 billion gallons of that water by 2020. That won’t happen. But the future is still uncertain.

Now under the aegis of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the pipeline and water grab continue to be the subject of litigation and contention in courts, the Legislature, and the regulatory arena — costing ratepayers and taxpayers millions. Nevertheless, banks, developers, resorts and other interests still clamor for the project despite the known risks.

Through grassroots activism, Nevadans and Utahns of all political stripes have worked together to stop an illegal and immoral project that federal and state courts have found to violate bedrock environmental protections. Generations of water grab opponents have worked to protect a region that receives less than a foot of precipitation per year and spans an area larger than the size of New Zealand.

The anniversary month precedes another milestone in the ongoing litigation against the SNWA.

Oral arguments will be on Nov. 12 in Ely at Nevada's Seventh Judicial District Court. Great Basin Water Network will be there alongside White Pine County, Utah officials, tribal governments, the LDS Church and other project opponents who want to protect the Great Basin's wildlife, wild places, and water resources forever.

Among Southwestern metro water purveyors, SNWA is a leader in conserving and innovating water resources in the desert. Since 2002, per capita water use and Colorado River water consumption are down 46 and 25 percent (respectively). This is an impressive feat demonstrating that SNWA can continue to reliably serve Southern Nevada without implementing its rapacious pumping and piping scheme in the nation's driest state. Kyle Roernik, executive director for the Great Basin Water Network, said, "We will be there, as we have for 30 years, to fight back and stop the project in its tracks. "