

TO: Leo Drozdoff, Chairman, Nevada Drought Forum

FROM: Steve Bradhurst, Executive Director, Central Nevada Regional Water Authority

DATE: August 17, 2015

RE: Central Nevada Regional Water Authority statement to the Nevada Drought Forum

On behalf of the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority I would like to thank you for inviting the Authority to participate in the August 19, 2015 Nevada Drought Forum Sector Meeting. The purpose of this statement is to 1) provide the Nevada Drought Forum information on the Authority, 2) bring attention to Nevada's water supply problem, and 3) respond to the three questions the Forum posed to the Authority.

What is the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority?

The Central Nevada Regional Water Authority is a unit of local government established by agreement of its member counties in the fall of 2005. The agreement is pursuant to the provisions of Nevada's Interlocal Cooperation Act (Chapter 277 of NRS).

The Authority has eight member counties (Churchill, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Lander, Nye, Pershing and White Pine Counties), and together they cover approximately sixty three percent of Nevada's land area. The Authority has a twenty three member board of directors, including ten county commissioners and six former county commissioners.

The Authority's conferred functions include the following: 1) be a forum to discuss and formulate positions on critical water and water-related issues pertaining to the eight member counties, 2) provide technical and policy advice necessary for sound water resource decisions, 3) assess and respond to proposals/plans that would export water resources from member counties, and 4) facilitate the development and implementation of a groundwater monitoring program in member county water basins. The Authority is not in the water utility business (wholesale and/or retail). Given the Authority's large geographic footprint, and the fact that most Nevada water issues impact urban and rural Nevada, the Authority is by necessity interested in all Nevada water issues (federal, state and local).

Are we "whistling past the graveyard?"

"Whistling past the graveyard" is when you do something to keep your mind off your worst fear. Nevada's worst natural resource fear has to be the real possibility of a water supply crisis in the near term (within the next 30 years). The Nevada Drought Forum is "doing something" in the water arena, but it is not addressing Nevada's worst natural resource fear. The Authority feels a Nevada water supply crisis will be caused by five interrelated realities: 1) limited traditional in-state water supply sources (surface water and groundwater), 2) drought, 3) climate change, 4) population growth, and 5) indifference or inattention.

Since 2008, the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority has asked the Nevada Legislature to consider Nevada's limited and possibly diminishing water supply a critical issue for Nevada's economic well-being, valued quality of life and natural environment. In the 2013 Nevada Legislative Session the Authority asked the Legislature, via Assembly Bill 301, to have the Legislative Committee on Public Lands conduct a study during the next interim (2014) on alternative sources of water for Nevada communities. The Authority's testimony on AB 301 included a statement that a number of Nevada communities do not have an identified, sustainable water supply within their control to accommodate projected population growth over the next 30 years. AB 301 was not approved by the 2013 Session. Fortunately, AB 301 became AB 198 in the 2015 Session, and AB 198 was approved by the Legislature and signed by Governor Sandoval. Therefore, it is hoped during the next year the Legislative Committee on Public Lands will conduct a study that will focus on the real possibility of a Nevada's water supply crisis in the not-to-distant future, including what to do about it.

The AB 198 study, the Nevada Drought Forum and the Nevada Drought Summit should be the foundation to have a meaningful statewide Nevada water future discussion, as well as a follow-on development of a Nevada water future strategy. The Central Nevada Regional Water Authority recommended a Nevada water future discussion and strategy in the spring of 2014. Please see the attached Central Nevada Regional Water Authority April 2014 position paper entitled "Is It Time for a Nevada Water Future Discussion and Strategy?" It is critical that the water future discussion and strategy involve all interested parties (e.g., State of Nevada, Nevada Legislature, Nevada's local governments, Nevada's business community, the environmental community and the general public).

The Authority's response to the three questions posed by the Nevada Drought Forum.

The first question is "*How has the drought affected the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority?*" The short answer is the drought made the Authority more acutely aware that Nevada is facing a water supply crisis, maybe sooner than thought. Climate change, population growth and limited traditional in-state water supply sources would eventually make water supply a critical issue in Nevada, but the prolonged drought in the Colorado River Basin and the Great Basin should convince state and local government decision-makers it is time to address the water supply problem now. Another impact of the drought that concerns the Authority is the thinking on the part of some local government officials and entrepreneurs that the solution to the water supply problem in Nevada's urban areas is groundwater from rural Nevada. At a minimum, it is expensive, controversial and risky for a Nevada urban area to stake its future on unrevealed and speculated groundwater from rural Nevada.

The second question posed by the Nevada Drought Forum to the Authority is "*What has the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority done to respond to the drought?*" Most certainly the Authority's efforts to have state decision-makers focus on Nevada's impending water supply crisis, via AB 301, AB 198, and the Authority's April 2014 position paper is a response. Also, in 2009 the Authority signed a memorandum of understanding with two counties in Utah and three counties in California to hold an annual Great Basin Water Forum to discuss Great Basin

water issues. The Authority hosted the first five Great Basin Water Forums (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013), and the focus of the Forums was on water supply problems in the Great Basin. In 2014 the Authority held a joint meeting with the Nevada State Land Use Advisory Council to hear how the states of Arizona, California and Utah are addressing their impending water supply problem. These states have acknowledge a projected gap or shortfall between water supply and demand in the not-to-distant-future, and they are doing something about their worst natural resource fear.

The third question posed by the Nevada Drought Forum to the Authority is *“What major obstacles exist to overcoming additional levels of water efficiency in your region?”* In light of the preceding statements the question to the Authority should be *“What major obstacles exist to addressing Nevada’s water supply problem?”* The short answer is indifference or inattention. The famous English author G.K. Chesterton wrote *“Of all the sins, indifference is the worst.”* Nevadans, as well as most Americans, have a dysfunctional relationship with water; that is, clean drinking water is taken for granted. It is possible there will come a time when it will be hard to ignore Nevada’s water supply problem. And, at such a stressful time sound decision-making will be difficult. The Nevada Drought Forum, the Nevada Drought Summit and the AB 198 study should provide some momentum in addressing Nevada’s water supply problem; assuming these efforts are more than just a feel good, bureaucratic exercise. State and local government decision-makers need to acknowledge there is a real possibility of a water supply problem in the future, and they need to be actively involved in addressing the problem. Another obstacle to addressing Nevada’s water supply problem is the less than honest statement made by some that a community has plenty of water because it has water rights to surface water and/or groundwater that will accommodate growth. Water rights do not equal wet water. Communities should make every effort to develop land use plans based on identified and sustainable water resources within their control, not on the use of all paper water rights and/or wished-for new water supplies.

Closing recommendation.

In closing, the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority recommends the Nevada Drought Forum include a discussion of Nevada’s water supply problem at the September Nevada Drought Summit. It is time for state and local government decision-makers to discuss the problem and not just whistle it away.

Attachment

c: Central Nevada Regional Water Authority Board of Directors

Is It Time for a Nevada Water Future Discussion and Strategy?

By

Central Nevada Regional Water Authority

April 2014

BACKGROUND

On May 2, 2003 the U.S. Department of Interior released a report entitled “Water 2015: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West.” The report states “Today, in some areas of the West, existing water supplies are, or will be, inadequate to meet the demands of the people, cities, farms, and the environment even under normal water supply conditions.” The report says five interrelated realities of water management are creating crises in the West: 1) explosive population growth, 2) water shortages exist, 3) water shortages result in conflict, 4) aging water facilities limit options, and 5) crisis management is not effective.” Today, it appears two additional interrelated realities exist, and they are extended drought and climate change.

Over the last few years many articles have been written about the existing and/or impending water supply crisis in the West. The titles of a few of these articles are: 1) “Warning: Water policy faces an age of limits,” 2) “Growth top threat to water supply,” 3) “Dramatic water changes coming to the Southwest,” 4) “Study: Climate Change May Dry Up Important U.S. Reservoirs Like Lake Powell and Lake Mead,” 5) “Where Will All the Water Come From?,” 6) “Worst Drought in 1,000 Years Could Begin in Eight Years,” and 7) “A new report confirms what we should already know: The Colorado River is in deep trouble.”

The new report that confirms the Colorado River is in deep trouble is the December 2012 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation report entitled “Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study.” The Study’s primary finding is significant shortfalls between projected Colorado River water demands and supplies will likely exist in the coming years. The median shortfall is projected to be 3.2 million acre-feet per year by 2060, and the worst case shortfall is projected to be close to 8 million acre-feet per year by 2060. To put this in perspective, consider the fact that the average Colorado River flow of late has been approximately 15 million acre-feet per year, and the Law of the River allocates 17 million acre-feet of Colorado River water per year to seven Colorado River Basin states and other

parties (including Mexico). Therefore, on paper there is already a shortfall between Colorado River water allocation and supply.

At the December 2013 Colorado River Water Users Association conference in Las Vegas the Secretary of Interior, Sally Jewell, said decreasing Colorado River water supplies is the “new normal on the river that we all had to deal with.”

If Secretary Jewell’s statement and the Bureau of Reclamation’s report are accurate, or even close to accurate, then Las Vegas Valley is facing a water supply dilemma. Las Vegas Valley receives 90 percent of its water supply from the Colorado River, and it appears there may be significant curtailments in Colorado River water to the Valley in the years to come. In addition, Nevada’s traditional in-state sources of water – surface water and groundwater – are at best limited, and at worst diminishing. Also, it is clearly expensive, controversial and risky for Nevada’s urban areas to stake their future on unrevealed and uncertain groundwater from rural Nevada.

The Central Nevada Regional Water Authority feels all of Nevada is facing a water supply crisis. In fact, since 2008 the Authority has asked the Nevada Legislature to consider Nevada’s limited and possible diminishing water supply a critical issue for Nevada’s economic well-being, valued quality of life and natural environment. In the 2013 Nevada Legislative Session the Authority asked the Legislature, via Assembly Bill 301, to have the Legislative Committee on Public Lands conduct a study during the next interim (2014) on water supply for Nevada communities. The Authority testified that Nevada is the most arid state in the union, and the Colorado River Basin and the Great Basin have experienced severe drought over the last decade. For example, 2000 to 2013 was the driest 14-year period in the 100-year historical record for the Colorado River Basin. Also, some scientists believe the Sierra Nevada snowpack that is the basis for western Nevada’s water supply could decrease as much as 40 percent by 2050. The Authority’s AB301 testimony included a statement that there is no question that a number of Nevada communities do not have an identified, sustainable water supply within their control to accommodate projected population growth over the next 30 years. The Authority asked that the AB301 study focus on alternative sources of water for Nevada communities since Nevada’s surface water resources are scarce and fully appropriated, and its groundwater resources are scarce, uncertain and fully appropriated in many areas. Alternative sources of water include water

conservation, water recycling, desalination, conjunctive use and rain water capture. AB301 passed the Assembly by unanimous vote of approval, but it was not voted on by the Senate.

As would be expected, the States of Arizona, California, Colorado and Utah are also confronted with projected water supply shortfalls in the near future. These states are actively addressing the problem by way of programs focused on ensuring a secure water future. In Arizona, the Arizona Department of Water Resources, in partnership with Arizona's water community, produced a comprehensive water supply and demand analyses that identified a potential water supply and demand imbalance if no action is taken to secure future water supplies. In an effort to deal with the projected imbalance, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer asked the Arizona Department of Water Resources to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how to address the projected imbalance. The Department did that, and in January 2014, the Department released a report entitled "Arizona's Next Century: A Strategic Vision for Water Supply Sustainability."

The State of California's program to address a projected water supply shortfall is called "California Water Action Plan," and a draft was released in late 2013. The State of Colorado's program to address a projected water supply shortfall is called "Colorado's Water Plan," and the first draft of the plan was also released in late 2013. The State of Utah's program to address a projected water supply shortfall is called "Utah's Water Future – Developing a 50-Year Water Strategy for Utah." Utah Governor Gary Herbert initiated the program in the spring of 2013. He said "We are at a crossroads for our future here," and he cited the challenges of ensuring adequate water supplies in the face of demand brought by population growth, the outdoor economy and environmental concerns. In July and August of 2013 the Utah water future program had eight listening sessions, held across the state, to begin mapping out a water strategy for the future. In addition to public comments at the listening sessions, the State of Utah received more than 800 online comments during the summer. On October 30, 2013 Governor Herbert convened a water summit to review what the public said about Utah's water future and announce the next steps in the process to develop the 50-year water strategy. At the water summit Governor Herbert announced the creation of a 38-member Utah Water Strategy Advisory Team to help develop the 50-year water strategy.

At the December 13, 2013 Central Nevada Regional Water Authority meeting the Authority received a presentation from Steve Erickson, a member of the Utah Water Strategy Advisory Team. He said the Team will solicit and evaluate potential water management strategies, frame water management options for public feedback, and develop a set of recommended strategies to be considered by the State of Utah as part of the 50-year water strategy. Mr. Erickson said the critical component of the Utah water future program has been the effort by Governor Herbert to involve the public in the program, and the tremendous response by the public to participate in the program.

RECOMMENDATION

The question that begs an answer is what can be done to avoid a Nevada water supply crisis stemming from population growth, limited in-state water resources, drought and climate change? Ensuring a secure water future for the State of Nevada has to be a top priority for the State, the Nevada Legislature and Nevada's local governments. The Authority feels the State of Nevada, the Nevada Legislature, Nevada's local governments, Nevada's business community, the environmental community and the public should come together in a partnership to develop a meaningful statewide water supply strategy.

At the December 13, 2013 Central Nevada Regional Water Authority meeting the Authority asked its executive director to look into the development of a Nevada water future program similar to the Utah water future program. In early 2014 the Authority's executive director discussed the concept of a Nevada water future program with the directors of eight Nevada water entities and asked them if they would be amenable to attending a meeting to discuss the merits of a Nevada water future program. The response was yes. The Authority feels a possible next step is to have a meeting to 1) receive presentations from the States of Arizona, California and Utah on their water future programs, 2) receive presentations from water resource research organizations (e.g., Bureau of Reclamation, USGS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, etc.) on water supply challenges facing Nevada, and 3) discuss whether or not to have a Nevada water future program, and if there is support for the program, develop a program outline. For example, a Nevada water future program could include the following steps: 1) initial discussion of Nevada's water future and a Nevada water future program at a water future meeting, 2) listening sessions throughout the state to discuss

Nevada's water future and potential water management strategies, and 3) the development of a Nevada water future strategy by a water strategy advisory team for consideration by the State of Nevada, the Nevada Legislature and Nevada's local governments.

CLOSING COMMENT

The answer to the title of this paper is yes; that is, it is time for a Nevada water future discussion and strategy. One should keep in mind the old Chinese proverb: "If we are not careful we will end up where we are going." Also, it has been said one should not waste a crisis since it presents an opportunity to do good.