

# MINUTES

# County of Inyo WATER COMMISSION

September 14, 2021

The Chairperson called the Water Commission meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. via videoconference. Water Commissioners in attendance were Randy Keller, Nate Gratz, Paul Huette, and Holly Alpert. Teri Red Owl was absent. Present from the Water Department were Aaron Steinwand, Laura Piper, Keith Rainville, Zach Nelson, and Meredith Jabis.

## 1. Pledge of Allegiance

The Vice Chairperson led the pledge of allegiance.

## 2. Public Comment

Sally Manning stated she emailed a public comment with regard to the Rose Valley pumping project. Commissioner Keller suggested since it cannot be discussed by the Board during public comment, to include it as an agenda item next meeting. Sally Manning concurred.

## 3. Approval of minutes from the April 26, 2021 meeting

Motion by Commissioner Huette, seconded by Commissioner Alpert to approve the minutes of the April 26, 2021. The Chairperson called a roll call vote; Randy Keller – Y, Nate Grate – Y, Holly Alpert – Y, Paul Huette – Y, Teri Red Owl absent. Motion passed.

## 4. Commissioners' reports

The Vice Chairperson asked if there were any Commissioner's Reports. Commissioner Keller stated he wished to express his appreciation for some of the comments received at the last Standing Committee meeting by people attending affirming the importance to a lot of citizens here that DWP treat the valley's landscape as kind of a whole as far as water issues go.

## 5. Director's report

### a. Runoff and operations update

Dr. Steinwand provided a presentation and an update on operations and stated the runoff update would be forthcoming the end of the month. The Commissioners and staff discussed this item in detail.

Philip Anaya asked Dr. Steinwand to provide a brief update on Bishop Creek stating the flows were considerably low and asked if the ditches will go dry. Dr. Steinwand and Keith Rainville provided information and background regarding Chandler and the various flows varied at different times of the year. Philip Anaya stated the ditches went dry in both 2013 and 2014 and wells were lost the end of 2013. Sally Manning stated she doesn't know how they decide where the water goes and what's being recharged; the pumping numbers for Big Pine were incorrect on staffs chart; and that pumping is way over the planned pumping.

### b. Status of Owens Lake Groundwater Project

Dr. Steinwand stated since the Water Commission last met, on June 4, 2021, LADWP circulated a letter responding to the comments on their CEQA document for the test well east pumping test; DWP postponed that project due to changes in operational priorities; the CEQA process is on hold until such time that LA may reconsider restarting this project again

### c. Fish Springs Hatchery update

Dr. Steinwand stated Ca Dept. of Fish & Wildlife reported they have about 625,000 fish of various sizes in the hatchery right now; discussed the pumping of the wells for the hatchery; more eggs will be arriving; and DWP engineers are exploring and developing options to be able to vary the well production to meet the hatchery needs;

and walked the Commission through the hydrographs. Sally Manning stated she appreciated the report on Fish Springs; could the axis numbers on the hydrographs be larger and discussed hatchery operation. Lynn Boulton inquired if the type C vegetation near fish springs fish hatchery is the depth to water in that area within 8 feet. Keith directed Lynn Boulton to the Water Dept. website [www.inyowater.org](http://www.inyowater.org) to the annual reports and hydrology section to find the information she is looking for visual comparisons. The Board and staff discussed the deep and shallow aquifers and flows in the Big Pine area. Dr. Steinwand stated to summarize, we have the data, we have various estimates, and we have measurements that we turn into estimates under the parcels which is what Lynn Boulton was asking and all that is in the annual report section of our website.

d. OVGA update

Dr. Steinwand stated there is an administrative draft of the GSP; the GSP was circulated internally last month; comments from staff are being incorporated; and a public draft will be released on September 23, 2021. He shared the time table for the following months leading up to submission of the GSP to the state.

Philip Anaya stated a deficiency in the draft GSP is there is no plan to manage the adjudicated/non-adjudicated boundary; reiterated the 2013/14 west Bishop issues; and he would like two items placed on future projects; pursuit of a adjudicated/non-adjudicated boundary management agreement with LADWP and inclusion of surface flow management.

## 6. Update on Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area Interim Plan

Dr. Steinwand stated at the May Standing Committee meeting the Standing Committee set the flooded acreage project which is done annually; change is to wet up 500 acres annually in the fall through spring period instead of varying the acreage flooded based on runoff; adopting fairly well known practices in other wetlands called moist soil management principles; the interim plan laid out several actions mostly by DWP ; weed treatment; weed survey; and discing of the tules in the wetland basins; culvert berm; diversion repair; and all of those have been completed. The Commissioner's discussed this as a possible future field trip.

## 7. Water Department Staff reports on summer monitoring activities

Dr. Steinwand stated at the end of the summer season, staff provides updates on summer monitoring activities; Keith Rainville, Zach Nelson, and Meredith Jabis will provide staff reports. Keith stated several of the things they do has been covered or will be covered in the next item, McNally Ponds; they've covered some additional flow monitoring/compliance monitoring; depth to water monitoring in areas of interest such as the Big Pine area, Fish Slough; tracked the high and lower water level years; hydro analysis; Bishop Cone audit, and neutron probe monitoring. Dr. Steinwand acknowledged all the staff for their excellent work over the summer. Zach provided a power point presentation and discussed rare plant monitoring done mostly by Jerry and Dana; stated this is done as part of the LTWA and it's done to monitor the rare plant populations consistent with state and federal laws; this year they visited 40 sites, completed line point monitoring to detect changes in vegetation dependent on groundwater ecosystems; monitored short term trends ; together with LADWP visited 126 of these parcels this year, completed point frame monitoring; and scoured the Owens River for noxious weeds. He discussed the flooding in the blackrock area; the upcoming avian surveys, remote sensing, LIDAR data; real-time satellite data; and drone flights to map vegetation. The Commissioners and staff discussed the summer activities Lynn Boulton stated will you know how much water it took to get to that amount of area via the drone mapping; will you know how much water DWP put in the blackrock waterfowl management area; pepper weed is developing at the Hines Spring and the Five Bridges area; about 300 acres of pepper weed and it's shocking to imagine just how much pesticide will be required to apply there, and when you're constantly applying the pesticides then you lose the rare indigenous species; and stated it's a huge ecological disaster. Commissioner Keller asked is this new or something we know about, Zach stated there has been pepper weed throughout that site for quite a while. Sally Manning stated she would echo what Lynn Boulton said about Five Bridges; it is an ecological disaster; no action is really being taken; vegetation parcels and monitoring site areas have been below baseline for 18 of the 20 years; type E vegetation is not getting the water allotments they are supposed to get; nothing of substance reaches the Technical Group; rare plant monitoring is only reporting to Ca Fish & Wildlife the areas in good condition not the places doing so poorly. Meredith Jabis provided a power point presentation on type D riparian vegetation studies and monitoring. Meredith stated this spring and summer they revisited of the woody recruitment locations on the LORP to characterize the topography; height and age of the individuals ; type D riparian vegetation monitoring on the middle and lower Owens river; she stated a lot of the information is summarized in the 2020 annual report. She stated riparian forests are a sensitive community type in the Owens valley; there is interest in tree recruitment; they are addressing the historic conditions that have allowed tree

establishment generally on the river, extended flood plain and in old channel meanders along the river; there is interest in the current age and size structure of these riparian forests; if these populations are expanding ; if they are stable, or if they are diminishing ; and explained the population age class. She explained in detail the types of data they are collecting on the trees as well as soil samples and tree cores for precise age estimation ; 61 transects were completed from the middle to the lower Owens River and the results will be presented in the 2021 annual report.

## **8. Status of McNally Ponds E/M report**

Dr. Steinwand stated last fall the Standing Committee directed staff to prepare a report evaluating the existing project location for the McNally Ponds as well as a possible alternative area near Farmer's Pond , staff have been working on this and provided several updates over the past year . He stated the plan for this year is to water up the existing site; the report is under way; Keith Rainville has done the hydrologic analysis along with staff from LADWP looking at surface water hydrology as well as the groundwater hydrology and the effects of the groundwater pumping to supply the projects; and the report is expected to go before the Technical Group on October 18, 2021. He stated the Technical Group may or may not make a recommendation to the Standing Committee to swap project locations, test the operation of Farmer's over McNally's, or leave the project at its present location and supply the existing McNally canals with pumped groundwater in dry years like this. Sally Manning stated she doesn't know who decided why Farmer's Pond deserves more mitigation; McNally Pond is an unworkable project; there is plenty of valley south of Bishop that needs mitigation; and asked the Water Commissioner's to steer the Standing Committee and County away from this idea and towards something more worthwhile; and Big Pine has 210 acres east of town that's never been dealt with. Lynn Boulton stated are you measuring on average how much water is going to the McNally Ponds; can the water be applied somewhere else other than all of it at McNally Ponds; what are other options; could there be a discussion about other alternatives before it goes to the Technical Group; and what about just raising the water table at Five Bridges to support vegetation. Sally Manning stated maybe just vote on some ideas on projects for at least parts of the valley that would benefit more than Farmer's Pond.

## **9. Standing Committee schedule and agenda items**

Dr. Steinwand stated the Standing Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 3, 2021, and discussion items may be about runoff and operations, blackrock , conditions in the valley, and the LORP; and hopefully we will have a more polished project with the McNally Ponds to discuss. The agenda will be discussed at the upcoming Technical Group meeting. Commissioner Keller requested the proposed agenda be sent to the Water Commission prior to the Tech Group meeting.

## **10. Future meeting schedule**

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for the early part of January 2022.

## **11. Adjourn**

The Vice Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.