

MINUTES

County of Inyo WATER COMMISSION

April 22, 2024

Commissioner Red Owl called the Water Commission meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. at the Clint Quilter County Office Building, Bishop, Ca. Water Commissioners in attendance were Teri Red Owl, Randy Keller, and Vikki Glinskii. Commissioner Berry and Commissioner Huette were present on the phone but not at noticed locations, so they participated as members of the public. Present from the Water Department were Holly Alpert, Laura Piper, Zach Nelson, and Tim Moore.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Board and Water Department staff introduced themselves and the Chairperson welcomed members of the public to the meeting.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Red Owl led the pledge of allegiance.

3. Public Comment

The Chairperson opened the public comment period and there was no one wishing to address the Board.

4. Approval of minutes from January 23, 2024

Motion to approve the January 23, 2024, minutes by Randy Keller, seconded by Vikki Glinskii. Motion passed, with Commissioner Berry and Commissioner Huette absent.

5. Commissioners' reports

Commissioner Glinskii stated she was catching up on reading documents, emailing Dr. Alpert regarding questions she had and bringing herself up to speed. Commissioner Huette was unable to attend in person but stated he would participate via zoom as a member of the public. Commissioner Red Owl wished everyone a happy Earth Day; stated there are great local Earth Day events happening; one she attended she witnessed the endangered Owens pupfish released into the Bishop Tribe's Conservation Open Space Area ponds, approximately 300 pupfish. She stated it was very touching to see.

6. CDFW update on Fish Springs variable-flow valve project to reduce hatchery pumping

Dr. Alpert introduced Russel Black with CDFW to speak regarding concerns received over the Fish Springs fish hatchery. He gave a brief overview and discussed the two projects at Fish Springs fish hatchery, the mid pond aeration system which he stated should be completed September of 2024 if there are no delays, and the variable speed valves project which will be starting this September 2024 with a completion date of December 2024. The Board & Mr. Black discussed this item in detail. Lynn Boulton stated Lahontan just reviewed the quality of the water that goes into the canal and they gave it a passing grade but if you repeat it several times it will become higher density, maybe they should check it again. Jon Klusmire inquired about the exact pumping for the hatchery vs the Big Pine wellfield, stated there is a maximum in 24/25 of 21,300 af in Big Pine and how does that break down. He stated the numbers don't match what LADWP is pumping out of the wellfield. Sally Manning stated there are two big wells at the fish hatchery, when they are both on,

one pumps 11-12,000 af and the other is about 8,000 af per year. She provided an overview of the various pumping and wells, on/off, etc affecting water levels in the Big Pine area. She asked if the fish production at the hatchery has been normal in the past 18 months, Mr. Black states yes. Lynn Boulton asked if the water gets too hot for the pupfish released in the Coso area and how do they control the temperature.

7. Director's report

Dr. Alpert provided an update on Water Department staffing. She stated a Research Assistant was recently hired and we are hiring six seasonal Field Assistant positions and two Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) seasonal positions.

She stated a recent update is LADWP is going to do an aquifer test in Rose Valley on well V817 as a first step in a possible groundwater banking project. The test will be performed in the second week of May and last approximately a week. The Water Department requested the data from the testing and that the test proposal be brought to the Inyo County/Los Angeles Technical Group. Commissioner Red Owl stated if any water is banked it should be to the basin it is coming from, and Rose Valley is a completely separate basin. She inquired if the Water Commission or county as a whole, has any authority to put requirements on their testing such as monitoring or environmental assessments. She stated she feels this will open the door for LADWP to send water transfers to Indian Wells Valley. Commissioner Keller inquired if there were other areas in the valley that could be used for potential water banking. Dr. Alpert stated she has heard from LADWP of three potential areas, the base of Cottonwood Creek, along the road that goes to the pump back station, and also east of the river in the southern portion of the valley. The Board and staff discussed this item in detail. Lynn Boulton asked if this water banking is a large open reservoir. Sally Manning stated this doesn't make sense that they will pump 21-acre feet in one week. She asked if V817 was a pump equipped well. Commissioner Huetten asked how close is it to the pump back station for the geothermal plant. Tim Moore stated they pump from Hay Ranch which is 2-3 miles. Sally Manning stated this is a type of water transfer, they are pumping water into the aqueduct and out of Rose Valley which is a separate basin from the Owens Valley, so the County has total say over this. Wendy Schneider asked what is the stated purpose of this project. Nancy Masters stated the whole groundwater banking is not a surprise and she thinks it is a problem. She asked who owns the land the wells are on. She stated Ordinance 1004 regulates the export of water when it is a sale, when sold and transported via the aqueduct. She stated they should be encouraged to water bank in the Owens Valley such as the Laws area. Lynn Boulton stated the LTWA has control. Nancy Masters stated if LADWP water banks in Rose Valley, that is the area that Coso Geothermal uses to enhance their wellfield so they can extract energy and make money, so one water molecule is not different than the other water molecule so in effect by utilizing Rose Valley, it can be construed that LADWP is making a sale of sorts. She stated Coso Geothermal may receive a benefit from this water banking project. Commissioner Keller stated any banking project is going to have a lot of complications. Jon Klusmire asked if they would pump water out of Rose Valley, put it in the aqueduct and bank it south. Wendy Schneider stated at what point are we allowed to ask what the plans are and what this banking project is. Lynn Boulton asked if they would be doing CEQA.

Dr. Alpert stated Tim Moore worked hard to complete our first OVGA annual report for 2022, the report is in the public comment period which ends this Friday; and she talked about the OVGA well registration program with a deadline of April 1.

8. Discussion of LADWP's 2024-2025 Draft Annual Operations Plan

Dr. Alpert provided a PowerPoint presentation on the 2024-25 Draft LADWP Operations Plan. Tim Moore and Zach Nelson responded to many of the public's questions and gave presentations on the Annual Operations Plan also. She provided a review over the past year of runoff, the 2023-24 pumping, historical pumping back to 1970, water levels and changes in depth to water. The Board and staff discussed this item in detail and at length. Lynn Boulton asked for the depth to water graph that she can zoom. Sally Manning stated the depth to water graph is misleading, is it positive or a negative. Jon Klusmire stated there are huge amounts of water spread around Independence and up on the alluvial fan there are dams where DWP stopped the water then slowly released so people are going to ask how could the groundwater level drop when there is so much water in that area. Sally Manning stated one year is not recovery. She stated conversion is not supposed to happen under the Water Agreement and that's very concerning. Lynn Boulton stated she would call 75% converted. Sally Manning stated the McNally's ran from the 1880's to the 1990's and when are things going to change. Nancy Masters stated running the upper and lower McNally canal might over time help to remediate those areas,

she stated is always better to prevent damage than to mitigate. Sally Manning stated that's a big jump from last year's 35,000 af to 51,470 af. She stated the tribe is on record stating they oppose pumping of W415 for anything other than what the town needs and just recommending the minimum pumping is not a plan. Nancy Masters thanked the Water Dept for encouraging LADWP to use surface water whenever possible. She stated what is the legal basis for LADWP diverting water up high on the alluvial fans, there is no way to adjust the diversions, they are set at an auto amount that goes out on the alluvial fan and doesn't go down to the grasslands. She stated the water needs to go down the natural water course to refresh the area and there are downstream water rights holders that are affected by this diversion. Lynn Boulton stated when LADWP exceeds the minimum pumping there should be a reporting of why. Jon Klusmire inquired about the total for exempt well pumping allowable that can be as high as 45,000-50,000 af.

9. Discussion of replacement well projects in Laws (W247R) and Big Pine (W379R)

Dr. Alpert provided a brief introduction regarding this item and Tim Moore provided details on the wells and their locations. The Board and staff discussed this item in detail. Lynn Boulton asked if Tim agreed with former ICWD employee Keith Rainville on prior notes regarding these wells. Sally Manning stated 700 feet in Laws will affect Fish Slough and if they are getting 5 cfs already, why would we let them drill a deeper well. Edie Trimmer stated she thought there was a lot not known about the northern end of Inyo County in terms of the groundwater; what is the purpose of well 247 and what does it supply. Tim Moore stated the McNally EM pasture project. Dr. Alpert stated DWP is doing an adaptive monitoring approach. Nancy Masters asked how far away from the wells will the deep monitoring wells be because the impacts from deep wells can be widespread and impacts we might not be able to anticipate.

10.. Future meeting schedule

The next Water Commission was tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, June 25, 2024.

11. Public Comment

Dan Berry apologized for not attending the meeting, he had extenuating circumstances and appreciates all the great public comments.

12. Adjourn

The Vice Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 8:52 p.m.