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Opponents Make Case Against Eastern Nevada Water Pipeline

Las Vegas, NV – August 1, 2017 – On Monday, US District Court Judge Andrew Gordon heard arguments in a lawsuit seeking to block a proposal by the Southern Nevada Water Authority from building a 300-mile long pipeline to extract billions of gallons of groundwater from the eastern part of the state.

Attorney Simeon Herskovits represented a broad coalition of local governments and nonprofit groups in Nevada and Utah, including White Pine County and the Great Basin Water Network. Along with tribal governments and other environmental advocates, they sued the federal government in early 2014. Plaintiffs argue the Bureau of Land Management’s assessment of the environmental impact of the project lacked enough detail and improperly delayed studying certain effects from the proposal. They ask that permission to build the project across public land be revoked until the analysis is revised.

“The hearing shows once again the shell game that SNWA is playing to build the pipeline,” said Gary Perea, a White Pine County Commissioner. “They, along with the state and BLM, point fingers, make excuses, and cut corners while constantly working to move to the project forward.”

Over the course of about an hour and a half on Monday, pipeline opponents and representatives of the federal government and SNWA laid out their positions. After asking a series of questions to both sides, Judge Gordon anticipated making a ruling by the end of September, when Nevada’s State Engineer will again take up the issue of how much water to grant to SNWA. Previous decisions by the top water official were voided in state court for being insufficient.

“All of these agencies are trying to avoid making a detailed plan to avoid or mitigate the damage from this multibillion-dollar boondoggle until it’s already built,” Perea said. “Why? Because the costs to ratepayers and the affected plants, animals, and communities would be massive. If those things were all made clear up front, the choice would be clear: reject the plan outright.”

There is no specific timeline for when the pipeline project, estimated to cost at least \$15 billion, would be built, nor a breakdown of how such an expenditure would be paid for. SNWA has already spent millions of dollars purchasing land, including active ranches in rural Nevada, and pursuing necessary approvals at both the state and federal levels since initially filing applications for water rights in the target valleys in 1989.

The proposed project faced a recent setback when water rights granted by the state were overturned in Nevada Court. After a lawsuit from similar groups, in 2014 Senior District Judge Robert Estes ordered King to recalculate how much pumping should be allowed and develop detailed triggers for corrective action should large-scale withdrawals result in damage.

Great Basin Water Network is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working for sustainable water policies that protect the Great Basin’s watersheds for current and future residents – human, animal, and plant. GBWN is committed to bringing disparate communities together to preserve and protect the West’s environment, economies, communities, and cultures.

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