SNWA to Receive Rural Nevada Groundwater

On April 16, Nevada's state engineer approved a portion of the groundwater rights applications the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) submitted for Spring Valley in White Pine County, enabling SNWA to develop a maximum of 60,000 acre-feet annually from the rural eastern Nevada basin. SNWA had applied for rights to 91,000 acre-feet per year.

Under terms of the decision, SNWA can pump 40,000 acre-feet annually from the basin for 10 years. At that point, SNWA will be allowed an additional 20,000 acre-feet annually from the basin based on the results of monitoring and impact analysis.

The first water deliveries from Spring Valley to southern Nevada are not expected until 2014 at the earliest, pending construction of a 285-mile pipeline, among other things.

The state engineer's approval also requires protecting existing groundwater rights in the basin, the ability for future groundwater growth and development in Spring Valley, and a comprehensive monitoring, management and environmental mitigation plan.

Visit www.snwa.com.

Review of EPA Identifies Strategic Weaknesses

A report issued in March by the U.S. EPA Science Advisory Board (SAB) identified several weaknesses in the strategic direction of the agency's major research programs. The strategic review focused on four key cross-program areas: the impacts of climate change, sensitive populations (human and ecological), the environmental consequences of urban sprawl, and large-scale natural and man-made environmental disasters.

Overall, the SAB found that severe budget constraints "appear to have caused EPA's research planning to become more reactive and less strategic." Furthermore, with a few exceptions, research funding decisions "appear to be incremental rather than strategic, causing research programs to focus more on yesterday's issues and less on new and emerging environmental problems." EPA "urgently needs to develop a higher-level research planning effort that can consider and adjust the balance and focus among major program areas and increase coordination and collaboration across program areas." SAB expressed "grave concerns about the decreased trend in the funding of ecosystems research, decreased funding of STAR (Science To Achieve Results) extramural and fellowship programs, and the elimination of the economics and decision-sciences research program," that resulted from the President's FY 2008 budget.

The 38-member SAB panel largely represents research universities, but also includes representatives from federal and state governments and nongovernmental organizations.

The report is available at www.epa.gov/sab/pdf/sab-07-004.pdf.

Reclamation Releases Draft EIS on CO River Shortage Guidelines

In late February, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released for public review and comment a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on proposed interim guidelines for managing the Colorado River storage system, particularly under drought and low reservoir conditions. The guidelines, which would extend through 2026, would be used for determining shortages in the Lower Colorado Basin and coordinating operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead reservoirs. The guidelines were developed to improve Reclamation's management of the Colorado River, provide mainstream U.S. users of Colorado River water a greater degree of predictability regarding annual water deliveries in future years, and provide additional mechanisms for the storage and delivery of water supplies in Lake Mead.

The draft EIS presents four possible alternatives for implementation plus a "no action" alternative, and the potential environmental implications of each.

HydroFacts

Percent increase in global population during 20th century:	300
Percent increase in water used for agricultural irrigation:	500
Total land area of the world:	32 billion acres
Percent land area in pasture:	27
Percent land area cultivated:	12
Percent cultivated land area with rain-fed crops:	10
Percent cultivated land area that is irrigated:	2
Annual withdrawals from rivers and aquifers for irrigation:	1.86 billion acre-feet
Estimated amount of water effectively consumed by crops:	728 million acre-feet
Percent global average irrigation efficiency:	39
Hours women and girls walk for water each day, globally:	200 million

Sources: UNESCO Water Portal Weekly Newsletter #185, April 2007 and WaterPartners International