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Utah Waters Commission

by Ken Embley

I know—there is no such thing as a Utah Waters Commission—at least not yet!

In 1991, a cooperative agreement among seven water and wastewater agencies in Southern Nevada created The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). From its inception, the purpose of the SNWA was to seek new water resources for Southern Nevada, manage existing and future water resources, construct and manage regional water facilities and promote conservation.

Recently, the SNWA published their 2006 Water Resource Plan. The plan provides a comprehensive overview of water resources and demands in Southern Nevada. As with previous plans, an underlying principle of the 2006 Water Resource Plan is to maximize the use of existing resources, while maintaining the ability to adjust planning as circumstances or conditions warrant.

To help facilitate fruition of its purpose, the SNWA launched Integrated Water Planning (IWP) in 2004. The belief is the development of some or all of the in-state water and related resources has potential implications for a wide range of operational issues, including treatment and delivery system capacities, return-flow credits, reclaimed water flows to Lake Mead, project funding and water quality—as well as for larger issues such as environmental protection and rural economic development. The IWP process included the formation of an Integrated Water Planning Advisory Committee (IWPAC) in August 2004. In September 2005, the IWPAC finalized 22 recommendations and presented them to the SNWA Board of Directors on November 17, 2005.

Well, it appears that Nevada has its “collective efforts” all together in terms of water. Are their collective efforts a shining example of what we ought to be doing in Utah? Do their collective efforts serve notice that when it comes to water, Nevada intends to be a dominating regional player? The answers to both hypothetical questions are a resounding yes!

It seems to me that the independent efforts of water related agencies throughout the state of Utah do a good to outstanding job of meeting their independent missions and satisfying their particular stakeholder demands. These independent efforts warrant fair recognition for a job well done.

However, Utah—we have a problem! Our water agencies operate independently of one another and some might say that, at times, different agencies will compete in order to achieve their independent missions and satisfy stakeholder demands.

The problem is a reliance on independent efforts and that, in turn, may mean a failure to act collectively where the conditions and circumstances calls for a collective effort to effectively and efficiently address and resolve water issues.

Again, I am not advocating the abandonment of stellar independent agency efforts. If anything, we should maintain and continue development of agencies where their missions add value for the people of Utah. ***What I am suggesting/recommending is the creation of a means to facilitate our collective efforts in managing water.*** My recommendation is that the Governor work with water agency heads, legislators and other interested persons to create and properly fund a ***Utah Waters Commission***.

The primary purpose of the Utah Waters Commission would be to create means and methods to ensure a collective effort between and among our Utah independent water interests. A Utah Waters Commission can create plans that provide a comprehensive overview of water resources and demands in Utah. A Utah Waters Commission can work with independent agencies to ensure a collective effort as we seek new water resources for Utah, manage existing and future water resources, construct and manage water facilities and promote conservation.

Nevada has its "collective acts" together with their 2006 Water Resource Plan. When it comes to water issues, Nevada is in a position to be a dominate player in the region. In my opinion, Utah needs to take a good hard look at what Nevada is doing and work to enable our collective water efforts to do such things as develop a water resource plan for Utah. In my opinion, we need a Utah Waters Commission.

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