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## MONO COUNTY SUES LOS ANGELES TO STOP NEXT EASTERN SIERRA WATER GRAB

### Litigation Challenges LADWP's Failure to Conduct Environmental Review Prior to Dewatering Wetland and Meadow Habitat in Southern Mono County

**Mammoth Lakes, Calif. (August 15, 2018)** – On Wednesday, Mono County filed litigation challenging the decision of the City of Los Angeles and its Department of Water and Power (LADWP) to dry out 6,400 acres of wetlands, meadows and pastures in Long and Little Round Valleys in order to export additional water from California's Eastern Sierra.

The lands in question have been irrigated for more than 100 years and provide important habitat for wildlife, including the bi-state-sage grouse, a California bird species of special concern currently being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The results of LADWP's devastating action are visible to anyone traveling along Highway 395 near Crowley Lake, and the scenic vistas cherished by visitors from Los Angeles and around the world could be forever altered. Thousands of acres of wetland and meadow habitat are already brown and dry. With wildfires raging around the state, the removal of water and encroachment of highly flammable invasive plant species has state and county officials worried.

According to the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, John Laird, LADWP's actions in southern Mono County "have significant consequences to wildlife by destroying wetlands and riparian areas and eliminating habitat for sensitive species such as the bi-state sage grouse" and "also significantly increase the risk of wildfires, which would threaten nearby communities."

The county's lawsuit alleges that LADWP failed to comply with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and seeks "a determination from the Court that LADWP's decision/action to significantly reduce water deliveries to approximately 6,400 acres of land in the County of Mono, modify more than seventy years of land management practices on those lands and thereby increase water export from Mono County is invalid and void and fails to satisfy the requirements of CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines."

CEQA requires public agencies, such as LADWP, to analyze and consider the potential environmental impacts of their actions prior to taking those actions.

The county's lawsuit further alleges that "prior to approving the additional water export and changing its historic land management practices, LADWP did not conduct any environmental review under CEQA. Thus, neither the public nor decisionmakers were provided information regarding the potentially significant impacts that such action may have on biological resources such as the bi-state sage grouse, visual/aesthetic resources, wetlands, and public safety."

At its August 7 meeting, the Mono County Board of Supervisors heard more than three and a half hours of comment from residents of the Eastern Sierra and visitors from southern California, environmental groups, state and federal regulators, and ranchers whose livelihoods are threatened, all expressing concerns about the impacts of LADWP's water reductions. The Mono Lake Committee, Sierra Club, Friends of the Inyo, Eastern Sierra Land Trust, and even an ex-LADWP employee cited concerns ranging from threats to the bi-state sage grouse, a California species of special concern which relies on the wet meadows for successful brood rearing, to impacts on climate change resulting from meadow and wetland loss and from the intrusion of invasive plant species to an increased risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Following the conclusion of public comment, the Supervisors voted unanimously to initiate litigation.

"I'm disappointed in the City of Los Angeles," explained Supervisor Fred Stump. "But our backs are against the wall, the environment is against the wall, the sage grouse is against the wall, and there's nothing else left to do."

Litigation was not the County's first choice. "We are willing to compromise. We all recognize that climate change impacts have to be mitigated. What we're asking for is reasonable and it's better for the ratepayers in LA," explained Supervisor Stacy Corless, who noted that litigation and court-ordered environmental mitigation along the Owens River watershed have cost the LA ratepayers billions of dollars over the years.

"Good policy analysis is determined by the actions taken by public agencies and not the pretty words they put on their websites or in their publications" said Mono County Board Chair Bob Gardner. "I hope that we see some corporate responsibility and good neighbor relations from the City of Los Angeles."

"Let's do the right thing right now," Gardner urged.

#### **About Mono County:**

Set on the eastern slopes of California's Sierra Nevada mountains, Mono County is a rare environment of natural contrasts and open spaces with only 14,000 residents and a tourism- and agriculture-based economy. Soaring granite peaks and spacious desert vistas, bubbling hot springs and cold mountain streams, winter snows and sunny summer skies, rolling sagebrush hills and vibrant wildflower meadows. "Mono" in Paiute means "beautiful," which aptly describes this scenic wonderland that stretches 108 miles in length from the Alpine County border in the north to the Inyo County border in the south. Originally formed on April 24, 1861, Mono County includes the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the northern area communities of Coleville, Topaz, and Walker, and the southern area

communities of Crowley Lake, Benton, Chalfant, June Lake, Lee Vining, and Mono City. More than 90% (approximately 3000 square miles) of Mono County consists of federal or state public lands visited by over 4 million people each year. The City of Los Angeles owns about 100 square miles and just 6% of the County's total lands are in private ownership.

For more information, maps of the affected areas, comment letters on the issue and a copy of the County's Petition for Writ of Mandate against the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, please visit: <https://www.monocounty.ca.gov/cao/page/mono-supervisors-ask-ladwp-do-right-thing>.