

Dry lake pumping still 'on table'

Consultants say they still hope to find a suitable level that won't damage area

By Julian Lukins
News Staff

Officials made it clear Thursday they were "not ready to throw in the towel" after tests revealed large-scale groundwater pumping for dust control at Owens

Dry Lake would have negative impacts on the environment.

Consultants studying groundwater at the vast lake bed told about 60 concerned locals at a public meeting in Lone Pine that a proposal by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) to pump 1,600 acre-feet per year from under the lake bed for dust control would harm local wells and damage wetland areas harboring wildlife.

However, consultants said they had not given up on the idea that groundwater could be used for shallow flooding mea-

sures at the lake bed, with DWP obligated to curb health-threatening dust by December, 2001. DWP acknowledged its water diversions caused the dust problem but DWP does not want to give up huge amounts of drinking-quality water from the city's aqueduct for dust control.

Paul Brown, a consultant with Camp Dresser & McKee, told locals that although tests had shown DWP's original proposal was unacceptable, future studies could reveal an acceptable level of pumping. "We are not ready to throw in the towel," Brown said. "While this proposal

does not work, we do not think it's impossible to find one that does," he added.

Some locals claimed the tests were a "waste of time" because the outcome was "obvious." However, Brown insisted much had been learned about groundwater beneath the lake bed. He said consultants had predicted a "draw down" of two-and-a-half feet during one test and the actual draw down was a foot greater.

DWP assistant general manager Gerald Gewe said DWP was "committed
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to pumping in a responsible manner." He said DWP would pursue groundwater pumping if a plan could be drawn up which would require some "mitigation" measures. Locals, meanwhile, have insisted no environmental damage would be acceptable and, therefore, "mitigation" — or corrective measures — should not be an issue.

Gewe said Thursday: "I think we can still come up with a pumping program and it can work." He acknowledged DWP could not proceed with its original proposal in light of test results showing it would have significant impacts on wells and wetlands. However, Gewe said DWP would pursue a "long-term" pumping plan which, he hoped, would be acceptable and satisfy local concerns. "We may not be able to and we may have to drop the whole thing," he acknowledged. "I clearly do not want to go down the litigation path again," Gewe said, referring to decades of lawsuits over water issues in Inyo County.

Consultants said projected impacts of the proposed large-scale

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pumping would include "draw downs" on the town well at Keeler and the well at Swansea. Other forecasts predicted damage to shoreline wetland areas, possibly drying up seeps and springs. However, consultants said tests did not reveal any likely subsidence damage to homes in Keeler.

Another public meeting will be staged in Lone Pine in November to discuss future pumping studies.

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Ruelas told CHP officers that he saw another vehicle in the No. 1 lane making a turn onto Pa Ha, and he followed in his 1984 Ford Escort, failing to see Decker's oncoming 1997 Dodge van.

Decker hit her brakes in an attempt to avoid the collision, but struck Ruelas' Escort on the right side.

Both vehicles sustained major damage. Both drivers were using safety belts and escaped injury.