

## SPECIAL REPORT

# Give Me a Stone

David meets Goliath in the eastern Sierra. Again. By Carolyn Dufurrena

*“We account for every drop of rain that falls in the Owens Valley, and let every drop of rain that falls in the L.A. Basin flow out into the ocean.”*

—Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles.

*They come to me and they start to cry  
Say ya gotta do something about that guy  
They say take this sword, I say thanks a lot  
But I do all right with this sling I got*

*Someone gimme a stone...*

*Stone that I can hold*

*Stone that I can throw*

*Someone gimme a stone*

*Someone gimme a stone.*

—Hyman, Chertoff, Forman & Bazilian:

*Little Feat rock band, 2000*

**T**he Ferraro Building in downtown Los Angeles, headquarters of the Department of Water and Power (DWP), is a black glass tower. A fitting residence for Goliath, it is surrounded by a 4.7 acre reflecting pool: a moat, complete with eight fountains, over which visitors must transit a black slate bridge to enter.

The water in this pool is now reclaimed gray water from the operation of the build-



*Fountains illuminate the reflecting pool surrounding the headquarters of LADWP at night. About 1.3 million gallons of eastern Sierra waters recirculate around this downtown monolith.*

ing's air conditioning system. But it came originally, via the Los Angeles Aqueduct, from the eastern Sierra, from Owens Valley. The 1.2 million-gallon reflecting pool approximates 75 percent of one ranching family's annual irrigation allotment—until February 2018 when their annual five acre-feet allotment disappeared.

Historically, the Los Angeles Aqueduct system has supplied the lion's share of the city's water. It is primarily gravity-fed, which means it's cheap to transport, much cheaper

than the Metropolitan Water District's Colorado River water, which must be pumped over several mountain ranges to suburban L.A., and is of less pristine quality.

Supplies of water from the eastern Sierra are finite, and dwindling. For a moment, set aside climate change and focus on what humans do. Reservoirs have earthen dams which have not seen significant maintenance in decades, which thus cannot be kept completely full. There are further reductions due to pipeline maintenance needs and multiple lawsuits in support of various environmental issues, including the California gull population at Mono Lake on the north end of the system and dust mitigation on Owens Dry Lake in the south.

Mayor Eric Garcetti, who has political ambitions beyond the state of California, has announced an ambitious plan to garner half the city's water from

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—ERIC GARCETTI

MAYOR OF LOS ANGELES

local sources by 2039: storm-water capture, conservation, etc. Indeed, within the last decade, minor recycling efforts have resulted in small contributions to the L.A. water system. It would be brilliant not to waste the majority of the 14.93 inches of rainwater the heavens gift the city in an average year. Garcetti's is a bold vision; still, DWP's most recent master plan for 2039 shows Owens Valley providing even more of Los Angeles' water—284,000 acre-feet per year—as opposed to the last five years, when it produced 108,080 acre-feet, 42 percent compared to about 20 percent.

So somebody's in Lala Land, or somebody's lying. ■



*The Upper Owens River passes through irrigated ranch lands in Long Valley north of Benton Crossing Road and Lake Crowley Reservoir in 2017, before DWP began dewatering the meadows.*

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# Legacy of Lies and Betrayal

*The history of the Los Angeles Aqueduct.*

September 1904. Fred Eaton and his protégé, William Mulholland, both worked for the Los Angeles City Water Company. They left Los Angeles headed for the Owens Valley, looking for water for a city in the desert, a city of some 200,000 souls, guided by J.B. Lippincott, head systems engineer for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. In addition to his government job, Lippincott maintained an engineering consulting business in Los Angeles.

Eaton traveled Long Valley, buying ranches and water rights and purportedly working for the Bureau of Reclamation, allegedly putting together a massive federal reclamation project. Cash-strapped farmers signed over their water rights with assurances that they'd be able to stay and farm the land. Too late they discovered they had really sold out to the city of Los Angeles.

Lippincott was removed from the Bureau of Reclamation in an attempt by the feds to save face. Undeterred, he immediately went to work for the city as chief engineer for the aqueduct, at twice his government salary.

The exploitation of Owens Valley water was, for Eaton, a matter of personal and financial gain that would ultimately eat him alive. He acquired Thomas B. Rickey's Long Valley Ranch, 22,850 acres of grazing in the Upper Owens Valley, for \$450,000. The city got the water rights. Eaton retained control of the crown jewel, the reservoir site, 5,000 head of cattle, 100 mules, farm equipment, plus \$100,000 for commissions on other properties he had purchased for the city. It wasn't enough. He wanted \$1 million for the reservoir site. Mulholland wasn't buying.

Mulholland was in love with engineering the massive project that would turn Los Angeles from a sleepy berg into a tropical city of hundreds of thousands. A handful of Southern California oligarchs almost simultaneously had bought up the San Fernando Valley on the cheap and were busy developing. The aqueduct was completed by 1913.

By 1920, L.A.'s population passed 500,000. Like a cancer, it continued to spread and its growth soon outpaced its water. By 1923, the San Fernando Valley had nearly sucked the

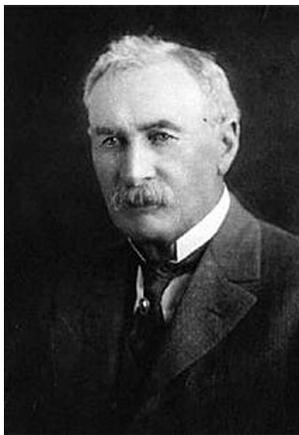
aqueduct dry. Groundwater pumping ensued.

In spring 1924, Owens Valley locals began sabotaging the aqueduct. That November, 70 armed men from Bishop seized control of the Alabama Gate Spillway, opened the valves and released a massive flood onto the desert floor that cut off all water to the city. A festive community picnic ensued, with

pit barbecues and an orchestra contributed by Tom Mix, who was filming a western in the nearby Alabama Hills. Bands played. People sang "Onward Christian Soldiers." The monkey wrenching went on for three years.

Meanwhile, Eaton, who had thought of himself as the "Cattle King of California," had sold his cows, built a chicken processing plant, and raised his price on the Long Valley reservoir site to \$3 million.

Eaton's board of directors, unbeknownst to him, had taken out a massive loan against



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*The Los Angeles "skyline" from the southern Sierra in August 2018. Although fires raged nearby, the sky above the city this day was mostly smog. AT TOP: William Mulholland, the mastermind who created the Los Angeles water system. Without him, Los Angeles could never have grown to its current size of 18.8 million people.*

the ranch at the local bank owned by the patriotic Watterson brothers, known to play fast and loose with a dollar in support of their rancher friends. Upon discovering the move, Eaton would have the first of a series of strokes. Somehow, though partially paralyzed for a time, he did not die.

Mulholland, meanwhile, furious with terrorist activities that continued to plague the aqueduct system, went after the Wattersons. He uncovered the embezzlement that had helped finance local ranchers and five local banks collapsed. Life savings, mortgages, everything evaporated. The Eaton Ranch went into foreclosure. Inyo County was ruined.

Mulholland's fortunes would sink in 1926 with the collapse of the St. Francis Dam, which killed at least 400 people and demolished several towns. He was nearly indicted for manslaughter, then not; nearly fired, then not. He retired in 1928 at age 73, depressed and suffering from Parkinson's.

Fred Eaton became progressively deranged, continuing to demand millions of dollars for his reservoir site. He was offered \$800,000, which he refused, although he was bankrupt. The city finally bought the Eaton Ranch in 1932 for \$25 per acre. Eaton had purchased it in 1905 for \$22.50 per acre. He finally succumbed to another stroke two years



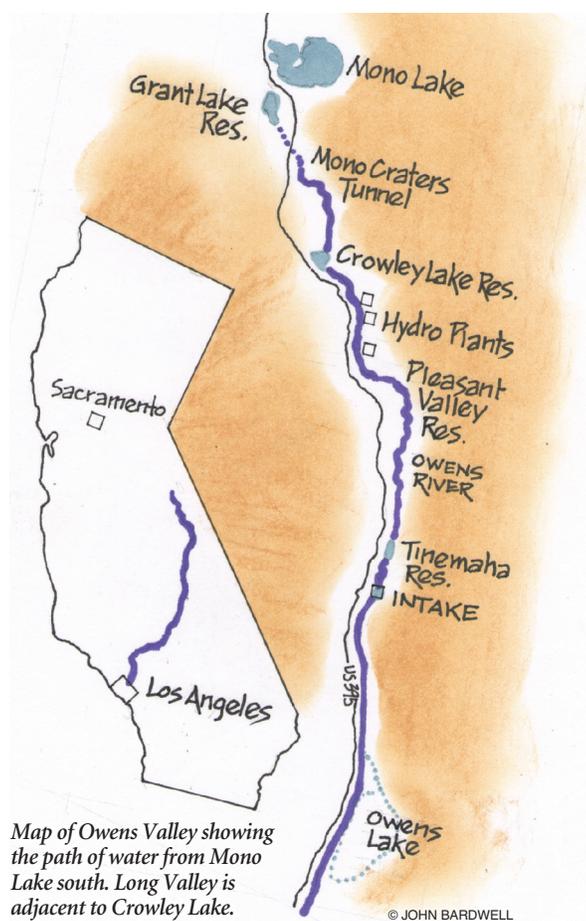
later. Mulholland would die the following summer. Crowley Dam, named for a priest who tried to patch up relations with valley residents, was finished in 1941. It destroyed thousands of acres of wetlands in the process.

By 1947, Owens Valley supplied enough water to Los Angeles for eight million people. Still, the management of that water was erratic. Wet winters caused the excess to be wasted into Owens Lake, dry since 1924. The result was a lawsuit from the flooded Natural Soda Products factory, set up on the shoreline.

Putting the ranchers out of business also resulted in a reduction of tax revenue. DWP started leasing properties back to ranchers so they could pay the taxes. Five-year leases, 85 percent of them without water, could be cancelled at the drop of a hat. Needless to say, no bank would make a loan for improvements. No dairies, no orchards. The lands reverted to grazing, even in wet years.

In 1972, Los Angeles announced it was increasing groundwater pumping, without any environmental study, above what it had disclosed during construction of the second barrel. The combined total water export was 570,000 acre-feet per year. Inyo County filed a CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) lawsuit against DWP.

*Second barrel south of Owens Lake and the Haiwee Reservoir, the L.A. Aqueduct enters two pipelines. The original 1913 pipeline can carry 480 cubic feet of water per second (cfs). The second barrel opened in 1970 with a capacity to transfer 300 cfs. The original aqueduct diverts most of the available surface water in Owens Valley. LADWP began pumping substantial quantities of groundwater to supply its second aqueduct in the 1970s.*



*Map of Owens Valley showing the path of water from Mono Lake south. Long Valley is adjacent to Crowley Lake.*

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In District Court, the city hilariously argued: “Nearly 40 percent of L.A.’s water goes for lawns, gardens, swimming pools and public parks...but such amenities are at the heart of L.A.’s way of life. Such deprivation would constitute a cultural decline.”

The court ruled in favor of Inyo County. Like a spoiled child, the city, within three days, responded by cutting off all water to lessees and dynamiting irrigation valves that had been rusted shut for 60 years. The city engineer described this action as “educational, rather than punitive.” Groundwater pumping continued at nearly three times the allotted level.

The water level in Mono Lake declined by 40 percent when the second barrel opened. Another challenge ensued, this time championed by a coalition of environmental groups in favor of the California gull population. The city lost. DWP is now mandated to maintain a certain water elevation (6,377 feet) in Mono Lake.

Long Valley is home to the last adjudicated scrap of water rights in the eastern Sierra. The irrigated meadows are the last sponge the city has to squeeze. ■

# Snowpack to Swimming Pool

*If there is excess water, DWP has to spread it onto the desert.*

Most of the water that ultimately ends up in the Los Angeles Aqueduct originates in the Mono Basin from geothermal springs that rise from the Long Valley Caldera and from creeks that run off the eastern Sierra into a system of lakes. Waters leaving Mono Lake run into a tunnel to Long Valley, which feeds into the Owens River, which runs into Crowley Lake. When Crowley fills, water is released into the Owens Gorge through a pipeline to two hydroelectric plants. All the water that comes out of there goes back into the Owens River channel, into a series of reservoirs to the aqueduct.

The aqueduct intake is near Alabama Hills. The water, which becomes more alkaline with every mile, stays in the aqueduct all the way to the Cottonwood water treatment plant at Lone Pine. Treated water moves to two Haiwee reservoirs near Olancho. High

levels of heavy metals in the sediment here create serious health issues, so DWP can't remove the muck. The reservoirs get shallower every year.

Like Oroville Dam, which came close to failing in the high water year of 2016, Owens Valley dams have gone without major maintenance for close to three decades. If there is excess water, DWP has to spread it onto the desert.

DWP demolished buildings on the farms and ranches it

bought in the early 1900s, but its irrigation systems and networks of canals and ditches remain. Now, in a wet year, DWP uses those canals to spread water over the valley floor in shallow flooding ponds, in an attempt to get the water to percolate back down into the water table. ■



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*Symmes Creek erosion, near Independence. A series of small dams and sand traps along this snowmelt creek feeding into the upper section of the Los Angeles Aqueduct have led to severe gully erosion. Active groundwater pumps throughout this area have also lowered the groundwater table significantly.*

## “Run It Like You Own It”

*Ranching families are nearly extinct in the Owens Valley. Those who are left are determined to remain, but betrayal and dismay are in their voices. Here are a few of their stories.*

### Gary and Alonna Cashbaugh Giacomini

“My great-grandfather, Augustus Cashbaugh (AA Cashbaugh), came into Owens Valley in 1865 from Zanesville, Ohio,” says Alonna. “He built a grist mill on Bishop Creek. My great-grandma, Ann Connolly, came from Ireland in the 1860s and went to work cooking there.”

The Cashbaughs put together over 2,000 acres of deeded land in Long Valley. They have run cows on the irrigated meadows there for a hundred years.

Many families in this century managed the transition to the next generation in a locally traditional way. “What you would do is sell to DWP,” says Gary, “and then the portion of the family that wanted to keep ranching would lease it back ‘in perpetuity’ as it existed, irrigated pasture.” Over time, this is what the Cashbaughs did.

In 1983, Alonna’s dad sold a portion to DWP—on a handshake agreement. “They said, ‘Your heirs can lease this forever and

operate it just as you do.’” Did they happen to get that agreement in writing? “We probably wouldn’t have been having these problems if we’d got that agreement in writing.”

These families trusted the DWP. “We knew they needed the water, but we were part of the picture. DWP managers lived here. Our kids went to school with their kids. We were good friends.” ■

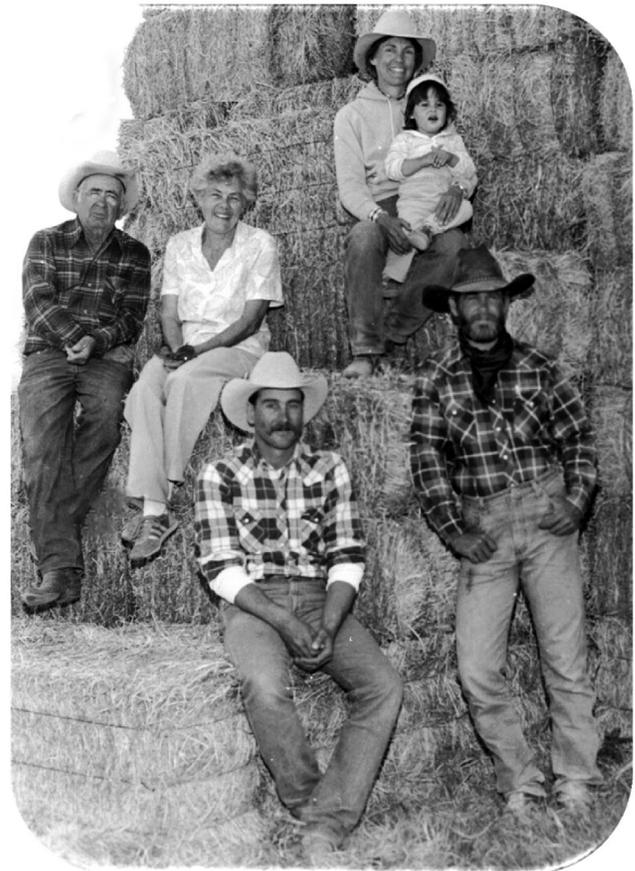


PHOTO COURTESY ALONNA GIACOMINI

*Cashbaugh family at the end of their last cattle drive in 1985. From left, Bud and Dorothy Cashbaugh, son-in-law Gary and wife, Alonna Cashbaugh Giacomini, with daughter Maria (Ria), fifth generation, on lap, and brother Jim Cashbaugh. Cattle move by truck these days.*

## Matt and Ria Giacomini Kemp

Matt Kemp never wanted to do anything but be a rancher. “Mom told me I had to leave the ranch for five years after college. Then, if I wanted to come back, it was OK.”

Armed with a degree in finance and the requisite time away, Matt did come back. He married Gary and Alonna’s daughter Ria, she with a master’s degree in ruminant nutrition, and they entrenched themselves in the family ranch and in this battle for water. The congressional delegation, acting on information from DWP, has accused local ranchers of raising the cost of water to Los Angeles’ ratepayers.

Matt, now chairman of the local cattlemen’s association, responds: “DWP has acknowledged that 50 percent of the water released for irrigation has returned to the system, either through alluvial aquifers or surface return. It costs \$1,000 per acre-foot to buy or replace that water. That’s \$10 million, the cost of evapotranspiration. There are four- to five-million ratepayers in the city of Los Angeles. That’s not \$30 a ratepayer, it’s \$2.50. Mitigation costs to the city’s ratepayers have been in the billions of dollars.” ■

COURTESY JOE GIACOMINI



Matt Kemp and his buckaroo family gather irrigated pasture in Inyo County in summer 2018. From left: Matt; Will, 10; Kate, 5; Ben, 8; and Ria (Maria Giacomini Kemp). These kids represent the sixth generation of the Cashbaugh-Giacomini tribe.

## Joe and Patti Echenique

Joe Echenique’s grandfather Tomas came from Spain in 1898 to California’s Central Valley. He made \$20 a month herding for Miller & Lux, trailing sheep into the High Sierra before the forests were closed to grazing. By 1903, Tomas had saved enough to go into business for himself. His sheep wintered in the Tehachapi Mountains near Bakersfield and he drove them up the Long Trail on the east side of the Sierra to summer grazing. His son, Joe Senior, followed in his footsteps. He and wife, Lucie Anchordoquy, had two daughters and one son, who took over the sheep in 1986.

Joe Echenique Jr. is 65. Like his father, he will never retire. His sheep year still starts in Bakersfield in November, with the lambing of 4,000 ewes on alfalfa fields. In April he moves to BLM allotments in the Mojave. The ewes come north to Little Round Valley south of Crowley Lake for the summer, first to irrigat-



Joe Echenique Jr.’s grandfather began trailing sheep to the eastern Sierra in 1905. Grandson Joe’s sheep still graze irrigated pasture near Crowley Lake along with Glass Mountain summer range near Mono Lake. Wife, Patti Novak-Echenique, is a former range con for L.A.’s DWP.

ed pasture leased from DWP. They work their way through Jeffrey pines in the Glass Mountains, a jumble of volcanic topography east of the Sierra, from May to October on U.S. Forest Service permits. Joe will haul water to

them every day. He had permits in the High Sierra until bighorn sheep were planted. Now he works the lower country, dry allotments of thick bitterbrush, forbs and grasses.

The sheep come back down the mountain to irrigated pasture for the fall and he will haul them back to Bakersfield, one truckload at a time. “This,” he says, “is the traditional thing that sheepmen did in California.”

Patti Novak-Echenique met Joe at the sheepmen’s picnic in Bishop in 1994. She was a range con for DWP. “I mapped the vegetation on all this irrigated ground,” she says. She also investigated the history of the ground she was mapping. The city drew each section and what had been there before DWP took over: house, field, chicken pens, orchard.

For many years after the conflicts subsided, the city and the ranchers got along well, she says. “We did a lot of collaborative improvement projects: burning, weed spraying, fencing.” DWP was part of the community. ■

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### Mark Johns and Callie Johns Peek

“My grandpa came up here in the mid-60s to run cows,” says Mark Johns. “We were one of the few gringo farming families in Bakersfield.” He smiles; everyone else was Basque. “We raised cotton and potatoes and ran cows.”

His family moved to Big Pine in 1974, when the kids were little, to a ranch leased from DWP. “Run it like you own it,” DWP said, and for years that’s what we did.”

Callie is the 4-H coordinator for Inyo and Mono counties. She has 230 to 260 kids in the program. “Most of them are from town,” she says. “I actually will have only one leader this year who has a livestock background.”

Many animals live on a 4-H farm behind

wanted it in their system,” he says. That, too, seems to have changed.

The lease is in Mark’s name and for a long while it was possible to transfer that lease to your kids. Mark’s daughter Callie and her husband would like to take the lease over, but there’s another issue for the Peeks, as there is for several other families in the valley. Callie’s husband works for DWP. Having a family member employed by DWP now makes things awkward for everybody. DWP employees may not own a lease because they may be privy to information that other ranchers might not be. They have to be extremely careful, now that the legal department is involved, not to say anything compromising. ■

### Mark Lacey

Mark Lacey’s great-grandfather came West in 1867 from Fredericktown, Mo., at the ripe old age of 25, bound to make his fortune in silver. He drifted into Inyo County and staked a claim near Independence on 160 acres and raised hay, corn and cattle.

Fifty years later, his two sons entangled in the War to End All Wars, John William sold his ranch to the city of Los Angeles. His son, Mark Buckner Lacey, would come home and start again, buying a small property near Olancho. The family legacy grew through two more generations. Summers in the High Sierra, winters on the flat until 1993, when the family moved to irrigated pasture in Long Valley and Bridgeport. John D. Lacey and his son, Mark, now lease pasture from the city and have formed partnerships with other cattlemen, expanding Lacey and Son to a stable and successful operation. Mark Lacey’s roots in the eastern Sierra are deep. Cattleman to the core, coolheaded and a businessman, he’s in it for his own kids now. ■



the fairgrounds. There’s a special ordinance that allows people to have critters in their backyards: pigs, turkeys, sheep. Mark says, “The kids have really helped their parents come to appreciate agriculture.”

The Johns’ lease is on the Owens River at Benton Crossing. When Mark was young, this was the middle of nowhere. But now the valley has been promoted as a recreational mecca, and mecca it is. Tourists stop on the ranch roads to take pictures of cows. They leave gates open. They hit cows on the highway.

“There are hot tubs on the place, people everywhere,” he says. Hundreds of folks camp along the river and the creek, oblivious to the potential effects of fluorine-rich geothermal water and the arsenic-saturated mud between their toes.

“We irrigate out of Hot Creek. DWP has never regulated it because it’s full of heavy metals and other bad stuff. They’ve never



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, Mark Johns and daughter Callie Peek on the Johns’ lease near Benton Crossing. Crowley Lake is in the background. He has collaborated for years with government entities in an effort to keep these meadows viable. ► Mark Lacey at McGee Creek in the eastern Sierra. He has also invested much time and energy into collaborative efforts with DWP to ensure the future of sage grouse habitat in Long Valley. ► Lacey’s dewatered lease adjacent to Crowley Lake.

# Collateral Damage

*Dewatering meadows hurts the bi-state sage grouse.*

In 2012, the assistant general manager for DWP asked what ranchers could do to reduce the amount of water they had to dedicate to Long Valley. Mark Lacey, of Lacey Livestock, whose operation is by far the largest in the valley, worked up a detailed proposal.

“We have a lot of water loss in this area because of very porous soils. We thought about various things to help conserve water. Concrete ditch liners? Pivots? Convict Creek is not reliable or consistent water, but there is a perched aquifer in that area. Could we dig sumps, pump out of the sumps into pivots? Drill groundwater wells?” Lacey gave the proposal to general manager Jim Yannotta in early 2013. There was no response.

The Convict Creek watershed contains critical bi-state sage grouse summer brood-rearing habitat. As shown in the graph on this page, the population has fluctuated slightly over the last 30 years; drought years were mitigated by irrigation. The years 2014 to 2016 were the worst for the grouse. “In 2015 DWP abruptly cut off the water—totally. In 2016 they limited it to the same amount of water they’re giving this year—17 percent of normal—basically nothing.” Grouse numbers plummeted. “DWP’s explanation is that the numbers are just tracking drought, precipitation and snowmelt. When we used to ride out there, we would see abundant grouse, usually in amongst the cattle, because that was where they were protected from coyotes.” This year, without water, there were no tender grasses, no insects and no baby birds.

DWP allocated a small amount of water, estimated to be 500 acre-feet, to address sage

grouse needs. “There are definitely ways to save water,” Mark says.

“We think we can raise quite a lot of feed with three acre-feet and accomplish objectives for the sage grouse. What I don’t want to do is just turn water based on what they need for the sage grouse, and it’s not making any feed for the cows. I’m paying a guy to irrigate for the sage grouse.”

Recently the Lacey family celebrated their 150th anniversary in Inyo County. “We have adapted to many changes here, but this policy change may be one we simply can’t adapt to. Not because we won’t, but it simply may not be possible.” Even so, Lacey is realistic. “Conditions change, so activities become untenable and we and our operations may have to be sacrificed. But it can’t be meaningless.”

The Center for Biological Diversity successfully sued the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Montana recently, arguing that it did not use adequate science when it decided not to list the grouse, a decision based not only on the bird, but on evaluation of critical habitat. CBD’s suit specifically mentions the bi-state sage grouse.

FWS and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, of course, very much want to avoid listing the grouse. During the original negotiations, DWP asked for an exclusion under section 4b2 of the Endangered Species Act. It includes a detailed discussion of DWP’s grazing management and riparian plans, irrigation, public access, all the activities that DWP stipulated it was doing to mitigate sage grouse impacts. The FWS decided to give it that exclusion based on these assurances,

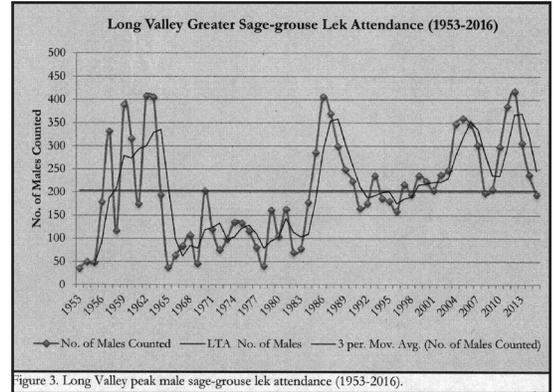


Figure 3. Long Valley peak male sage-grouse lek attendance (1953-2016).

*Sage grouse numbers in Long Valley have fluctuated over the years, but irrigated meadows have helped mitigate the effects of drought. Steep decrease in numbers since 2014 is exacerbated by the dewatering of the meadows.*

and now DWP is reneging on those promises. Because FWS didn’t list the grouse, the feds have no enforcement ability against DWP.

Like a spoiled child, DWP’s standard policy is to avoid responsibility. “If there’s something that they’re supposed to be doing, they won’t do it until they get caught and somebody makes them do it,” says Mark Lacey. That puts ranchers in a tenuous position. “I want FWS to know we’ve been doing everything we can, working with the Audubon Society and others to stabilize the grouse population, as required under the grazing management plan. I want to know we’re included in the discussion because, whatever gets decided, we’re the ones who are going to have to implement it.”

It’s not even clear that DWP will send representatives to the table. It has said that sage grouse don’t affect its operations.

This is not about just a handful of ranchers in Mono County. It goes without saying that both CBD and Western Watersheds Project want to get rid of cattle grazing on all federal lands. So this issue is about the seven western states where there are sage grouse populations. Mark worries that their situation will impact everybody else who has been working to improve sage grouse habitat and stabilize populations. “If CBD gets a foothold here and the grouse is listed,” he says, “it’s going to limit oil and gas production on federal lands and this administration does not want to have limitations on what it can do on the public lands.” Not to mention what it will do to the livestock industry. What DWP is doing will affect ranchers everywhere. ■

*Shifting sands of the Keeler Dunes bury more than 100,000 hay bales spread by Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District in an effort to mitigate dust pollution from Owens Dry Lake.*

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# The Lawsuit

*“There’s an old saying in Inyo County, that after trying everything else, DWP is usually forced to do the right thing.”*

— Mark Lacey

One of the most concerning elements of this debacle is that DWP cannot say how much of the 30,000 acre-feet of water it’s taking is actually going to get to Los Angeles. Perhaps it will end up spread on the Owens Dry Lake. Perhaps it will simply evaporate on the way. There are losses that are unaccounted for.

In Bridgeport, Calif., on August 7, Mono County’s Board of Supervisors heard hours of testimony from environmental groups, ranchers, fishermen and recreationists, including several who drove up from Los Angeles to voice their support. Here are a few comments from that meeting:

“If DWP wants to return these areas to ‘natural condition,’ they’re going to have to remove Crowley Lake, which destroyed thousands of acres of wetland. Irrigation of these meadows mitigates removal of that wetland by DWP.”—Jeff Dozier, retired professor and founding dean, School of Environmental Science and Management, UCSB

“Is there a water crisis in L.A.? Friends and family who live in L.A. tell me there have been no requests for water conservation. Why aren’t we asking for...lawns and private swim-

ming pools in the L.A. Basin to be dried up?”—Kay Ogden, executive director, Eastern Sierra Land Trust

“The shrinkage of wetlands will negatively impact the sage grouse and other wildlife. We need to draw the line.”—Lynn Bolton, Range of Light Group, Sierra Club

“Growing up in Orange County, our lawns were always green, our neighbors’ lawns were always green. Why can’t L.A. take a page from Nevada and water every other day?”—Chris Brumbar, Crowley business owner

biologist or engineer has the art or the skills to manage these meadows like the ranching community has.”—Steve Nelson, Bureau of Land Management

“I am just one of 14 million visitors. I have been coming here since I was a child.... This area is a world treasure. It is incumbent on all of us who love this land to defend it and maintain it.”—David McMullen, fisherman, Ridgecrest, Calif.

The county specified that DWP had made its decision without attention to the California Environmental Quality Act. There was no Environmental Impact Report. There was no studying of alternatives.

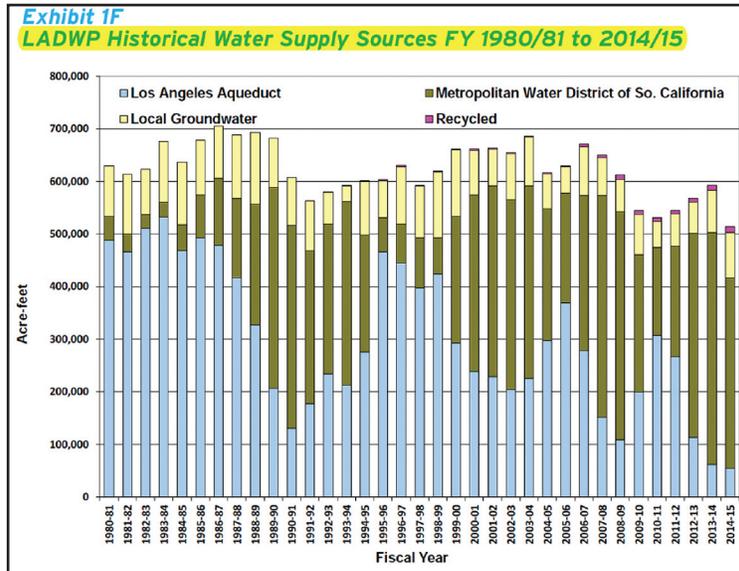
“Our experience over many years,” said Mary Roper, head of the Owens Valley Commission, “is that litigation is the only effective mechanism to ensure L.A. follows the law. By all means, collaborate, but have your lawsuit in your hip pocket. Before the meadows die, file an injunction.”

“I’m a collaborative person,” agreed supervisor Fred Stump, “but there’s nothing else to do but file litigation.” At the end of the day, that’s exactly what they did. David launched his stone.

One has to wonder if, instead of howling about climate change, the city of Los Angeles would acknowledge and adapt and take responsibility for the things it can change. Wouldn’t it make more sense to aggressively address the waste of storm water, strongly advocate conservation, and even mandate it, and take ownership of the future, instead of stealing it from the eastern Sierra’s children? ■

*Carolyn Dufurrena lives on a desert ranch in northwest Nevada, where no drop of water falls unnoticed. This story has benefited from exhaustive research by William Kahl in 1983’s “Water and Power,” in Marc Reisner’s 1986 “Cadillac Desert” and “Rivers in the Desert” by Margaret Davis, 2014.*

**Postscript:** LADWP finally hired a contractor to conduct monitoring in Long Valley in late August, six months after its decision to dewater the valley. A monitoring drone crashed and ignited a 30-acre wildfire. If those meadows had been irrigated, it’s likely no fire would have ensued.



DWP’s Stormwater Capture Plan, October 2017, details historical water usage. Increasing fraction from Colorado River waters represents significant increase in expenditure to the city. Recycling efforts shown in pink. BELOW: Plans for 2039 in pie charts show the city’s hopes for doubling the eastern Sierra contribution (dark blue). [http://www.mwdh2o.com/FAF%20PDFs/12\\_LADPW\\_SWMP\\_2017TechConf\\_RVillegas.pdf](http://www.mwdh2o.com/FAF%20PDFs/12_LADPW_SWMP_2017TechConf_RVillegas.pdf).

“There are two world-class fisheries in this valley: Hot Creek and the Upper Owens River. The reduction in biodiversity that will occur if the wetlands are dewatered is of great concern. Crowley Lake destroyed thousands of acres of

wetlands and with it the opportunity for CO<sub>2</sub> exchange. If L.A. is truly concerned about mitigating the effects of climate change, it would enhance the wetlands, not destroy them.”—Matt McClain, Mammoth Lakes Recreation

“At BLM, science supports our decisions, but this isn’t all about science. Managing these meadows is an art, and no wildlife

