I Don’t look for many changes from the new editor of Deserts Report

Although there is now a new Managing Editor for Desert Report, my goal is to have a seamless transition in which readers see no major changes. There is a great group of people working on this publication; from the authors to the editors to the graphic designer and the database administrators, who will see that this publication continues to highlight the current and important issues we face in our deserts.

Large donations from organizations acknowledged on inside cover of back page

As has been mentioned in previous issues of Desert Report, funding has been a critical issue recently due to the National Sierra Club no longer supporting us financially. However, several other desert groups have come forward and been very supportive of this publication and for that we are greatly appreciative. These large donors will now be acknowledged on an ongoing basis on the inside cover of the back page. Check them out, go to their websites, and support them any way you can.

Want to receive notification that Desert Report is available online?

Several people have requested to receive notification by email when a new issue of Desert Report is available, instead of receiving a hard copy of the publication. This option is now available. If you wish to stop receiving hard-copies of the Desert Report and instead receive email notification when a new issue is available at the DesertReport.org website, email Kate Allen at KJ.Allen96@gmail.com. Alternatively, you can complete the form on the back cover and mail the form to the address listed.

– Stacy Goss
Advocating for the environmental concerns and for water rights in rural Nevada and Utah, a coalition of indigenous tribes, ranchers, rural residents, sportsmen and environmentalists, interests that on other issues may be opposite one another, had been joined in a united front.

ter plans. A plan of development was prepared and a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental compliance process was begun for a proposed 300-mile pipeline that would cross federal lands and deliver over 155,700 acre-feet/year to the Las Vegas Valley to facilitate continued growth and development. Suddenly, forgotten water right applications became extremely important to both rural Nevada and Las Vegas.

In a complementary action, the State Water Engineer, in 2007 and 2008, held hearings on applications in four groundwater basins, awarding SNWA rights to extract over 58,000 acre-feet of groundwater per year.

Advocating for the environmental concerns and for water rights in rural Nevada and Utah, a coalition of indigenous tribes, ranchers, rural residents, sportsmen and environmentalists had been formed in 2005. Calling themselves the Great Basin Water Network (“GBWN”), interests that on other issues may be opposite one another, joined in a united front to battle the water transfer.

At the hearings in 2007 and 2008, the State Engineer denied standing to anyone, including the GBWN, who had not filed a protest in 1989. Obviously in the years since the initial filings by SNWA much had changed, much had been learned, and new stakeholders had emerged. The GBWN took the fight to court and after disappointing rulings from a Nevada district court, sought an opinion from the Nevada Supreme Court which ultimately ruled that the State Engineer had violated Nevada state law and had denied modern day stakeholders due process and an ability to participate in the hearings.

Stunned by the setback, SNWA initially attempted to get the Nevada State Legislature to pass a revised law that would negate the Supreme Court ruling. They were defeated by the efforts of GBWN and the legislature’s preoccupation by a serious budget debate.

In January 2010, the SNWA re-filed all of their 1989 water right applications. With no clear response from the State Engineer’s office, the Great Basin Water Network and many individuals and organizations opposed to the water grab filed over 1600 protests of the re-filed applications. Eventually, the courts and State Engineer ruled that SNWA’s 2010 applications moot and dismissed all the protests as well. This move stung the GBWN and other protesters in that the considerable filing fees for the over 200 protests of the applications were not refunded.

In early 2011, the State Engineer announced the opening of a new protest period, ordered by the Nevada Supreme Court, to give all current stakeholders an opportunity to establish standing in hearings to be held in the fall of 2011. The GBWN organized workshops on the proposed pipeline, its consequences, and how to file protests with the State Engineer. In the end, nearly 1000 protests were filed with the State Engineer, including those by the GBWN which included over 250 parties in a coordinated joint filing.

As in many environmental campaigns, the war is not won in a single skirmish or even many skirmishes. The successful protest campaign now completed, the attention of the GBWN is turned to two new battle fronts – commenting on the draft environmental impact statement for the project, expected this summer, and the hearings to be conducted by the State Engineer this fall. Other related skirmishes include challenges by the Center for Biological Diversity, a member of the GBWN, against smaller but related pipeline projects in Lincoln County, and a court case filed by the Center alleging failure of the federal government to adequately protect their water rights for the Moapa National Wildlife Refuge, the site of springs essential for the survival of the endangered Moapa dace and springsnails.

The Great Basin Water Network was created to protect water resources in rural Nevada and to advocate for environmental sustainability. In the years ahead, water rights will continue to be an important issue as our demand for this precious recourse increases.

Rob Mrowka is an ecologist employed by the Center for Biological Diversity and serves as the Center’s Nevada Conservation Advocate. Mrowka was previously employed with the U.S. Forest Service and later served as the Environmental Planning Manager for Clark County. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Great Basin Water Network.

For More Information

Go to www.greatbasin.net.