

2001 JAN 10 PM 2:00

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
RIVERSIDE, CALIF.

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Dear Mr. Williams,

We are concerned about the plans of Cadiz, Inc. to drain an ancient aquifer that underlies the Mojave National Preserve and five Bureau of Land Management wilderness areas.

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This project could endanger the unique and rare plants and animals of this desert community, including the threatened desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep. Two of the several wildernesses that could be impacted by this project are the Trilobite and Clipper Mountain Wildernesses, home to the second largest herd of desert bighorn sheep in the state.

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The "monitoring and mitigation" plan is ill defined and offers questionable management for environmental impacts. Under the plan all monitoring and decision making is dominated by Cadiz, Inc. and its customer, Metropolitan Water District, both of which have built-in incentives to favor continued groundwater extraction. This puts profit focused decision makers in charge of the protection of our public resources. This does not protect the public interest.

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The BLM's authority is not defined in the latest environmental report and instead will be defined in closed-door negotiations, subject to political pressure instead of public oversight. The terms of BLM's authority and oversight needs to be

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addressed and publicly disclosed in another environmental impact statement.

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The document needs to justify the actual need for this project and examine alternatives that are actually sustainable, safer, and less environmentally destructive, including water conservation measures. The review of such viable alternatives is a requirement under both state and federal law. Alternatives that should be considered include other existing, planned or feasible water storage projects and a host of easily adopted water conservation measures that have successfully reduced water demand in other areas.

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The public lands that could be impacted by this project include two national parks and five wilderness areas managed by the BLM. These lands were set aside by Congress to be permanently protected for their nationally significant natural and cultural resource values. This project is likely to undo that protection for future generations.

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The SEIS ~~does~~ not contain complete information on the water quality of the groundwater or the Colorado River water that would be imported to this aquifer. This is troubling, given the recent discovery of extraordinarily high levels of chromium 6 in the groundwater and the likelihood that one or both of these water sources contain arsenic, radon, MTBE and perchlorates (rocket fuel). This water will be very expensive to treat, likely at the expense of taxpayers and/or water customers in Southern California.

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This decision has enormous ramifications for the future of water management, public health, and the protection of the natural resources of Southern

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California. We need to urge the Metropolitan
Water District and the Bureau of Land Management
to make a decision that is informed, reasoned,
and that promotes the public interest rather than
private profit.

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Lane P. Labbe'
530-283-9771



EW ENGLAND
RANCH



BLM California Desert District
6221 Box Springs Blvd.
~~1111~~ Riverside, CA 92507-0714

Attn: Mr. James Williams

92507/0714

