

## Central Nevada Regional Water Authority

P.O. BOX 682  
EUREKA, NV 89316

TEL: (775) 237-6010

FAX: (775) 237-6012

### Testimony before the Interim Committee on Use, Management, and Allocation of Water Resources

March 22, 2006

Jon Hutchings, Eureka County Natural Resource Manager  
Doug Carson, Chairman, White Pine County Water Advisory Committee  
Sheri Eklund-Brown, Elko County Commissioner

**I Background.** The Central Hydrographic Region consists of 78 ground water basins in 11 Nevada counties (Figure 1). The region is the largest of our state's 14 Hydrographic Regions, encompassing much of central, eastern and southern Nevada. The Central Region is distinguished by 1) its arid environment, 2) absence of regional surface water flows, 3) productive alluvial aquifers and 4) deeper, largely uncharacterized bedrock aquifers. Information about occurrence and flow of ground water in the Central Region is sparse; therefore, management and planning decisions aimed at long-term resource sustainability are tentative and open to considerable dispute.

Recognizing that no single government agency, community or citizen organization can successfully navigate the complex economic, environmental and social aspects of water resource sustainability in the Central Region, leaders from Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Lander, Nye and White Pine Counties formed the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority (Authority) under Nevada's Interlocal Cooperative Act

**II Mission and Objectives.** The mission of the Authority is to prepare communities in central and eastern Nevada for sound water-resource decisions that promote prosperous economies and strong civic institutions in a healthy natural environment. Under the interlocal agreement, member counties work cooperatively to formulate water-resource solutions that:

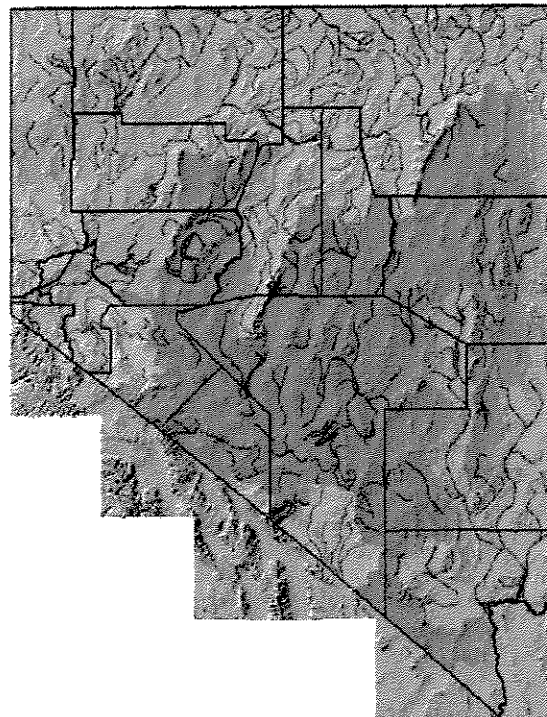


Figure 1. The Central Hydrographic Region as designated by the Nevada Division of Water Resources. The Central Region is shaded blue.

EXHIBIT I - WATER RESOURCES  
Meeting Date: 03-22-06  
Document consists of 3 pages  
Entire Exhibit Provided.

1. Support their local and regional economies by
  - *developing and maintaining cost-effective water infrastructure, and*
  - *maximizing economic benefit from regional water resources.*
2. Meet the needs of their citizens by
  - *providing access to clean, inexpensive water supplies, and*
  - *sponsoring water-resource education aimed at local governments and the public.*
3. Build their capacity for making sound water-resource decisions by
  - *assisting member counties to predict long-term water needs,*
  - *identifying gaps in water resource data and information,*
  - *developing a uniform and accessible base of knowledge about regional water resources,*
  - *creating a regional water plan based on common aspects of county plans, and*
  - *assessing impacts of regional water resource development proposals.*
4. Maintain their natural environment in a healthy condition by
  - *assessing impacts of development on the region's ecosystems, and*
  - *protecting against the irreversible impacts of over-development.*

**III Activities.** The Authority is pursuing three initiatives in pursuit of its mission. First, the Authority is developing an accessible, current and continuously maintained information base of hydrologic data, demographic information and supporting documentation that will advance successful county and regional water resource planning. SB 62 funds and county assessments are being used as seed money in this effort. Primary cooperators include member counties, the Nevada Division of Water Resources (NDWRA) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Second, the Authority is analyzing member county water resource plans to identify planning needs and move toward regional consistency. Third, the Authority is developing local, state and federal government policy recommendations aimed at enhancing planning efforts and ensuring long-term viability of local water resource economies.

**IV Policy and Legislative Priorities.** As suggested above, a wide range of policy concerns are important to the Authority's mission. Priority issues and actionable recommendations are summarized below.

1. Availability of accurate technical information is the foundation for good water resource decision-making. Many basins in the Central Region remain understudied in the face of certain development for urban water supplies. Collection and dissemination of adequate pre-development (baseline) water resource information in these areas is necessary to ensure that sound decisions are made in the future.
  - ⇒ *Continue to fund SB 62 and similar programs aimed at local government involvement in data gathering and use.*
  - ⇒ *Prompt USGS, NDWR and other sources of primary water resource data toward greater collaboration on information management and dissemination.*
2. Inaccurate estimates of water usage are problematic when communities engage in water planning. Domestic well usage, in particular, is not adequately accounted for

in fast-developing rural communities where build-out is likely to focus on domestic wells rather than municipal water systems.

⇒ *Encourage NDWR to work with local planning agencies to accurately quantify and project domestic well use.*

3. Domestic wells are a substantial portion of ground water use in rapidly-developing ground water basins. The uncertain scope of domestic rights is likely to hamper solutions to resource over-allocation and planning for future growth.

⇒ *Clarify “protectible interest” for domestic well owners and establish a priority date for domestic water rights.*

4. Political pressure to tap “unappropriated” ground water in the Central Region is unprecedented. At the same time, estimates of how much unappropriated water can be developed without causing substantial economic and environmental injury to source communities are inadequate. These conditions have resulted in overallocation of ground water basins in the past and will conspire to do so in the future. To avoid this outcome the legislature must a) empower NDWR to pursue robust assessments of perennial/safe ground water yield and b) expect the State Engineer to allocate new ground water resources gradually, in a stepwise fashion.

⇒ *Instruct NDWR to oversee a collaborative statewide research program aimed at answering questions about sustainable ground water development.*

⇒ *Provide adequate funding for this effort.*

5. Many ground water basins in Nevada are known to be fully- or over-appropriated. Many other basins may prove to be over appropriated in the future (due to contemporary development pressure, allocation during a wet cycle, long-term, climate change, etc...). The primary cure for over allocation of ground water is regulation; however, regulation has never been applied in Nevada and is likely to be an exceedingly expensive, long and litigious solution that does not always best serve the public interest. In basins where disruption of economic use of water will cause major short-term economic impacts, alternative solutions to over appropriation like water right buyout and retirement programs, water banking and water conservation provisions may be preferred solutions.

⇒ *Develop a policy framework for alternative cures to over appropriation of ground water.*

6. Rural communities in the Central Region are under-prepared for the rigors of comprehensive water resource planning. Successful planning for community resource development will require long-term commitment by local governments, State executive departments and the Nevada legislature. The primary planning needs are 1) technical support, 2) information management and 3) financial assistance for local planning efforts.

⇒ *Provide adequate financial and technical support for community water planning.*

⇒ *Instruct and fund the NDWR Water Planning Section to actively support water resource planning in underserved communities.*

*For more information about the Central Nevada Regional Water Authority please call Jon Hutchings, Eureka County Natural Resources Manager at 775.237.6010 or Joni Eastley, Authority Chairman and Nye County Commissioner at 775.482.8191.*