



Friends of the Inyo
819 N Barlow Ln
Bishop, CA 93529

June 29, 2018

Mayor Eric Garcetti
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Mel Levine, President
Board of Commissioners
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
Room 555-H 15th Floor
111 N. Hope Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Irrigation of ranch leases in Mono County

Dear Mayor Garcetti and Board of Commissioners President Levine,

We write today to convey our concerns about LADWPs recent attempt to discontinue and/or reduce irrigation of leased grazing allotments in the Long Valley and Little Round Valley areas of Mono County. Friends of the Inyo is a Bishop, CA based grassroots conservation organization with over three decades of experience with public lands and wildlife in the Eastern Sierra. We represent over 800 members, many in the Eastern Sierra. We partner with Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) on educational programs in the Owens Valley and on Owens Lake.

Friends of the Inyo has many concerns regarding the de-watering proposal. One of these concerns the Bi-State Sage Grouse. As a member of the Bi-State Working Group, we follow the population levels of the Long Valley Bi-State Sage Grouse as well as other population management units (PMUs) within the distinct population segment's range.

The Long Valley population represents 30% of the entire bi-state population within California. We contributed to the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan, which identifies management actions and goals. The Plan clearly states that irrigated meadows are crucial for successful brood rearing habitat. In recent years, likely because of drought this subpopulation has been in decline. De-watering by DWP will likely exacerbate this decline and contribute to the overall drop in population levels within eastern California. We appreciate the participation and involvement of LADWP in the Bi-State Working Group, and remind you that their involvement in this group demonstrates a commitment to the long-term protection of the grouse and their habitats. In our view, the elimination or reduction in irrigation water to this fragile habitat is in direct conflict with this commitment.

The damage to the population that would likely result from the proposed de-watering would be exacerbated by the fact that there has been substantial loss of wetland and riparian habitats across the Eastern Sierra over the last 120 years. Prior to the development of Crowley Lake Reservoir, the lower part of Long Valley contained several thousand acres of wetland habitat. Irrigation by DWP following water diversions of multiple streams from the Sierra Nevada currently sustain wetlands and riparian systems in the Long Valley and Little Round Valley areas. Such irrigation contributes to overall ecosystem function here through the storage and filtration of surface and groundwater. Benefits include the buffering of containments that can harm human health, resistance to the spread of invasive species, and resilience to fire and drought. LADWP has been a leader in riparian and wetland restoration throughout the Eastern Sierra and we encourage the department to maintain course with their restoration activities.

Although the bi-state sage grouse and wetland health are a primary concern of Friends of the Inyo, the concerns of Mono County, land owners, managers and lessees extend to a variety of other issues impacting quality of life in the Eastern Sierra. Grazing is a rich part of our collective history and helps fuel our rural economy. Because of this we stand in solidarity with the ranchers and lessees of these at-risk allotments. The elimination or reduction of 5 acre-feet of water will negatively impact over 15,000 acres of ranch land under LADWP's 2018-2022 lease agreement. The agricultural industry in the Eastern Sierra is a major driver of our economy and ranchers remain dependent upon the use of LADWP lands. In addition to sustaining 449 jobs and contributing \$6.2 million in federal, state and local taxes, ranching and agriculture generate \$78.6 million in local economic activity. The die off of meadow and riparian vegetation from de-watering will have cascading effects to adjacent public lands where Friends of the Inyo advocates for sustainable grazing practices. We are also concerned dewatering will increase soil erosion and facilitate the spread of invasive species on DWP and adjacent public lands.

We encourage the City of Los Angeles to engage a diverse group of local stakeholders in the development of a management plan addressing timing and allocation of water resources to these allotments. The success story at Owens Lake and the partnership Friends of the Inyo has developed with LADWP speaks to the potential for a collaborative effort that benefits all parties and the natural environment.

We respectfully urge you to engage in this issue and advocate for LADWP to continue irrigation at previous levels in Long Valley and Little Round Valley.

Sincerely,

/S/ Wendy Schneider
Executive Director
Friends of the Inyo

CC:

Mono County Board of Supervisors
Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Stacey Simons Mono County Counsel
Matt Kemp, President, Inyo/Mono Cattlemen's Association
Inyo Register
The Sheet
Mammoth Times
Sierra Wave