

MINUTES

County of Inyo WATER COMMISSION

April 28, 2025

Commissioner Red Owl called the Water Commission meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. at the Inyo County Water Department, Independence, CA. Water Commissioners in attendance were Teri Red Owl, Randy Keller, Paul Huette, Dan Berry, and Vikki Glinskii. Present from the Water Department were Holly Alpert, Laura Piper, Jerry Zatorski, Tim Moore, Tyler Starbard, and James Mills.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Board and Water Department staff introduced themselves and the Chairperson welcomed members of the public to the meeting.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Red Owl led the pledge of allegiance.

3. Public Comment

The Chairperson opened the public comment period. Sally Manning inquired why there hasn't been a meeting in a year. Tina inquired regarding the meeting process and at what time could she speak on items.

4. Approval of minutes from April 22, 2024

Motion to approve the April 22, 2024, minutes by Randy Keller, seconded by Paul Huette. Motion passed, with Commissioner Berry abstaining.

5. Commissioners' reports

Commissioner Keller thanked the Water Department for the great job on the website and all the detailed information available, specifically the mitigation page and the drill down to parcels. Commissioner Berry announced this was his last meeting, that he would be resigning and appreciated the opportunity to serve the community as a Water Commissioner. Commissioner Huette stated the Commission needs to hold more meetings, at least quarterly. Commissioner Glinskii inquired if Commissioners could request a meeting. Commissioners' consensus was to schedule this year's meetings on Item 8.

6. Director's Report

Dr. Alpert introduced the Water Department's two new Research Assistants, Tyler Starbard (started May of 2024) and James Mills (started in April 2025). She provided background on both employees. She also provided an update on the Silver Fire, and stated Jerry Zatorski of the Inyo County Water Department surveyed the area and provided a report, 9 vegetation parcels were partially or fully burned and a permanent monitoring site burned, but the Neutron Probe tubes were still intact. The Board and staff discussed the burn area and effects on the parcels and flows in the LORP. Lynn Boulton asked if the Water Department knew where the Silver Fire started or how. Dr. Alpert stated it started along the river and likely human caused.

7. Discussion of LADWP's 2025-26 Draft Annual Operations Plan

Dr. Alpert provided a PowerPoint presentation on the LADWP's 2025-26 Draft Annual Operations Plan. She reviewed the runoff conditions, historical pumping, changes in depth to water and groundwater levels at indicator wells. She discussed the parcels that were below baseline for several years. She outlined the process followed for the Operations Plan and provided the Inyo County Water Departments 2025-26 pumping recommendation of 61,660 acre-feet (AF). She stated LADWP proposed low pumping was 67,860 AF and proposed high pumping is 88,560 AF. The Board, staff, and public discussed this item in detail and at length. Noah Williams stated the established baseline of 1984-87 is false because the groundwater decline started in 1970 across the valley. Commissioner Keller stated 1984-87 was agreed upon in the Water Agreement as a baseline so the damage done between 1970-1984 was accepted. Sally Manning provided comments on the graphs and vegetation data provided and stated starting at below baseline was a compromise. Lauren Kelley referred to the graphs and asked what the Water Department is requesting that would make changes in the vegetation and groundwater levels and asked for clarification on what a "control" parcel would be. Sally Manning stated control parcels were selected based on primitive data and it appears it's not updated. Daniel inquired about the wells being exempt from monitoring and possible reevaluation of the status. Tina stated she is thankful for all the work the Water Department is doing. She also stated it's concerning to see 14 parcels below baseline for so long. Dr. Alpert explained briefly about the Water Agreement and Green Book and that there are specific processes that must be followed. Lynn Boulton stated she understands the Water Agreement and Green Book have the depth to water for wells but what's important is vegetation. She reviewed the different types of vegetation and rooting zones and stated she would like to see an evaluation of all the wells to see if the monitoring wells are accurately placed to trigger the on/off for the different vegetation types. Sally Manning stated she'd like to see the models going back to the baseline control vs wellfield, and how that was determined. Mark Drew asked what is driving the difference between the graph and the depth to water of -1.8 ft and why the average across the valley -1.8 ft. Tim Moore provided clarification. Lauren Kelley asked how the 46 indicator wells differ from the 358 wells. Sally Manning made comment on the decline of -1.8 ft, and stated two feet is a lot. Tina stated we should stop groundwater pumping and she believes we are letting LADWP get away with far too much. Commissioner Red Owl requested that a short webinar be made to explain how to navigate the links that were shown on the presentation for the public. Wendy Schneider stated she would like the Commission to ask for reduced pumping, she believes they can do better, ask them to give us back 7,000-acre feet, by using surface water instead of pumped water for Type E lands, ask to not install Well B2 or B5, no pumping of W416, and no test on W386. Sally Manning stated the former Water Director recommended not looking at in valley uses. She stated the well at Symmes Shepard is next to 200 acres of alfalfa or whatever they decide to grow with 5-acre feet per acre, and why would you recommend a number like that. She also made comments on the pumping range of other wells. Lauren Kelley asked if there was a chance to reduce the recommended numbers prior to Wednesday's due date if it's agreed in valley uses are lower. Tina asked how LADWP has responded in the past to Inyo County's recommended pumping. Dr. Alpert stated they don't respond. Tina stated we are then in a system that isn't working and how can we reframe this. Noah Williams stated he supports proposing a lower pumping amount and he encourages these conversations. Daniel inquired about media coverage regarding the issues at hand so that people in the Los Angeles area are aware of the other side of the story such as the LA Times. Thomas stated LADWP is a well-greased machine, and we need to take the grease away. He suggested at each meeting an attendee should bring a friend to increase the presence at the meetings then maybe it will get their attention. Lauren Kelley asked if the County was going to include W416 and pump test on W386, B2 or B5 in the response letter to LADWP. She would like the Water Commission to recommend the above be included in the response letter. Tim Moore stated that neither W416 or W386 have pumps in them currently and they are a long way away from being able to perform these tests. Kyndall Noah stated his comment is on the thresholds and baselines, modeling analysis have no bearing on the voices of our suffering relatives, being plant, animals, and water, and he stated he is tired of data being used to erase where we live, what we feel and what we know, the land is in pain no matter what the charts and models claim. He stated how can the Water Commission prioritize the voices of the local communities over technical justification. Marian Seiter stated she wishes to applaud the Water Commission and staff for being articulate; stated she came to the meeting late and asked for an overview of who approves LADWP's pumping and what the process is. The process was explained to her by the Chairperson. Marian stated she encourages our people to dispute everything. Mel Joseph stated he is happy to hear the Commissioners wishing to put in a lower pumping number; there is a lot of concern regarding W416 and although he was told W416 is uncertain, it's in LADWP's document, it is for certain. Sally Manning stated our decision makers here are the Water Commission and the Inyo Board of Supervisors and staff, she stated we need to be proactive to manage pumping to avoid changes. She asked when will we focus on the goal and not the language in the documents. She stated the County needs to change their narrative and defend the valley. She would like

to see the Big Pine Tribe's letter details in the response the County provides to LADWP. She stated why not ask for an extension of time to make changes. She stated the on/off doesn't work either. Noah Williams stated he is still trying to wrap his mind around the in valley uses, he would like to remind everyone that we are the source, this is where the water originates from, it's the man-made diversion that is causing all the issues. He states this is where the water originates, this is where the water belongs. Commissioner Red Owl stated they should discuss rooting zones over the coming year to better respond to the next LADWP Pumping Plan. Commissioner Berry suggested an annual educational workshop on the Water Agreement and the Water Commission's role for better understanding. Mark Drew stated we are talking about the symptoms, and the issue is the Water Agreement itself, can the Water Commission go to the Board and say we'd like to lift the hood on the Water Agreement, to revisit it. Commissioner Keller stated the Water Agreement could be better, but LADWP is not going to agree to any changes if it currently serves them well. Mark stated there is going to be a lot of attention paid to energy. Tina stated LADWP should understand it's not about the water, but managing the water. She stated LADWP is a poor steward of the water and poorly managing the water in the Owens Valley. Commissioner Huette made a recommendation to go with last year's low pumping numbers and also put in comments on the W416, W385, B2 and B5 or any new well with a second by Randy Keller. Motion passes.

8. Future meeting schedule

Sally Manning stated the selection of Chair and Vice Chairperson was not on the agenda. She also stated Inyo County's budget hearings are in September and the Water Commission should weigh in on what the Water Department's workflow is for the year. The next meetings were scheduled tentatively for July 10, 2025, which will need to include selection of Chair and Vice Chairperson and October 9, 2025.

9. Public comment

Lauren Kelley asked for confirmation on the date of the upcoming Technical Group meeting. Lynn Boulton stated the vegetation in the valley has become mostly dry shrubs, which means less biodiversity. She stated the Los Angeles Water & Power Commissioners approved a motion last April to ensure biodiversity and equitable nature-based solutions throughout their 300,000 acres of land and we can hold them to that if they really want to be good stewards and develop biodiversity. Tina stated we can use their language regarding billions of gallons of water instead of acre feet. She thanked staff for their work. Lynn Boulton stated the Sierra Club relates to gallons, not acre feet. Tyler Starbard stated he wished to acknowledge the energy in the room towards taking action to protect the valley.

12. Adjourn

The Vice Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 8:39 p.m.