

1 GORDON H. DePAOLI
Nevada State Bar No. 195
2 DALE E. FERGUSON
Nevada State Bar No.4986
3 WOODBURN AND WEDGE
4 6100 Neil Road, Suite 500
Reno, Nevada 89511
5 Telephone: 775 / 688-3000

6 Attorneys for WALKER RIVER IRRIGATION
7 DISTRICT

8 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEVADA

9	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	IN EQUITY NO. C-125
10)	SUBFILE NO. C-125-B
11	Plaintiff,)	
12	WALKER RIVER PAIUTE TRIBE,)	
13	Plaintiff-Intervenor,)	
14	v.)	WALKER RIVER IRRIGATION
15	WALKER RIVER IRRIGATION DISTRICT,)	DISTRICT'S RESPONSIVE BRIEF
16	a corporation, et al.,)	ON THRESHOLD ISSUES
17	Defendants.)	
18	_____)	
19	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	
20	WALKER RIVER PAIUTE TRIBE,)	
21	Counterclaimants,)	
22	v.)	
23	WALKER RIVER IRRIGATION DISTRICT,)	
24	et al.,)	
25	Counterdefendants.)	
25	_____)	

26 **I. INTRODUCTION.**

27 The Walker River Irrigation District (the "District") responds to the Opening Briefs of
28 the United States and the Walker River Paiute Tribe (collectively the "Plaintiffs") and of

1 Mineral County. The Plaintiffs and Mineral County disregard Case Management Order
2 (“CMO”), Doc. No. 108. They do not consider the nature of the issues the CMO intends be
3 identified as threshold issues. They attempt to label other CMO directives as “preliminary”
4 threshold issues. The CMO clearly contemplates threshold issues that differ from, and go far
5 beyond those suggested by their briefs.
6

7 The fundamental difference between the threshold issues proposed by the Plaintiffs and
8 Mineral County on one hand, and the District and other defendants on the other hand, relates to
9 what constitutes a threshold issue, and correspondingly, what the Court intended to achieve by
10 establishing the threshold issue process in the first instance. The Plaintiffs and Mineral County
11 contend that only case management issues and purely legal issues (primarily issues that are
12 raised under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure) are proper threshold issues. It is
13 this narrow view that causes them to add the word “preliminary” as a modifier to “threshold”
14 and to make allegations about litigation shortcuts which avoid the requirements of the Federal
15 Rules of Civil Procedure and due process. The CMO clearly does not direct that the Magistrate
16 Judge establish “preliminary” threshold issues; rather the CMO states that the Magistrate Judge
17 shall “consider and make a *preliminary determination* of the threshold issues to be addressed at
18 the outset of the litigation.” (Compare, Brief of the United States of America and the Walker
19 River Paiute Tribe, and, Brief of Mineral County, with CMO at p. 9, Ins. 6-8 [emphasis
20 added]).
21
22

23 The approach of Plaintiffs and Mineral County to the threshold issue question is entirely
24 divorced from the content of the claims which Plaintiffs assert. It ignores the content of the
25 CMO, and includes no analysis of whether any determination of the “preliminary” threshold
26 issues proposed will in any way defer costly and possibly unnecessary proceedings in the
27 interests of the Court and the parties.
28

1 Their approach ignores the Court's broad authority to consider certain claims or issues
2 while holding others in abeyance. When the content of the CMO, and the authority and intent
3 of the Court to further manage the Tribal Claims through the threshold issues in ways that
4 might defer costly and possibly unnecessary proceedings, are brought to bear on the threshold
5 issue question, it becomes clear that Plaintiffs' and Mineral County's approach is simply
6 inappropriate and inconsistent with the purpose and intent of the CMO and with Rule 42(b) of
7 the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.
8

9 This Case as a whole may be excessively large and complex but bifurcation allows the
10 Court to avoid costly and possibly unnecessary proceedings by processing claims and issues in
11 a manner that serves to expedite the litigation. The threshold issues proposed by the District
12 and the other defendants clearly have that potential. Plaintiffs and Mineral County make no
13 attempt to justify their threshold issues based upon those goals.
14

15 **II. THE CASE MANAGEMENT ORDER MAKES IT CLEAR THAT PHASE I OF**
16 **THE TRIBAL CLAIMS, DETERMINATION OF THRESHOLD ISSUES,**
17 **ALLOWS FOR FULL AND COMPLETE DISCOVERY, DISPOSITIVE**
18 **MOTIONS AND IF NECESSARY A SEPARATE TRIAL ON SOME OR ALL**
19 **OF THOSE ISSUES.**

20 In the CMO, the Court stated that "without bifurcation of some sort, the case may
21 simply be too big and too complex to process on a reasonable basis." (CMO at p. 2, lns. 10-
22 11.) Therefore, the Court bifurcated the claims of the Tribe and United States for the Walker
23 River Indian Reservation (the "Tribal Claims") from all of the other claims raised by the United
24 States (the "Federal Claims"). (CMO at p. 4, lns. 9-19.)

25 The Court then went further. The CMO directs that proceedings in this case take place
26 in phases. (CMO at p. 11, lns.10-12.) Phase I of the proceedings is to consist of the threshold
27 issues as identified and determined by the Magistrate Judge. (CMO at p. 11, lns. 14-16.) Phase
28 II of the proceedings will involve completion and determination on the merits of all matters
relating to the Tribal Claims. (CMO at p. 11, lns. 17-19.) Additional phases of the proceedings

1 shall encompass all remaining issues in the case, but the court anticipates that such phases will
2 not be scheduled until the threshold issues have been decided on the merits. (CMO at p. 11-12,
3 Ins. 25-26, 3-6.)

4 Once the threshold issues are identified and determined by the Magistrate Judge, the
5 Court established clear procedures for resolving those issues during Phase I of the proceedings.
6 First, it provided that "discovery shall be allowed to all parties on the threshold issues." (CMO
7 at p. 13, Ins. 4-6.) The Court authorized and contemplated full and complete discovery under
8 the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. The Court instructed the Magistrate Judge to establish
9 the period for discovery and such other terms, conditions, modifications and extensions as the
10 Magistrate Judge determined appropriate. (See, CMO at p. 13, Ins. 11-14.) The CMO thus
11 allows for full discovery on the threshold issues for all parties following a final determination
12 of such issues. (CMO at p. 13, Ins. 3-6.)

13
14
15 On completion of discovery, the Court authorized "motions which may be dispositive or
16 partially dispositive of any threshold issue." (CMO at p. 13, Ins. 16-18.) The Magistrate Judge
17 is to set the time period and schedules for such dispositive or partially dispositive motions.
18 However, such motions are to be decided by the Judge. (CMO at p. 13, Ins. 19-22.) The CMO
19 thus provides for the filing of dispositive motions following completion of discovery on the
20 threshold issues. (CMO at p. 13, Ins. 16-20.)

21
22 Finally, the CMO expressly provides that if "the threshold issues are not resolved by
23 motions, an evidentiary hearing shall be held before the undersigned Judge at such time and
24 according to such conditions (including, as appropriate, the filing of joint pre-hearing orders as
25 shall be determined by the Magistrate Judge)." (CMO at p. 13, ln. 23 - p. 14, ln. 2.) The CMO
26 thereby provides for fact-finding through separate trial on any of the threshold issues not
27 resolved by dispositive motions. (CMO at p. 13, Ins. 23-25.) Thus, the CMO does not
28 disqualify issues which require full discovery and fact finding from being a "threshold issue."

1 It does just the opposite by providing for complete and full compliance with the Federal Rules
2 of Civil Procedure, complete and full discovery, and complete and full fact finding on threshold
3 issues, including, if necessary, a separate trial.¹

4 There is simply no question that the threshold issue process set forth in the CMO was
5 intended to further manage this complex litigation in ways which might defer costly and
6 possibly unnecessary proceedings in the interests of judicial economy and the convenience of
7 the parties. The Court clearly did not intend to establish a complicated process for dealing with
8 nothing more than run-of-the-mill motions under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil
9 Procedure. It also did not intend to establish a process to litigate issues of law disconnected
10 from the content of the claims being asserted by the Plaintiffs.

11 Each of the "preliminary" threshold issues proposed by Plaintiffs and Mineral County is
12 considered below based upon the above considerations. As the Court compares the threshold
13 issues proposed by Plaintiffs and Mineral County to those proposed by the District and other
14 defendants, the most relevant question is: Does a determination of the issue have the potential
15 to avoid costly and potentially unnecessary proceedings on the central Tribal Claims, i.e., a
16 water right for Weber Reservoir for use on the Reservation as it existed at the time the Decree
17 was entered, and for the Added Lands and a water right for the Added Lands?
18

19
20 **III. THE "PRELIMINARY" THRESHOLD ISSUES PROPOSED BY THE UNITED
21 STATES AND WALKER RIVER PAIUTE TRIBE, AND MINERAL COUNTY
22 ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THE THRESHOLD ISSUES AS
23 CONTEMPLATED BY THE CASE MANAGEMENT ORDER.**

24 **A. Issues Related to Service Are Not Proper Threshold Issues as Contemplated
25 by the Case Management Order.**

26 The District agrees that the CMO provides for joinder of certain persons and entities
27 holding categories of water rights, and that those parties be joined before the threshold issue list

28 ¹ Mineral County's assertion that the Court limits discovery on threshold issues (Mineral
County Brief at p. 6, Ins. 5-6) is simply wrong.

1 is made final. The District also acknowledges that the CMO recognizes that the Plaintiffs may
2 move for publication of summons consistent with Rule 4 of the Federal Rules of Civil
3 Procedure. However, although the Court may need to conclude that service is sufficiently
4 complete for purposes of finalizing the list of threshold issues, that determination is not, and
5 was never intended to be, a "threshold" issue.

6
7 If Plaintiffs believe that publication is appropriate or necessary as provided in the CMO,
8 they should file a motion to that effect. However, resolution of that motion is not a threshold
9 issue, nor would any determination of whether publication is adequate or complete be a
10 threshold issue.

11 Plaintiffs also suggest consideration of the need to expand the categories of water right
12 holders to be joined as a threshold issue. (Brief of the United States of America and Walker
13 River Paiute Tribe, at p. 5.) They specifically refer to users of underground water, particularly
14 domestic users. (Brief of United States of America and Walker River Paiute Tribe, at p. 5.)
15 First, no one has proposed that that category be expanded. Second, the CMO establishes
16 criteria for determining whether or not the category should be expanded. It requires a showing
17 that a new water right for the Tribe could affect the rights of other categories of domestic users.
18 (CMO at p. 3, Ins. 14-20.) No such showing has been made. Moreover, even if an attempt is
19 made to expand the parties to be joined, that too will not be a threshold issue under the CMO.
20

21
22 **B. The United States and the Walker River Paiute Tribe Mischaracterize**
23 **Threshold Issues Related to Jurisdiction as Case Management Issues and**
24 **Mistake Other Scheduling and Case Management Issues for Threshold**
25 **Issues.**

- 26
27 1. The United States and Walker River Tribe Characterize a Threshold
28 Jurisdictional Issue as a Case Management Issue and Misstate The
Threshold Jurisdictional Issue in Doing So.

Plaintiffs phrase the jurisdictional issue as "whether Case No. C-125-B is the proper case for the Federal and Tribal claims or whether these claims must be filed in a new and separate action" and identify the issue as a case management rather than a jurisdictional issue.

1 (Brief of United States of America and Walker River Paiute Tribe, at p. 6.) The essence of this
2 issue is whether a court in an action which has gone to final judgment has jurisdiction after
3 entry of that final judgment to adjudicate new claims for additional water, or whether such
4 claims must be the subject of a new and separate action. This is a jurisdictional threshold issue
5 as identified by the CMO.

6 This is not a new issue raised for the first time now. It is an issue which was before the
7 Court in the briefing related to the CMO. It is not an issue which, if decided adversely to
8 Plaintiffs, would require starting over. Rather, it is an issue which requires a determination as
9 to whether this proceeding should be considered a new action completely separate from the
10 continuing administration of the Walker River Decree which takes place in Case No. C-125.

11 2. Deadlines for Amendments to Claims and Answers Are Scheduling and
12 Case Management Issues; They Are Not Threshold Issues as
13 Contemplated by the Case Management Order.

14 Plaintiffs include the CMO's directive regarding scheduling and case management into
15 the threshold issue process. They assert that issues related to scheduling and case management
16 as identified in the CMO at page 8, ¶10, are proper threshold issues. (Brief of the United States
17 and Walker River Paiute Tribe, at p. 6-7.) This assertion also ignores the plain language and
18 content of the CMO.

19 The section of the CMO dealing with scheduling and management merely allows the
20 parties to recommend "procedures for scheduling and for the efficient management of the
21 litigation" to the Magistrate Judge. (CMO at p. 8, Ins. 20-23.) This section of the CMO
22 precedes the section of the CMO dealing with the determination of threshold issues by the
23 Magistrate Judge and directing the parties to identify potential threshold issues. (CMO at p. 9,
24 Ins. 3-19.)

25
26 Recommending procedures for scheduling and efficient management of the litigation is
27 simply not the same as identifying potential threshold issues. Scheduling and management of
28 the litigation clearly refers to just that, scheduling and management: housekeeping matters

1 related to the times and dates for proceedings, "special procedures for service of pleadings,"
2 and "other mechanisms to reduce the burdens on the parties and the court." Scheduling and
3 management *procedures* are not threshold *issues*, and attempting to identify such procedures as
4 issues does not confer threshold status.

5
6 Plaintiffs suggest that some time be allowed both for receiving and assessing answers,
7 and for potentially amending claims and answers. (Brief of the United States of America and
8 Walker River Paiute Tribe, at p. 6.) Plaintiffs first filed these claims over sixteen years ago.
9 They sought permission to amend the claims eleven years ago, and received that permission
10 nearly nine years ago. The suggestion that at this point additional time should be allowed for
11 purposes of amending claims is simply a subterfuge for delay.

12
13 Moreover, the CMO does not require answers from all counterdefendants prior to
14 identifying, processing and deciding threshold issues. Plaintiffs take the position that the
15 threshold issues cannot even be identified unless and until every counterdefendant has filed an
16 answer in these proceedings. That assertion simply ignores the content of the CMO. It
17 expressly provides that no answers or other pleading will be required except upon further order
18 of the Magistrate Judge. It also provides that no default will be taken for a failure to appear.
19 (CMO at p. 12, lns. 22-25.) In terms of finalizing the threshold issues, the Court simply
20 directed that they be finally resolved and settled after all appropriate parties are joined. (CMO
21 at p. 9, lns. 10-13.) There are no reasons, except delay and unnecessary cost, to require
22 answers from all counterdefendants before proceeding to finally determine threshold issues and
23 to litigate those issues in accordance with the CMO.

24
25 The Court has required persons joined to file a Notice of Appearance and Intent to
26 Participate. In many cases, defendants are represented by attorneys, and some of those
27 attorneys have joined in the position of the defendants on threshold issues. Once the Court has
28 made a preliminary determination of threshold issues, that preliminary determination can be

1 served on all persons who have filed a Notice of Appearance and Intent to Participate, with a
2 time frame for making the list final. When it wrote the CMO, the Court was well aware that
3 there were parties presently appearing in the case who would likely raise most, if not all, of the
4 potential threshold issues, i.e., Nevada and the Walker River Irrigation District, and that groups
5 of individual defendants would also participate. Answers are not necessary to finalize and
6 litigate the threshold issues, and are only suggested for purposes of delay.
7

8 **C. The Initial Jurisdictional Threshold Issue Is Whether the Decree Court**
9 **Has Jurisdiction to Adjudicate New and Additional Claims for Reserved**
10 **Water Rights; Consideration of All Other Issues Involving the Surface**
11 **Water/Underground Water Relationship Should Await Resolution of Other**
12 **Threshold Issues As Suggested by the District and Other Defendants.**

13 The initial jurisdictional threshold issue is whether the Decree Court has jurisdiction to
14 adjudicate these new and additional claims by Plaintiffs for reserved water rights for the
15 Walker River Indian Reservation. All of the other jurisdictional issues suggested by Plaintiffs
16 and Mineral County involve the surface water/underground water relationship issues. They are
17 issues which should not be considered until other threshold issues have been determined in a
18 way which requires that they be considered.

19 As the District noted in its opening brief (Doc. 1416, at p. 13-14), the prior
20 determination of other threshold issues suggested by the District and other defendants will help
21 to define the extent to which the surface water/underground water relationship issues are
22 actually, rather than hypothetically, involved in the case. If the Tribe has no rights to surface
23 water beyond those presently recognized in the Walker River Decree, it will not be necessary to
24 consider: (i) what jurisdiction the Court has over groundwater used pursuant to state law; (ii)
25 whether the Court is required to accept the distinction drawn between surface water rights and
26 groundwater rights provided by California and Nevada law; (iii) whether holders of surface
27 rights under federal law have more protection from the use of groundwater than holders of
28

1 surface rights established under state law; or (iv) whether issues of interference need be decided
2 as part of an adjudication of federal surface water rights.

3 Plaintiffs do not contend that at the present time the Tribe is being deprived of water
4 under the 1859 water right recognized in the Decree because of underground pumping by those
5 who have permits to pump underground water under Nevada law or by domestic users of
6 underground water. There is simply no good reason to have the Court consider in the abstract
7 these issues which may be, and likely are, partially, if not wholly, hypothetical issues.
8

9 Plaintiffs, and California to a certain extent, propose an issue concerning the Court's
10 jurisdiction to determine rights to water "in the system not covered by the Decree." (Brief of
11 the United States of America and Walker River Tribe, at p. 7.) If, by that issue, Plaintiffs
12 suggest that entry of the Walker River Decree renders the process for appropriating water under
13 Nevada and California law meaningless, that issue is not raised in any of their pleadings and,
14 therefore, is not a threshold issue.
15

16 **D. Issues Related to Applicable Law.**

17 The District recognizes that an issue in this case is whether a claim to a right for
18 underground water may be made under the implied reservation of water rights doctrine which
19 was established in *Winters v. United States*, 207 U.S. 564 (1908), or under any other theory of
20 federal common law. However, as the District noted in its opening brief, that issue should be
21 considered in conjunction with the broader issues of claim and issue preclusion, and laches and
22 estoppel. The other issues related to applicable law proposed by Plaintiffs and Mineral County
23 are all issues which, at this point, are purely hypothetical and which, depending on the outcome
24 of appropriate threshold issues proposed by the District and other defendants, may never need
25 to be considered at all. They all relate to issues concerning the surface/underground water
26 relationship.
27

28 **E. Contrary to the Contentions of the United States and Walker River Paiute**

**Tribe Issues Relating To Finality and Claim Preclusion Are Proper
Threshold Issues.**

1
2
3 Plaintiffs suggest that defenses based on claim and issue preclusion cannot receive
4 threshold status because they require discovery and possibly expert testimony. As noted at the
5 outset, the fact that discovery is required, and that experts may be needed in a trial, is no bar to
6 identification of an issue as a threshold issue. Indeed, the CMO expressly recognized claim
7 preclusion as a threshold issue. (CMO at p. 9, lns. 17-19.)

8
9 The CMO directs that threshold issues shall address among other issues equitable and
10 other defenses. (CMO at p. 9, lns. 17-19.) The questions of what evidentiary matters are
11 relevant or material in the proof or disproof of those defenses must naturally be taken up at the
12 separate trial on the defenses. *United States v. Truckee-Carson Irrigation District*, 71 F.R.D.
13 10, 13 (D.Nev. 1975). The scope of a separate trial on the defenses of res judicata or
14 collateral estoppel for example must include development of facts sufficient to make a
15 determination on the defenses. This is because each element of res judicata and/or collateral
16 estoppel must be affirmatively proved and the defendants carry the initial burden. *Id.*²

17
18 Plaintiffs overstate the amount of discovery and testimony needed for the Court to
19 properly address the finality issues. The validity or merits of a cause of action need not be
20 known if the question is whether the cause of action is barred by the principles of res judicata
21 or a party is collaterally estopped from asserting matters in proof of its validity. *Truckee-*
22 *Carson*, 71 F.R.D. at 13. While it is true that in order to consider the applicability of the
23 principles of res judicata or collateral estoppel the nature of a cause of action must be known,
24 such nature can be determined from the complaint and through discovery so that a sufficient
25 record is made to determine if the principles apply. *Id.* Therefore issues of finality and claim
26

27
28 ² Thus, Mineral County's suggestion that the threshold issues proposed by defendants will
unfairly burden the Plaintiffs, (Brief of Mineral County at p. 6, lns. 19-26) is nonsense.

1 preclusion are proper threshold issues because a record sufficient to make a determination upon
2 them can be developed from the discovery and fact-finding provided for in the CMO.

3 **F. Threshold Issues Related to Equitable Defenses Are Proper Threshold**
4 **Issues.**

5 The District and other defendants have set forth appropriate equitable defenses for
6 threshold issues. As noted previously, there is no requirement for answers, and clearly no
7 reason to delay identification of threshold issues for answers. As noted above the CMO directs
8 that threshold issues address equitable defenses and a record sufficient to determine if such
9 equitable defenses apply can easily be made within the directives of the CMO.

10 **IV. CONCLUSION.**

11 The District believes that the jurisdictional issue concerning whether the Decree Court
12 has jurisdiction to adjudicate these claims can be quickly and easily resolved, either by
13 stipulation that Case C-125-B, for all purposes, shall be treated as a new and entirely separate
14 proceeding wholly and completely independent from the action which led to the final judgment
15 which is the Walker River Decree, or by consideration as a threshold issue. With respect to the
16 remaining threshold issues identified by the District and other defendants, the Court should
17 follow the clear requirements of the CMO. A time period should be established for discovery.
18 At the conclusion of discovery, a time period should be established for filing wholly or partially
19 dispositive motions. Issues not resolved by dispositive motion should then become the subject
20 of a pretrial order, and a trial should be held on those issues. After such a trial is complete, the

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1 Court should consider and decide what, if anything, should be certified for appeal under
2 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b).

3 DATED this 10th day of October, 2008.

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WOODBURN AND WEDGE

By: Gordon H. DePaoli
Gordon H. DePaoli
Dale E. Ferguson
6100 Neil Road, Suite 500
Reno, Nevada 89511
Attorneys for WALKER RIVER
IRRIGATION DISTRICT

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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I certify that I am an employee of Woodburn and Wedge and that on the 10th day of October, 2008, I electronically served the foregoing *Walker River Irrigation District's Responsive Brief on Threshold Issues* with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send notification of such filing to the following via their email addresses:

Linda Ackley
lackley@water.ca.gov

Marta Adams
maadams@ag.state.nv.us, payoung@ag.state.nv.us

Greg Addington
greg.addington@usdoj.gov, judy.farmer@usdoj.gov, joanie.silvershield@usdoj.gov

George Benesch
gbenesch@sbcglobal.net

Karen Peterson
kpeterson@allisonmackenzie.com, jjonas@allisonmackenzie.com

Simeon Herskovits
herskovitx@westernlaw.org

John W. Howard
johnh@jwhowardattorneys.com, elisam@jwhowardattorneys.com

Michael D. Hoy
Michael D Hoy mhoy@nevadalaw.com

Erin K.L. Mahaney
emahaney@waterboards.ca.gov

David L. Negri
david.negri@usdoj.gov

Michael W. Neville
michael.neville@doj.ca.gov, wallace.greene@doj.ca.gov

Susan Schneider
susan.schneider@usdoj.gov

Laura Schroeder
counsel@water-law.com

1 Stacey Simon
2 ssimon@mono.ca.gov

3 Wes Williams
4 wwilliams@standfordaluni.org

5 and I further certify that I served a copy of the foregoing to the following by U.S. Mail, postage
6 prepaid, this 10th day of October, 2008:

7 Kenneth Spooner
8 General Manager
9 Walker River Irrigation District
10 P.O. Box 820
11 Yerington, NV 89447

William W. Quinn
Office of the Field Solicitor
Department of the Interior
401 W. Washington St., SPC 44
Phoenix, AZ 85003

12 Mary Hackenbracht
13 Deputy Attorney General
14 State of California
15 1515 Clay St., 20th Floor
16 Oakland, CA 94612-1413

Tracy Taylor
Division of Water Resources
State of Nevada
901 S. Stewart St.
Carson City, NV 89701

17 Garry Stone
18 United States District Court Water Master
19 290 S. Arlington Ave., 3rd Floor
20 Reno, NV 89501

Allen Biaggi
Dir. of Conservation & Natural Resources
State of Nevada
901 S. Stewart St.
Carson City, NV 89701

21 John Kramer
22 Dept. of Water Resources
23 1416 Ninth St.
24 Sacramento, CA 95814

Wesley G. Beverlin
Malissa Hathaway McKeith
Lewis, Brisbois, Bisgaard & Smith LCP
221 N. Figueroa St., Suite 1200
Los Angeles, CA 90012

25 James Shaw
26 Water Master
27 U.S. Board of Water Commissioners
28 P.O. Box 853
Yerington, NV 89447

Robert L. Auer
Lyon County District Attorney
31 S. Main St.
Yerington, NV 89447

29 Tim Glidden
30 U. S. Dept. of the Interior, Office of the
31 Secretary, Div. Of Indian Affairs
32 1849 C St. N.W.
33 Mail Stop 6456
34 Washington, D.C. 20240

Cheri Emm-Smith
Mineral County District Attorney
P. O. Box 1210
Hawthorne, NV 89415

35 Marshall S. Rudolph, Mono County Counsel
36 Stacy Simon, Deputy County Counsel
37 Mono County

William E. Schaeffer
P. O. Box 936
Battle Mountain, NV 89820

1 P. O. Box 2415
2 Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546-2415
3 Todd Plimpton
4 Belanger & Plimpton
5 1135 Central Ave.
6 P.O. Box 59
7 Lovelock, NV 89419

8 Jeff Parker
9 Deputy Atty. General
10 Office of the Attorney General
11 100 N. Carson St.
12 Carson City, NV 89701-4717

Nathan Goedde, Staff Counsel
California Dept. of Fish and Game
1416 Ninth St., #1335
Sacramento, CA 95814

Timothy A. Lukas
P.O. Box 3237
Reno, NV 89505



Holly Dewar

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