



STOP THE UNFAIR GROUNDWATER REPLENISHMENT FEE

The residents of Ridgecrest and surrounding communities need a reliable and affordable water supply.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS PROTECT OUR VALLEY'S WATER?

Protect Our Valley's Water is a coalition founded by Searles Valley Minerals that is dedicated to keeping the Indian Wells Valley (IWW) community informed about the ongoing issues and developments related to the IWW Basin and its water supply. This coalition works to ensure that residents are aware of important decisions, policies, and actions affecting their water resources, advocating for fair and sustainable water management practices.

WHAT ARE THESE LAWSUITS INVOLVING THE INDIAN WELLS VALLEY GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY?

Searles Valley Minerals filed a complaint to protect its longstanding groundwater rights in a comprehensive adjudication of all groundwater rights in the IWW Basin. Searles and other parties are also challenging the imposition of Authority's unprecedented fee on groundwater pumping. Searles has been operating in the IWW Basin for over 151 years, and this fee undermines Searles' historic and senior groundwater rights. Searles believes the best resolution is through a basin adjudication, allowing everyone to have their day in court.

WHAT IS THE FEE?

Searles Valley Minerals, a significant regional employer, is threatened by a "groundwater replenishment fee" imposed by the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority on some (but not all) of the groundwater pumpers in the IWW Basin. This fee fails to respect Searles' senior groundwater rights and imposes an unfair financial burden. If not successfully challenged, the fee could severely impact Searles' operations and the local economy.

WHAT IS THE INDIAN WELLS VALLEY GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY?

The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) was established under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014 to manage the region's groundwater sustainably by 2040. However, the Authority's current plan imposes an arbitrary and unreasonably burdensome fee on select groundwater users without a viable solution for future Basin water supplies.

WHAT WAS THE INTENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT ACT (SGMA)?

SGMA was designed to foster better local and regional management of California's groundwater basins, with the goal of achieving sustainability by 2040. Its success depends on fair and reasonable local implementation. Unfortunately, the Authority's exorbitant replenishment fee does not align with this intent, as it imposes an unfair and unreasonable fee, and it fails to provide a practical plan to achieve sustainability.

WHAT IS DRIVING THE INDIAN WELLS VALLEY GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY'S NEW FEE?

The Authority aims to secure new water sources by purchasing water rights from elsewhere in California and building a costly new pipeline to bring that water to the Indian Wells Valley, all of which is to be funded by the Replenishment Fee. This fee improperly targets only some groundwater users, including Searles Valley Minerals, and in doing so ignores Searles' historic and senior water rights in the IWW Basin. The Authority proposes constructing a costly pipeline to transport water from these newly acquired sources to the IWW Basin. The financial burden of this project will be placed on the residents and businesses of Ridgecrest and Trona. The Indian Wells Valley Water District has conducted studies on this proposed new pipeline and has generally concluded that the economics do not work: the Ridgecrest and Trona communities cannot afford this pipeline.

WHOSE WATER RATES WILL INCREASE AND BY HOW MUCH?

The Authority's plan unreasonably selects "winners" and "losers" without regard for existing water rights. Despite the senior and historic water rights held by Searles Valley Minerals, Authority seeks to charge Searles these exorbitant fees, meaning that Searles faces a 7000% increase in water costs, amounting to \$6 million annually. This unsustainable fee will place a heavy financial burden on the people in the Ridgecrest and Trona areas, as they will ultimately be responsible for funding the proposed pipeline, which is not practical.

WHAT IS THE IWVGA PIPELINE PROJECT?

The IWVGA Pipeline Project is a proposal to transport water from newly acquired sources across California to the Indian Wells Valley Basin. This costly pipeline lacks a clear timeline, secure funding, and its feasibility is uncertain. The financial burden of this project will ultimately be placed on the residents and businesses of Ridgecrest and Trona through increased water rates.

HOW WILL THE AUTHORITY'S PIPELINE PROJECT IMPACT THE OVERALL WATER SUPPLY IN THE BASIN?

The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority's Pipeline Project proposes to transport treated water from the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency (AVEK) pipeline to Ridgecrest via a brand-new and costly pipeline. The feasibility of the pipeline construction is questionable and this project alone will not achieve sustainable groundwater management in the Basin. The variability in water allocations from the State Water Project (SWP) means that the pipeline cannot guarantee a reliable or consistent water supply, leaving the Basin's long-term water security at risk. Adding an expensive and uncertain water source does not solve the fundamental problem of the current over-extraction of the Basin's groundwater.

WHY DOES SEARLES VALLEY MINERALS BELIEVE THE AUTHORITY'S PIPELINE PROJECT IS NOT A VIABLE SOLUTION FOR THE BASIN?

Searles Valley Minerals believes that the Pipeline Project is not a viable solution for the Basin due to several key factors. For example, the financial burden of the project is substantial, with total costs potentially reaching up to \$491 Million. This cost will ultimately fall on the residents and businesses in the Basin, including Searles Valley Minerals, significantly increasing operational expenses. Further, the reliability of water from the pipeline, water originally from the SWP, would be highly variable. This means that the pipeline is unlikely to ensure a consistent and dependable water supply, which is critical for industrial operations. Investing in the Pipeline Project alone will not help the IWV Basin achieve sustainability. Instead, investing in alternative solutions that focus on sustainable groundwater management and conservation would be more effective in securing the Basin's water future.

WHAT IS THE TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP STORAGE STUDY AND WHAT WERE ITS FINDINGS?

The Technical Working Group (TWG) storage study, conducted by a group of qualified groundwater professionals, assessed the total amount of groundwater in storage in the Indian Wells Valley Basin. This collaborative effort included contributions from Searles Valley Minerals. The study found that the Basin contains approximately 66.9 million acre-feet (AF) of total groundwater and about 37.5 million AF of fresh groundwater. The TWG storage study highlights the importance of scientifically grounded and collaborative approaches to understanding and managing the Basin's water resources. The TWG continues to conduct studies on key issues relevant to the Basin using best available science.

HOW WILL THE AUTHORITY'S FEE IMPACT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

The fee will create economic hardship for many residents of Ridgecrest and devastate the Trona community. Searles, a key water supplier and economic driver, will be severely affected by the financial burden, which is unreasonable, unfair, and disproportionate.

WHAT IS SEARLES' ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY?

Searles is a cornerstone of the Trona and Ridgecrest communities, supporting the local economy with innovative technologies and stable, well-paying jobs since 1873. Through Searles Domestic Water Company, the company provides municipal and domestic water to Trona, a severely disadvantaged community, and is the sole source of its water supply. Searles' contributions to the greater communities of the area include:

- A \$675 million annual economic impact on Kern, Inyo, and San Bernardino counties.
- Employment for 575 direct jobs and 614 indirect/induced jobs.
- \$2.7 million in annual expenditures on Kern County vendors.
- An average annual wage of \$90,909 for Searles employees.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS?

The management of the groundwater basin must be based on the best available science, more transparent, collaborative, and fair. A just process that respects Searles' historic water rights and acknowledges Searles' critical role in the local economy is essential. The Authority must protect the entire community and develop a sustainable plan that balances the groundwater basin while supporting Ridgecrest and Trona.



HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

To request to be added to our email list, email info@protectourvalleyswater.com.