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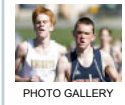


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### Who should get underground water? Nevada wants to pump from aquifers on border

By **Stephen Speckman**  
Deseret News

As Nevada jockeys for water to quench a thirsty, growing Las Vegas, officials in Utah have spent about half of a \$3 million budget to study valuable aquifers along the border.

Utah Geological Survey researchers are midway through a project that involves digging monitoring wells south of the Dugway Mountain range and near Nevada's Great Basin National Park to study the quality, quantity and connectivity of aquifers that for decades have supplied Utah water rights holders.

"Westerners realize water is limited," said Lucy Jordan, a UGS hydrogeologist. "So, as a Westerner we all need to make the most out of those supplies."

Jordan gave a presentation Friday at a UGS board meeting to update members on the progress of the monitoring that began in areas of Millard County.

Last year state lawmakers appropriated \$3 million to do the study, which was prompted by the Southern Nevada Water Authority filing with the state of Nevada for water rights to 110,000 acre-feet of groundwater on their side of the border. Nevada's state engineer has given the go ahead to pump up to 40,000 acre square feet west of Great Basin, but pumping hasn't begun yet.

"When it comes down to who actually gets to pump, that's when it gets contentious," Jordan said. "That's why we're doing this — we want to know existing water rights holders will not be negatively impacted."

So far, drilling and monitoring has taken place with aquifers that span the **Snake**, Hamlin and Tule **valleys**, with nine drilling sites that have up to three wells each. Utah has spent about \$1.8 million of its budget, with more wells to be drilled this year.

Does Nevada have the right to go after 110,000 acre-feet of water so close to the border?

"That's an interesting question," Jordan said. "It depends on who you ask. That's where the big problems come in. Whose water really is it?"

In talks about who should have access to groundwater that flows underground on both sides of the state line, Jordan said. Nevada officials have maintained water is flowing from their state into Utah. Jordan noted in an interview Friday that Western water historically has gone to whomever began using it first.

Monitoring will continue, with results up until now showing that two aquifers studied are flowing from one to the other and that the quality is good. Jordan said they'll be looking closely at how spring runoff impacts the volume of those aquifers, which have yet to be tested by any large-scale pumping project.

E-mail: [sspeckman@desnews.com](mailto:sspeckman@desnews.com)

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