



UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO | DESERT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Background – August 2007

Project Purpose

Sustain the economy and the ecosystem of the river basin for delivery of water to Walker Lake.

Project Partners

University of Nevada, Reno; Desert Research Institute; Nevada System of Higher Education

Key Points

Why save Walker Lake?

- The Lake is undergoing a great amount of stress due to rapidly declining lake levels (145 feet since 1882) with resulting increased salinity; this impacts the Lake's ecosystem.
- It is one of only three desert terminal lakes in North America with a fresh water fishery.
- The Lake is a major stopover for migrating birds on the Pacific flyway.
- The environmental health of the basin, of the river and of the Lake is interdependent and linked to the economic health of the basin.

Project Significance:

- The role of the two research institutions – as collaborators and project leaders – coupled with the project's scope and complexity, make this a unique and historic undertaking.
- The project will have local, state, national and international implications.

Project Overall:

- DRI and the University bring environmental, agricultural and economic expertise.
- The project partners recognize there are deeply held and occasionally conflicting views about water issues.
- Stakeholders Group has been created to provide for stakeholder input and involvement.

Project Funding:

- The project is authorized and funded by Congress through P.L. 109-103, Section 208.
- \$70 million was awarded to the University to fund the Walker Basin Project.
- Up to \$14 million will go toward research on the Walker Basin.

Delivering water to the Lake:

- This will include acquisition of water and/or water rights from willing sellers at fair market value for final approval by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.
- The acquisition program will be reviewed in an Environmental Impact analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Research:

- Research will explore the best means by which to get water to Walker Lake while maintaining a strong economy and improving the ecosystem of the Walker Lake watershed. These efforts will involve developing a watershed and decision support model and evaluating economic impacts of water purchases, low-water use drought-resistant crops, water conservation, in-stream health of the Walker River, and sediment and salt delivery to the Lake.
- This research will have application to other arid and high desert regions.