

Groups sue over Cadiz water draw

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SAN BERNARDINO — Conservation groups filed a lawsuit in superior court here today challenging the Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project.

The Center for Biological Diversity, National Parks Conservation Association, Sierra Club and San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society are suing over a proposal to tap a large underground aquifer in the desert northeast of Twentynine Palms.

The plan is to convey the water by pipeline and aqueduct to water customers in Orange Company.

“This shortsighted water grab will benefit those pushing more sprawl in Orange County, but it’ll rob some of California’s rare species of the water they need to survive,” said Adam Lazar, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. “Our desert, the residents of San Bernardino County and Orange County rate payers all deserve better.”

The project’s environmental review was done by Santa Margarita Water District, the lead agency among a consortium of participating water districts.

The National Parks Conservation Association has stated the environmental review should bring in the resources of the U.S. Geological Survey under the National Environmental Policy Act.

“On behalf of our over 90,000 California members and supporters, we sent a strong message to the Santa Margarita Water District that this ill-conceived project was a significant threat to the Mojave Desert in general and the Mojave National Preserve in particular,” said Seth Shteir, a field representative for the National Parks Conservation Association.

“Our voice — and the law — was disregarded throughout this process, and taking legal action is our only viable next step.”

Proponents of the project say it will use water otherwise lost to evaporation. An economic study of the project states it will create thousands of jobs.