

San Bernardino Sun

[http://www.sbsun.com/pointofview/ci\\_20609612/cadiz-gamble-leaves-us-high-and-dry](http://www.sbsun.com/pointofview/ci_20609612/cadiz-gamble-leaves-us-high-and-dry)

Cadiz gamble leaves us high and dry

Op-Ed

Ruth Musser-Lopez

Posted: 05/12/2012 07:11:08 AM PDT

Long-time desert citizens in the eastern half of San Bernardino County will recall the cheekily misnamed "Low Level Radioactive Waste Repository" in Ward Valley, which turned out to be a massive nuclear dump. Currently, the misnamed Cadiz water "conservation" proposal is really a massive water privatization scheme - an Owen's Valley-like water grab.

A long struggle with strong public opposition throughout the 1990s brought an end to both an earlier version of the Cadiz water grab and the nuclear dump, a victory over the privatization of scarce public resources. Those projects required collaborators in positions of power - a British ex-patriot and political fundraiser, Keith Brackpool, currently the chairman of the California Horse Racing Board, originally conjured up the incarnated Cadiz proposal over a decade ago.

Now, 1st District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt is greasing the wheels for the new version of the Cadiz water grab, even though locally, the city of Needles refused support.

What entitles one hedge-fund-backed investment firm, currently using only 2,000 acre-feet of water per year, the right to sell 50,000 to 75,000 acre-feet yearly of precious, life-giving, desert water, right out from under desert residents, businesses and growing desert markets?

Water is a public resource owned by citizens of the county and the entire state, as guaranteed by the California Constitution. That is why the East Mojave Landowners Association is opposed to the project.

Proponents, imagining that water not shipped from the desert is somehow lost, tout exaggerated evaporation figures as a justification for taking the water. They calculate evaporation rates in Cadiz Valley to be greater than that of Death Valley - go figure. They propose pumping Fenner Valley water before it reaches Cadiz Valley, but then, nonsensically, would divert Colorado River water to the very place where they claim Fenner water is being "lost" to evaporation.

Sound like a shell game? This is no safe bet; instead it's a guaranteed loss of the high water table and evaporation that cools the desert environment, critical to the desert ecosystem.

Given the importance of our groundwater as a shared public resource, the Board of Supervisors could have considered this to be the county's own public works project, conserving and using this water to benefit our local government, roads, schools, libraries, etc. So why would they vote to privatize the water and its sale while the risks and potential liability will be the public's should the company walk away?

Several weeks ago the supervisors approved another \$350,000 in project legal costs. A skeptic would easily connect the fact that Cadiz has fed the bank account of Supervisor Mitzelfelt \$48,000, ostensibly for campaigns.

On May 1, after a scant five-day notice, the supervisors approved an exemption that severely limits the county's ability to monitor and enforce rules against harmful impacts to the water table. The approved Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) forces the county to wait an entire decade for information about harm to the aquifer.

The county is supposed to act as lead agency for environmental review of the project, but the supervisors punted that responsibility to an Orange County water district nearly 200 miles away from the project and without accountability to us. The Supervisors' assertion that they can cede Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) statutory authority through an MOU is convoluted, disingenuous and corrupt. It delivers a role to SMWD that it cannot perform without a fatal conflict of interest: SMWD will purchase and benefit from the privatizing of our water.

Both independent experts and the U.S. Geological Survey have repeatedly demonstrated that the Cadiz project is unsustainable. Lowering the water table will turn our spring-dependent desert into a sandy wasteland, endangering scenic resources, wildlife and plant species - and accompanying tourism.

At best, the Cadiz project will provide short-term construction jobs, while a few others will get incredibly rich. At worst, the Cadiz project sets a dangerous precedent for giving away one of our county's most precious resources: our water supply. The Cadiz project is not a long-term solution and will simply generate more problems including environmental and economic calamity.

We didn't fight the supervisors in the '90s to defend our East Mojave groundwater against nuclear contamination just to have it now pumped out from under us by Cadiz. The supervisors should abandon their current supportive course, reject any future enabling approvals, and stand up against such an ill-conceived and harmful project.

Ruth Musser-Lopez is principal of the Archaeological Heritage Association of the Lower Colorado River; [riveraha.org](http://riveraha.org).