

## Environmental groups try to block Trump-era approval of Cadiz right-of-way

By Debra Kahn

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Environmental groups sued the Interior Department on Tuesday to force it to reconsider a right-of-way the Trump administration granted to a groundwater pumping project in Southern California.

**What happened:** The [Center for Biological Diversity](#), the Native American Land Conservancy and other environmental groups are seeking to have the Bureau of Land Management reconsider granting a right-of-way to the Cadiz Water Project through its waiver of federal environmental rules. The project, in the works for decades, involves pumping groundwater from an aquifer below the Mojave Desert and selling it to Southern California water agencies.

The [Center for Biological Diversity and Sierra Club](#) cited the [National Environmental Policy Act in its suit](#), while the Native American Land Conservancy and National Parks Conservation Association [cited the](#) National Historic Preservation Act and NEPA. Both suits were filed in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

**Background:** Cadiz has long sought to construct a pipeline to send groundwater under the Mojave Desert to urban users. The Bureau of Land Management signed off on a "categorical exclusion" from the National Environmental Policy Act in December, allowing the project to use about 50 miles of an old gas pipeline right-of-way in San Bernardino and Kern counties.

BLM previously under Trump allowed the project to use a railroad right-of-way that the Obama administration had said would require federal environmental permits; environmentalists challenged that and got the determination sent back to BLM in 2019.

Gov. Gavin Newsom also signed a bill in 2019, [CA SB307 \(19R\)](#), that put an extra hurdle in the project's way by empowering the State Lands Commission and Department of Fish and Wildlife to consider if the company's plans would damage habitat or other resources on state or federal land. The new route would steer largely clear of state land, diluting the state's authority over the project.

"We felt like this was a pretty clear violation of the NEPA review process, so that's why we decided to file on it," said Ileene Anderson, a senior scientist with the [Center for Biological Diversity](#).

**Reaction:** Cadiz said the project would benefit nearby communities. "[W]e are deeply saddened but not surprised by the latest attempts by opponents of new water supply to delay and obstruct federal permits that could augment California's water supply infrastructure, especially as the state is staring down another drought and continues to have more than 1 million people without reliable access to clean water," the company said in a statement. "Members of the organizations

funding these lawsuits and spreading the misinformation about the pipeline's use should be ashamed of the frivolous spending of their dues to fund attacks on water access in California."

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