



## **FARM BUREAU CALLS ON STATE TO PROTECT WATER RIGHTS AND WEST DESERT ECOSYSTEM**

**SALT LAKE CITY – September 21, 2006** – In a statement before the Utah Legislature’s Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment Interim Committee, the Utah Farm Bureau Federation called on the Governor, State Legislature and Utah State Engineer to aggressively protect Utah water rights, Utah residents, Utah agriculture interests and the fragile Western desert ecosystem.

“Utah must demand that Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) provide full protection to existing water rights in the affected region, recognize the jurisdictional issues associated with state boundaries and assess the impacts of the proposed pipeline along the western Utah border,” said Randy Parker, Chief Executive Officer of the Utah Farm Bureau.

Farm Bureau is concerned that the push by SNWA to reach a quick agreement is the result of politics and money without regard for a process that adequately protects the historic values of the region, including the sovereign water rights of the state of Utah.

Nevada and Utah are the two most arid states in America. Both states manage resources based on ongoing water shortages, especially in Utah’s West Desert. Current agriculture irrigation or the larger impacts of another prolonged drought may be just a drop in the bucket compared to the impacts of the SNWA proposal to pumping 25,000 acre-feet from Snake Valley and 180,000 acre feet annually from eastern Nevada aquifers.

The Snake Valley aquifer rests largely in Utah. There is undocumented speculation that a deep carbonate aquifer containing ancient water underlies the region. Hydrologists, with adequate time, have the ability to estimate the amount of water and how pumping will affect the aquifer. If a deep aquifer is present containing ancient water, only a scientific analysis will determine the hydrologic connection between it and the shallow alluvial aquifer.

“Water is the lifeblood of the arid west. Availability of water is critical to Utah’s rural economies and farm and ranch families. Even the slightest lowering of the underground water resource could adversely impact farmers and ranchers. Increased costs associated with deeper pumping of water could render agriculture economically infeasible in the region,” Parker said.

In addition, Farm Bureau is concerned that science hasn’t fully determined the hydrologic connections between Utah’s western aquifers and the long term impacts of removing and transporting 180,000 acre feet of groundwater from eastern Nevada aquifers. This heavy

groundwater drawdown could influence hydrologic mechanics, ultimately adversely impacting Utah's sovereign water rights, water quality, agricultural irrigation practices and costs and the associated West Desert ecosystems.

The Utah Farm Bureau Federation is calling on the SNWA to take the necessary time to provide an unbiased inventory and assessment of the target basins along the Utah border, especially Utah's Snake Valley. The inventory and assessment must include detailed information allowing the Utah State Engineer to determine any potential adverse impacts to Utah, its water rights, property rights and associated ecosystems.

The inventory and assessment must include but not limited to:

- A comprehensive inventory of recorded water rights, vested water rights, historical water rights and current uses.
- A comprehensive inventory of pre-project baseline conditions, including all springs and seeps on both private and public property, flows, water tables and vegetation.
- Use of resource inventory data in modeling to predict the potential impacts of 25,000 acre feet of groundwater removal from Snake Valley.
- A groundwater monitoring program that measures any adverse affects on Utah water resources, agriculture interests and the ecosystem.
- Agreement to incremental levels of pumping implemented over an agreed timeline to assure no adverse impacts to Utah's sovereign water resources or Snake Valley residents.
- Establishment of agreed to thresholds of impacts that will automatically reduce or stop SNWA pumping of Snake Valley groundwater.
- Advance agreements for mitigating adverse impacts of groundwater pumping in Snake Valley and compensation for affected parties including but not limited to the State of Utah, agricultural interests and others holding water rights.

“Utah agriculture is a multi-billion dollar industry, employing more than 100,000 Utahns. Agriculture's economic contribution is of greatest importance to our state's rural communities and their citizens, including Snake Valley,” Parker said. “In the counties that could be harmed by the proposed SNWA pipeline, there are additional cultural and economic issues. SNWA must assess the potential adverse socio-economic impacts to the historic residents of the region.”

### **About the Utah Farm Bureau**

The Utah Farm Bureau is the largest general farm and ranch organization in the state with more than 19,000 member families. Its mission is to improve the net income of the state's farmers and ranchers and the overall quality of life in the state and nation through political action, educational and informational means. The Farm Bureau is a non-partisan, voluntary organization, and its efforts are based on grassroots policies developed by members at the local, county, state and national levels. It is affiliated with the American Farm Bureau Federation, the world's largest general farm organization, with more than 5 million family members in 50 states and Puerto Rico. For more information, go to the Utah Farm Bureau Web site at <http://utfb.fb.org>.

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