



the Owens Valley Committee

# the RAINSHADOW

THE OWENS VALLEY COMMITTEE • VOL. 8 NO. II • FALL/WINTER 2013 • WWW.OVCWEB.ORG

w e w a t c h t h e w a t e r

## Industrial-Scale Solar Threatens Owens Valley

OVC Team

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power released a Draft Environmental Impact Report last summer for a 200-megawatt photovoltaic solar plant in Owens Valley. Located at the base of the Inyo Mountains, four miles northeast of Manzanar National Historic Site, the Southern Owens Valley Solar Ranch Project would cover two square miles of what is now open space, wildlife and grazing land. The site is located within the Lower Owens River Project area, less than two miles east of the Owens River.

The land would be bulldozed and covered with flat solar panels, and two new groundwater wells would be constructed. About 60 archeological sites would be obliterated along with at least five rare plant populations, and one of the most spectacular landscapes in the country would be industrialized. Meanwhile, rooftops and parking lots in Los Angeles, which could produce far more electricity, are barely used.

This would be the first industrial-scale solar project in the Owens Valley. It would be a blight on our landscape; impairing viewsheds from the Inyo Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, as well as from Manzanar, US 395 and other locations in the valley.

Yet the environmental report (DEIR) claims that impacts to aesthetics would be less than significant.

The DEIR lacks a dust abatement plan, weed management plan, and a decommissioning/reclamation plan for when the project ends. The DEIR does not adequately address hydrological and biological issues, the applicability of the Long Term Water Agreement, nor potential impacts to cultural landscapes, the LORP, housing, and to public services and utilities.

The proposed solar plant would violate Inyo County's general plan, zoning and solar ordinance. However, due to state laws, Inyo's zoning and general plan cannot be enforced on DWP land, and County Counsel is not confident the solar ordinance could be. County staff estimates net costs to the county to provide services to the project would come to about \$6 million.

A proposed Memorandum of Understanding "term sheet" for the solar project came before the Inyo County Board of Supervisors in August. It called for DWP to give Inyo County \$4 million, guarantee 10 entry-level jobs at the new facility

### Speak Out! Tell LADWP How You Feel

YOU CAN VIEW THE DWP SOLAR RANCH DEIR AT LOCAL LIBRARIES OR ON-LINE AT WWW.LADWP.COM/ENVNOTICES. THE DEIR COMMENT PERIOD ENDED NOVEMBER 4, BUT YOU CAN STILL MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD FOR THE OWENS VALLEY BY WRITING COMMENTS TO:

- Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles (mayor.garcetti@lacity.org)
- LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners (commission@ladwp.com)
- Mr. Charles Holloway, LADWP Manager of Environmental Planning and Assessment (Charles.Holloway@ladwp.com)

PLEASE CC YOUR COMMENTS TO THE INYO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- Linda Arcularius, First District (larcularius@inyocounty.us)
- Jeff Griffiths, Second District (jgriffiths@inyocounty.us)
- Rick Pucci, Third District (supervisor.pucci@gmail.com)
- Mark Tillemans, Fourth District (mtillemans@inyocounty.us)
- Matt Kingsley, Fifth District (mkingsley@inyocounty.us)



Photo: Connie Spenger

From kit foxes to golden eagles, the proposed solar location provides home or foraging for a variety of wildlife, plus rare wildflowers and archeological sites.

## Lower Owens River Project Update: Poor Planning Leads to Massive Fish Kill

By Mark Bagley

A major fish kill occurred in the LORP in late July when DWP diverted large amounts of water from the Los Angeles Aqueduct through the Alabama Gates, a few miles north of Lone Pine, to the Lower Owens River. This water release stirred up river bottom sediments, resulting in increased biological oxygen demand and turbidity, which caused extremely low dissolved oxygen levels and the death of hundreds, if not thousands of fish in the Lower Owens River.

Near the LORP pump station pond more than 700 dead fish were reported. It is likely that thousands more dead fish were not observed in the channel below the Alabama Gates, due to dense cattails and tule growth, and to dead fish sinking to the bottom.

Francis Pedneau, a Lone Pine fisherman who has bass fished in the Owens River for decades, reported that at his favorite fishing hole on the river east of Lone Pine he and his wife caught and released 96 bass on September 13, 2012. However, on one day in August and one in September this year, at the same fishing hole, they caught only one bass each time.

Scheduled repair of the Aqueduct walls about one mile south of the Alabama Gates for the week of July 22 made the fish kill highly predictable. The work required draining the Aqueduct between Alabama Gates and Lone Pine Creek. According to DWP they reduced flows in the aqueduct in the days preceding July 22 and anticipated only a small flow, up to 5



Countless Largemouth Bass died in the oxygen-depleted water.

cubic feet per second, from the Alabama Gates to the river in order to drain the aqueduct.

DWP claims that flash flooding from “unexpected” thunderstorms was the cause of the fish kill. However, thunderstorms are not exactly unexpected in July and August in the Owens Valley. In fact, on his widely read Mammoth Weather website, Howard Shecter forecast on July 18 that, “The Southern California deserts as well as Southern Nevada could really get walloped with some heavy rain and flash flooding in some areas by the end of the weekend or early next week.”

The fish kill will likely set back the fishery four to six years. Clearly, what caused it is the decision by DWP to schedule the aqueduct work in July, and then when thunderstorms and flash flooding were forecast for the area and actually began on the Sunday before work was scheduled, to not postpone the work.

## Crystal Geyser Lawsuit Settled

OVC, Sierra Club and Crystal Geyser Roxanne have settled a legal challenge to the County of Inyo’s approval of Crystal Geyser’s Cabin Bar Ranch Water Bottling Plant Project and Environmental Impact Report. The company proposed to take 360 more acre-feet of water per year and construct a new bottling facility, doubling their production of bottled spring water in the Cartago-Olancho area. OVC and Sierra Club were concerned about the scope of the biological and hydrological surveys and the potential impacts the project may have on neighbors’ wells, springs, wetland vegetation, rare plants, and aquatic species. After long negotiations, a settlement of the lawsuit filed earlier this year was reached this fall. In the settlement, Crystal Geyser agrees to monitor off-site wells in Cartago and expand the scope of the biological and hydrological surveys and impact analyses. The results of these studies will be provided to OVC and Sierra Club and will be submitted to the County of Inyo to assist Crystal Geyser and the County in developing and approving the Groundwater Monitoring, Mitigation, and Reporting Plan. This plan, which must be approved by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors at a public hearing prior to project pumping, will govern Crystal Geyser’s mitigation requirements while operating the water bottling project.

## Slake Update

A HUGE THANK YOU to the following donors who helped the Owens Valley Committee fund our Slake video project!!! Bristlecone Media will produce an initial short promotional video highlighting the work of the Owens Valley Committee and some pressing issues at this time. It will be a call for more involvement and a teaser for the upcoming, longer Slake video. This first video is slated for completion in time to coordinate with the centennial of the opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which will be in November. Slake is in pre-production and will be released next year.

Stan Mattick	Pat Brown-Berry	Colleen Hampton	Doug White	Linda Emerson	Gerald Wise	Michael Neumann
Jeri and Nelson Brown	Paul Grishaber	Stacy Goss	Dave Wagner	Jane McDonald	Carma Roper	Meera Menon
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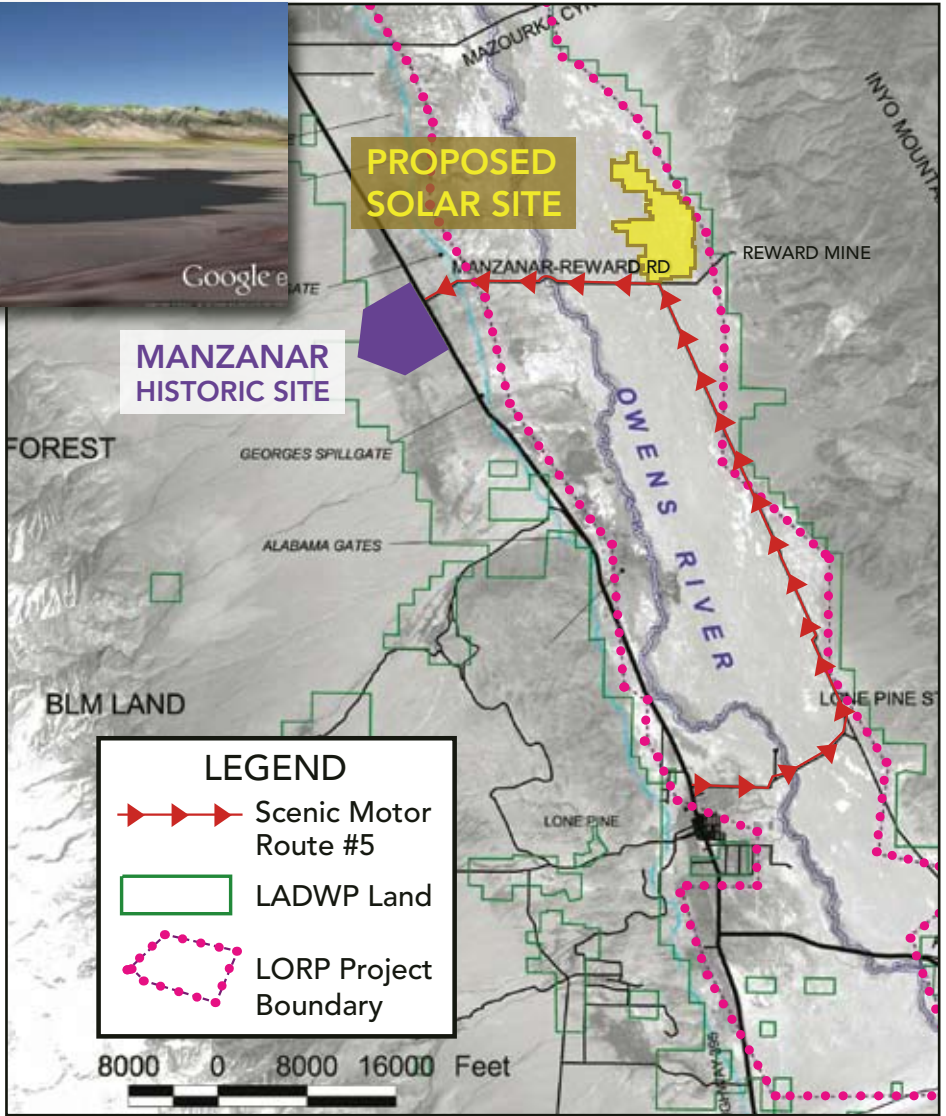
Simulated view from above the Reward Mine.

for county residents, and a few more incentives. In return, Inyo would agree not to challenge the project's EIR.

OVC activists and the Superintendent of Manzanar National Historic Site spoke against the proposed terms. Unfortunately, the Supervisors voted 4-1 to accept the term sheet. However, Supervisors emphasized this did not necessarily mean they would agree to the MOU.

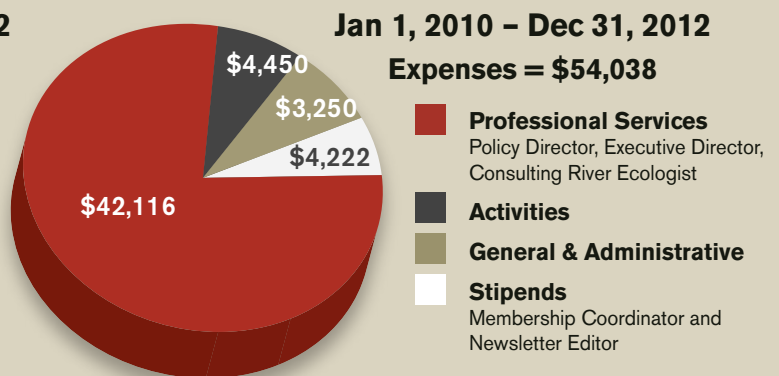
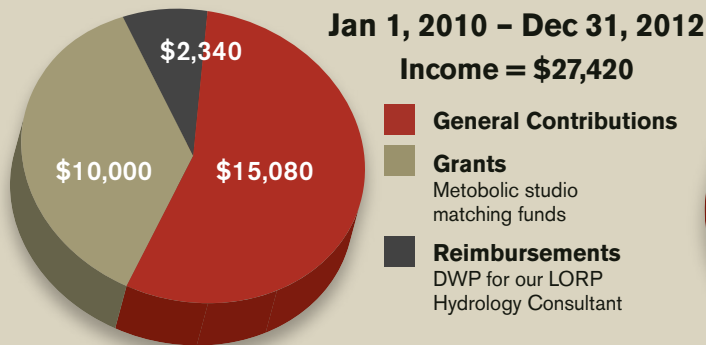
A study by the LA Business Council and UCLA recently determined there was potential for over 5,500 megawatts from rooftop solar in DWP's service area — far more than would be generated by the proposed Owens Valley project. Rather than investing in its own infrastructure to use sunshine on Los Angeles rooftops, DWP has decided to industrialize a landscape it had hitherto claimed it was preserving, and prided itself on that fact.

"The Owens Valley remains one of the last areas in California that is virtually untouched by pollution and development, precisely because of DWP's excellent land stewardship," wrote Aqueduct Manager Gene Coufal in 2005.



The solar site would be larger than nearly every community in the Owens Valley.

## OVC Financial Report



OVC started the year 2012 with \$66,159 in assets (money in the bank) and ended the year with \$39,541 in assets with a 2012 income of \$27,420 and expenses of \$54,038. Mark Bagley served as Policy Director from Jan 1 through Aug 14 and as Executive Director from Aug 15 through November 14.

Eastern Sierra Birding Trail Maps & our OVC Membership brochures are available. Email [outreach@ovcweb.org](mailto:outreach@ovcweb.org).

## The Owens Valley Committee Needs Your Help!

Please renew your membership or consider making an additional donation. Just use the attached donation envelope, or send it to:

**Owens Valley Committee**  
**PO Box 77**  
**Bishop, CA 93515**

## OVC Goals

1. "Watchdog" the 1991 LTWA (Water Agreement) between Inyo County and L.A.
2. Oversee the implementation and management of the Lower Owens River Project (LORP).
3. Educate the public and promote its involvement with water issues.
4. Seek a dual use designation for dust control water at Owens Lake for wildlife as well as dust.



Photo: Steve Matson

Coyote gilia, a rare wildflower that grows on the proposed solar site.



The OVC Board recognizes the importance of tapping into the latest means of communication. Receive regular updates and keep current on water issues by taking a moment to friend the OVC on **Facebook!**

## the RAINSHADOW

The Rainshadow is the newsletter of the Owens Valley Committee. OVC is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit citizen's action group dedicated to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of water and land resources affecting the Owens Valley. The biannual report edition of The Rainshadow is produced in the Spring and Fall of each year. Send suggestions and corrections to the editor.

**CONSTANCE SPENGER** EDITOR  
[info@ovcweb.org](mailto:info@ovcweb.org)

**ALAN BACOCK** PRESIDENT  
[president@ovcweb.org](mailto:president@ovcweb.org)

**MARK BAGLEY**  
[info@ovcweb.org](mailto:info@ovcweb.org)

**NILS DAVIS DESIGN & PRODUCTION**  
DESIGN- [keri@nilsdavisdesign.com](mailto:keri@nilsdavisdesign.com)

CONTRIBUTORS:

**NINA WEISMAN**, CO-CHAIR INDIEGOGO  
[NinaW@ovcweb.org](mailto:NinaW@ovcweb.org)

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
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OWENS VALLEY COMMITTEE  
PO Box 77  
Bishop, CA 93515  
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED