

COVID-19 Shutdowns Have Minimal Impact On Water Use

The numbers of coronavirus cases continue to increase and just in early May, there were over five thousand confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Nevada alone. The pandemic led to the closing of the Las Vegas Strip, a popular tourist destination in Nevada. Lake Mead is the leading source of water in Southern Nevada as it supplies ninety percent of its water. In this session of KNPR's "State of Nevada" program, Joe Schoenmann discusses with multiple guests if and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the amount of water that is used in Nevada.

A main participant of this session was Joe Schoenmann. He acted as the host of the program and is a Senior producer of KNPR's "State of Nevada" program. One of the guests that he had on this session of the program to discuss the water usage of Southern Nevada was Pat Mulroy. She is the former head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. Another guest on this session of the program was Dave Johnson. He is the current Deputy General Manager for Engineer and Operations for the Southern Nevada Water Authority. The last guest of the session was Andy Gebhardt who is the current Director of Operations and Water Quality for the Truckee Meadows Water Authority located in Northern Nevada.

An issue that was discussed throughout the session was how the pandemic affected places that supply water such as Lake Mead. In response, Mulroy stated that despite the large amount of water usage made by the resorts in Las Vegas, a lot of the water gets returned back into the system. This means that even before the pandemic, the amount of water usage wasn't of high concern since it just goes back to the source to be reused. This claim was supported by Johnson as he explained that every drop of water that goes down the drain in Southern Nevada gets treated by a water treatment plant and then returned to Lake Mead. He also stated that the people of Southern Nevada have been relatively consistent in terms of residential water use which lends

itself to the lack of concern that Nevada residents should have about the supply of water as there have been little to no drastic changes. Gerbhardt agreed with these claims as well stating that he doesn't seem to anticipate a large effect in the Northern Nevada water supply either.

Another issue mentioned was the concern of a lack of accessibility to water by residents due to deferred payments which could be caused by the increase of unemployment that was created by the pandemic. Mulroy stated that she would be doubtful of a scenario where all of a sudden the "spigots go dry" and that the Southern Nevada Water Authority has a debt service for those in need. She also stated that the Southern Nevada Water Authority has been working on contingency plans since the days of H1N1, a strain of the swine flu. The claim is also backed up by Johnson as he states that the Las Vegas Valley Water District, since the beginning of the pandemic, have been assisting homeowners and rate-payers who face difficulty during this time. A lack of manpower was also brought up as a concern in relation to a possible restriction to the accessibility of water. Mulroy responded to that by stating that the demand for manpower would be limited due to the use of technology that's currently being used at the Southern Nevada Water Authority. On the other hand, despite the lack of technology, Gerbhardt states that from working with the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, he believes that their current workforce and team are solid and so the lack of manpower isn't a concern of theirs.

The main point of the session was a constant reiteration that Nevada residents should have large confidence in their accessibility to water. This is due to in-depth resource plans of conservation and innovation that these agencies have to ensure a positive future for the water industry in Nevada. There were no actual opposing opinions made by any of the participants in this session of the program. All participants, except the host, Joe Schoenmann, who was simply

directing the conversations, seemed to push forward the same idea that the people of Nevada should not have to worry about their accessibility to water.

From this session of the “State of Nevada” program, a course concept that was discussed was the state government and in this instance, how they deal with large issues such as a pandemic. The Southern Nevada Water Authority as well as the Truckee Meadows Water Authority are government agencies that manage the needs of water throughout Nevada. This is a vital part of our society that is controlled by the state government. This session gave us a glimpse of the work the state government does in order to maintain consistency throughout Nevada with such an important resource.

Works Cited

Johnson, Bert. "COVID-19 Shutdowns Have Minimal Impact On Water Use." *Nevada Public Radio*, 7 May 2020, knpr.org/knpr/2020-05/covid-19-shutdowns-have-minimal-impact-water-use.