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KNPR “State of Nevada” Summary

In the KNPR “State of Nevada” program titled as “COVID-19 Shutdowns Have Minimal Impact On Water Use”, Bert Johnson created multiple questions for three water experts about COVID-19’s potential impact on Lake Mead’s water supply. The first participant that he interviewed is Pat Mulroy, former Head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). Bert Johnson stated that the pandemic has been taxing on all of Nevada’s residents, but he wanted to know if the closure of casinos and hotels on the Strip has had a positive impact for Lake Mead. In response to Johnson’s question, Mulroy stated that the casinos and hotels never made much of an impact on water usage because they are major contributors to Return-Flow Credits. Even though the Strip’s casinos and hotels consume immense amounts of water, Return-Flow Credit facilitates any leftover water to obtain treatment and return to Lake Mead. To paraphrase, Mulroy stated that the casinos and hotels return approximately 80 percent of what they consume so their impact on the water supply is minimal. The percentage of water that is not returned is mostly used for outdoor consumption, also known as consumptive use. Deputy General Manager of Engineering and Operations at Southern Nevada Water Authority, Dave Johnson, discussed how the SNWA is more concerned about residential addresses using large amounts of water for gardening during Spring and Summer. It is worth noting that the water usage from residential addresses is relatively the same as last year due to conservation efforts, so the SNWA isn’t too concerned. Director of Operations and Water Quality for Truckee Meadows Water Authority

(TMWA), Andy Gebhardt, shares the same perspective as the other water experts and has seen little to no impact on the water supply since COVID-19 began. All of the participants had corresponding views on the water usage in Southern and Northern Nevada being minimally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the Return-Flow Credit methodology. Regarding COVID-19's impact on revenue, there were mixed responses from the participants. Mulroy stated that the previous pandemic H1N1 had a significant impact not on the revenues, but on the manpower and how they operate the system. She believes that COVID-19 will have less of an impact on the water supply because the SNWA has improved their use of technology, leaving less demand for manpower. Bert Johnson introduced the third participant Dave Johnson and asked him, "Almost a half million people filed unemployment claims, do you think the Water Authority will be able to sustain a large amount of deferred payments?". Dave Johnson responded that the Las Vegas Water District had temporarily stopped the residential shut off policies in response to the crisis. The SNWA is aware of the fiscal impacts but they want to help the community during this crisis. Bert Johnson asked Andy Gebhardt the same question and he stated that the TMWA has seen a slight dip in commercial sales and a slight increase in residential sales. The TMWA believes that there will be a 15-20 percent drop in commercial sales for the budget over the next fiscal year, but they will find ways to make the budget work. Bert Johnson mentioned the Managing Director of Hobbs Ong & Associates, Guy Hobbs and his prediction of tax revenue falling to 50 percent by this July. Bert Johnson asked Gebhardt what the Water Authority could do to offset the loss. Gebhardt replied, "during a discussion in the budget workshop, they were expecting a shortfall of about 107 million dollars in the next fiscal year's revenues and to combat that loss they will be prioritizing projects and possibly deferring projects.". They are experiencing a significant impact by that, but they believe they can manage

through it effectively. Gebhardt also stated that he does not anticipate he will have to raise fees, and that their scheduled rate increase has been pushed back to September instead of this May due to the pandemic. Despite the struggles, all of the participants stated that they've been fortunate enough to deal with COVID-19 effectively because the H1N1 pandemic prepared them with pandemic readiness and response plans. Gebhardt stated that they already had inventories of N-95 masks and any leftover masks were donated to local hospitals. Additionally, they put 1000 employees on telecommuting and minimized the amount of staff on-site. COVID-19 has shown little impact on Lake Mead's water supply, but the increasing temperatures and weather changes are why participants foresee substantial changes to the water supply.

Works Cited

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