

Cadiz Water Project looms close to endangering Mojave Desert and biodiversity
(July 2019)

It's back — following recent episodes of relaxed government oversight, the controversial [Cadiz Water Project](#) (CWP) is now closer than ever to excavating billions of gallons of Mojave Desert groundwater. In August 2018, California legislators [failed to pass a bill](#) that would have required the CWP to undergo a new state environmental review, thereby allowing the project to move forward to completion. If enough Southern California water agencies decide to purchase the Cadiz groundwater, the Mojave could become entirely depleted of its limited water supply, endangering desert flora and fauna that rely on it.

Desert-agriculture business Cadiz, Inc. conceived the CWP nearly 20 years ago when its co-founders discovered an untapped basin beneath the company's Mojave Desert property. Seeking profit, the duo devised a 50-year plan that would operate to uproot 50,000 acre-feet of water annually. Their team would construct a 43-mile long pipeline across the desert to feed the water to Southern California water agencies.

Since its conception, the project has been met with strong opposition from environmental activist groups. Sierra Club leaders argue the project would deplete Mojave spring waters that are [connected to the aquifer](#), consequently endangering desert wildlife that rely on this resource.



Thriving, desert oases such as Bonanza Spring rely on Mojave groundwater
Photo Source: Chris Clarke

The San Geronio Chapter of the Sierra Club oversees the Mojave Desert region and has played a major role in the opposition movement against the CWP. In 2015, the chapter took the issue to the federal court in hopes of dismantling the project altogether. The Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) [ruled](#) that Cadiz, Inc. would need federal permission to construct a pipeline across the land.

Now under a new federal administration, the BLM [rescinded the decision](#) in October 2017, permitting the company to build its pipeline without federal approval. Since then, Cadiz, Inc. has worked diligently to get Southern California water agencies on board and to purchase the groundwater.

Chris Clarke, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) California Desert Program Manager, has worked alongside Sierra Club CA for nearly 30 years to protect the Mojave National Preserve and nearby, at-risk areas from such projects. Inspired by the natural beauty of Bonanza Spring, a Mojave oasis, Clarke actually quit his former job to begin his career preserving the area with the NPCA.

"It's the beating heart of the Mojave," Clarke said.

Cadiz, Inc. claims that its aquifer is constantly replenished by snow and rain that have percolated into the surrounding Mojave mountains. This source of water has slowly traveled with gravity into the valley's watershed.

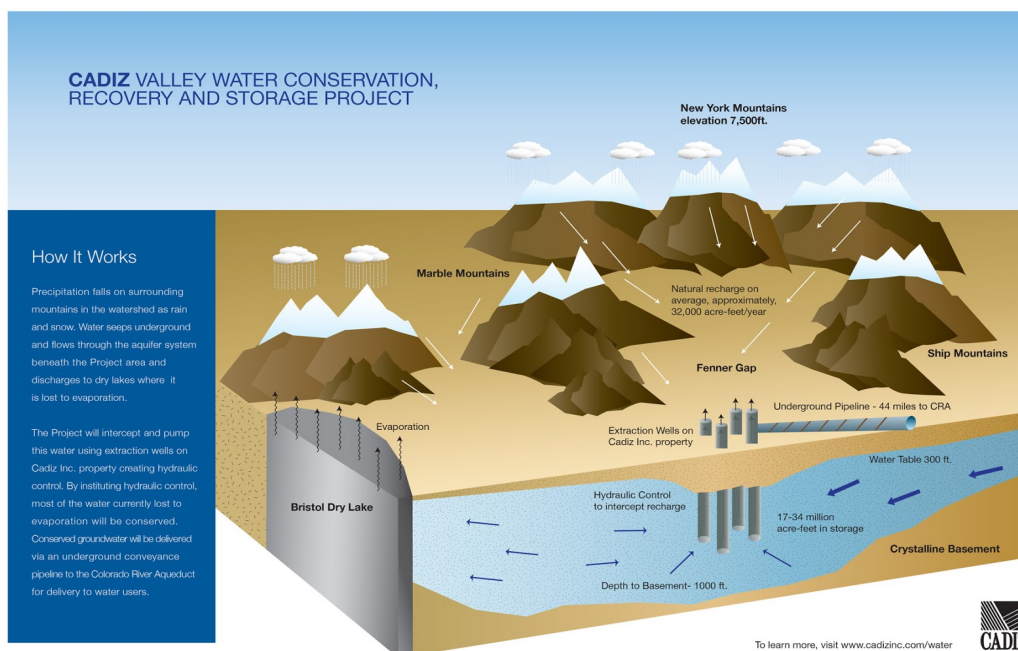


Photo Source: Cadiz Water Project

Clarke questions this claim, refuting that the basin took millions of years to collect its water. It would become quickly depleted if the groundwater was uprooted during the project's 50-year

lifespan. He contends the basin simply could not recharge fast enough to keep up with the hydrological demands of the CWP.

“If you pump out more water than can be replenished, the water table drops,” Clarke said. “If it drops, it falls away from the surface water springs that it feeds. Those would consequently dry up.”

Cadiz, Inc. recently came under fire for publishing questionable [research findings](#) conducted by the company’s own private investigators. These findings conflict with [peer-reviewed research](#) that suggests Mojave groundwater is necessary for wildlife survival.

“Cadiz has yet to communicate the project’s potentially harmful effects, which springs actually feed the aquifer, and how long it would take the aquifer to be fully replenished,” said Charming Evelyn, the Sierra Club Water Committee Chair. “They have yet to respond to publicly-funded scientific rebuttals against the project.”

Evelyn and Sierra Club CA activists are currently lobbying for legislation that would protect the Mojave Desert and prevent the transportation of the groundwater to the greater Los Angeles area.

Los Angeles activists have been reaching out to their local water districts and communicating their concerns about the CWP. So far, these advocacy tactics have been [effective](#). In May 2019, the CA Senate [passed SB 307](#), a law that would increase environmental oversight in the Mojave.

In an effort to underscore the environmental impacts, Evelyn encourages Angeles Chapter members to send letters and petitions of opposition to their local water agencies and government representatives.

“We must educate our new Sierra Club members, new Congresspeople and new water agency board members on the project’s adverse impacts,” Evelyn said. “You have to keep in mind that sometimes the same people you spoke to five years ago are no longer there. We’re retracing our footprints and doing the same thing over and over again.”

A note to a representative could be as simple as:

Dear Representative,

I am concerned about the adverse environmental repercussions of the Cadiz Water Project. I oppose any transaction between Cadiz, Inc. and any Los Angeles water agency, as it would negatively impact the Mojave Desert region and its natural inhabitants.

According to Evelyn, strength by numbers could make all the difference in preserving the Mojave and its wildlife.

“Legislators listen to the people they hear from,” Evelyn said. “If they hear from the Cadiz folks, that’s who they’ll be listening to.”

To find and contact your local House representative, click [here](#).