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SQUAW VALLEY WATER PROVIDER ISSUES SUPPLY ASSESSMENT FOR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Olympic Valley, Calif. – Sierra conservationists are scrutinizing a new assessment of local water supplies that claim there is plenty of water for new development in Tahoe's Squaw Valley.

The draft report, issued by the Squaw Valley Public Utilities District earlier this week, evaluates the water demands of KSL Capital Partner's development proposals and concludes "that there is sufficient water supply to meet the estimated Project."

That conclusion, however, counters existing research and official studies that have claimed that the local aquifer does *not* provide a safe and adequate supply of water – and have even led officials to seek additional water imports from a distant watershed, Martis Valley.

"For years, officials have been telling us that the existing water supplies in Squaw Valley do not provide a secure and adequate source of water for existing customers, let alone new development," according to Peter Van Zant, Field Director for Sierra Watch. "We either have water or we don't, but we can't have it both ways."

Sierra Watch has engaged the expert hydrologists of Tully & Young, based in Oakland, to dive into the draft Water Supply Assessment and better understand the science behind Squaw's water issues.

In some ways, water in Squaw is a simple issue. The local aquifer is a real – yet finite – resource. It's a pool of groundwater that settles between geologic bedrock and the valley floor, replenished by annual snowmelt and pumped for local use.

But assessment of its ability to provide adequate supplies in the decades to come is made in

the context of controversial variables – potential demand and historic drought.

This week's assessment is driven by new development proposals that could greatly increase demand on limited water supplies.

Earlier this year, Denver-based KSL Capital Partners submitted its *Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan* to Placer County, which maintains land use decision-making authority in Squaw Valley.

The plan calls for maximum build-out of 1,757 bedrooms in a series of high-rise condos, hotels, and housing. New development would be about seven times as big as the current Squaw Valley Village and include an indoor amusement park with water slides, miniature golf, and water skiing.

All that development would need a lot of water.

And for more than five years, the water district has been conducting research and building its case: local supplies are not enough.

For example, its 2009 *Alternative/Supplemental Water Supply & Enhanced Utilities Feasibility Study* claimed that, "Drilling new production wells within the Olympic Valley has become increasingly more difficult due to the limited capacity of the Squaw Valley aquifer to yield sufficient quantity and quality of potable water."

The proposed solution to inadequate local supplies is to import water from another watershed – to sink an eight-mile pipe under Martis Valley, tap its aquifer, and pump the water up to Squaw Valley.

That proposal is not part of this week's Squaw Valley water assessment. But it's a topic of great concern in the Tahoe Region.

So is the drought.

The Water Supply Assessment, however, only reviewed data through 2011.

But last winter marked the third year in a row with below normal snowfall in the Northern Sierra. In May, state officials reported that the water content of the Sierra snowpack was only 7% of average and that last winter was the driest on record. Hydrologists in the region predict that the Truckee River above Squaw Valley will run dry in September.

"The drought reminds us that water at the crest of the Sierra is a severely limited resource," says Tom Mooers, Executive Director of Sierra Watch. "Our goal is to ensure that any new development respects not only the unique sense of place in Squaw Valley and

that any new development respects not only the unique sense of place in Squaw Valley and the Tahoe Region but, also, its limited natural resources."

About Sierra Watch

Sierra Watch works to protect great places in the Sierra Nevada by turning development threats into conservation opportunities. Founded in 2001, the Nevada City based non-profit has built a remarkable track record in land preservation in Tahoe's Martis Valley, on Donner Summit, and for other treasured Sierra landscapes. For more information, contact Peter Van Zant at (530) 265-2849, ext. 201.

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