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# Group prepared for long fight over pipeline plan

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A San Francisco-based group of forward thinkers could one day build a giant clock in the mountains of eastern Nevada that will mark time for the next 10 millennia.

At the moment, though, The Long Now Foundation is mixed up with a short-term venture, and the consequences will be measured for a mere 200 years.

The unusual cultural foundation has formally protested plans by the Southern Nevada Water Authority to siphon groundwater from rural Lincoln and White Pine counties.

Long Now representatives are slated to present testimony critical of the project on Thursday, as a weeks-long state hearing on the multibillion-dollar pipeline network nears its conclusion.

The foundation is arguably the quirkiest participant in a hearing that already has logged objections from ranchers, hunters, environmentalists and American Indian tribes.

Long Now's interest is specific: In 1999, the foundation bought 180 acres of long-dormant mine property on Mount Washington, a limestone fortress dotted with ancient bristlecone pines and surrounded by Great Basin National Park. Six years later, the group purchased ranchland in the valley below, not far from where the water authority plans to sink its wells.

But in a general sense, the plan to tap groundwater across eastern Nevada and pipe it to Las Vegas also clashes with the central philosophy of Long Now. The foundation's stated goal is to counter "the short-horizon perspective of market-driven economics" with long-term thinking and long-term responsibility that is "measured at least in centuries."

Just don't expect outright opposition to the pipeline from the group of prominent writers, artists and entrepreneurs.

"As a rule we do not take sides," said Alexander Rose, the foundation's executive director. "However, it is our intent to be a very long-term steward for this landscape, and (we) want to be sure the very best science and due process is included in any decisions involving the area."

The water authority seeks state permission to tap up to 126,000 acre-feet of groundwater a year from four valleys.

Spring Valley, to the west of Mount Washington, would serve as the anchor basin for the multibillion-dollar pipeline project, which could deliver enough water to Las Vegas to supply more than 425,000 homes.

Nevada's top water regulator, State Engineer Jason King, is expected to rule on the authority's groundwater applications in late March based on evidence presented during the ongoing hearing in Carson City.

A federal review of the project forecasts a wide range of effects on the environment over the next 200 years, depending on exactly from where and how much groundwater is pumped.

## A NEW DEFINITION OF NOW

The Long Now Foundation was established in 1996 by an eclectic group of Bay Area intellectuals searching to restore "the long view" to a society increasingly distracted by its own rapid advancement.

On their website, they explain themselves: "The Long Now Foundation hopes to provide a counterpoint to today's accelerating culture and help make long-term thinking more common. We hope to creatively foster responsibility in the framework of the next 10,000 years."

The board of directors includes Stewart Brand, biologist and creator of the "Whole Earth Catalog"; Wired magazine founder Kevin Kelly; computer scientist and inventor Danny Hills; and musician Brian Eno, among others.

Eno is credited with coming up with the foundation's name, which is a millennial twist on "the here and now."

With a sense of humor and purpose, Long Now's acolytes mark the year with five digits instead of four: not 2011 but 02011. "The extra zero," they explain, "is to solve the deca-millennium bug which will come into effect in about 8,000 years."

So what about this giant clock?

Consider it a monument to deep time: a mechanical computer hundreds of feet tall that will mark the hour and minute for 10,000 years. The clock will use the sun to power and correct itself, and each time it chimes it will play a unique melody whether anyone is there to hear it or not.

Such a machine is without precedence. No major structure built by human hands has ever lasted so long. If you could travel back in time 10,000 years, you would find yourself in a world before agriculture, standing in a puddle left by the last ice age.

## A 'MONUMENT-SCALE' MESSAGE

An 8-foot prototype of the 10,000-year clock now ticks in the London Science Museum.

The full "monument-scale" version will reside inside a mountain in West Texas, a hard day's hike from anywhere.

According to the foundation's website, the clock is now being machined and assembled on the West Coast while its limestone cavern is readied.

Mount Washington in White Pine County was the original site for the clock.

Ely real estate agent Dave Tilford helped Long Now's founding members find and buy the property in the late 1990s. They said they were looking for desert property with high limestone cliffs, so Tilford took them to one of his favorite spots in the entire Great Basin.

"At the time, the property wasn't listed for sale. I wasn't even sure who owned it," he said.

At first, Tilford didn't really grasp who the Long Now people were or what they were planning to do. A giant 10,000-year clock inside a mountain? They must be nuts.

"Early on, it may have crossed my mind, but it was a fleeting thought," he said.

Tilford is now a member of the foundation. He has been for years.

"My membership number is pretty low," he said. "It's been really an exciting adventure to know these people and to be associated with them."

## GROUP MAY STRIKE NEVADA CLOCK

With work on the 10,000-year clock now under way in Texas, it's unclear what will happen to the property in Nevada. The group's website refers to developing a "10,000 year installation" on Mount Washington "in parallel" with the clock in Texas, but Rose could offer no additional details because there aren't any yet.

"We have no idea what this would mean or when we might do it," the Long Now executive director acknowledged in an email last week. "There is currently no funding for it, so it is just a notion at this point."

Tilford said he would love to see a second clock built inside Mount Washington, even though the 70-year-old would likely never live to see it finished.

"This is a long-term, long-thinking project," he said. "Construction might not begin in my lifetime, but I hope that it does. I hope the clock gets built and serves the purpose for which it is intended."

Until that decision is made, Tilford has no doubt Long Now will take good care of what he considers a truly special part of Nevada and the world. The foundation appears to be in it for the long haul, he said.

Every summer, Long Now members gather at their property in White Pine County. The foundation has even been known to hold board of directors meetings on the mountain.

"Everybody finds a bristlecone log to sit on," Tilford said.

"It's exciting to see their excitement about Mount Washington and about the planet as a whole.


"They love it as much as I do. They really do."

Contact reporter Henry Brean at hbrean @reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0350.

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