

Geothermal perspectives

Benett Kessler, Sierrawave.net, 4-14-14

The geothermal company in Mammoth Lakes, ORMAT, wants to expand its operations and drill up to 16 more geothermal wells. Mammoth Community Water District has appealed the EIR on that project and holds grave concerns about harmful impacts on Mammoth's underground water supply. So, when an ORMAT representative spoke in public comment at Mammoth's Planning and Economic Development Commission last week, the Water District manager explained his sharply different point of view.

Charlene Wardlow of ORMAT stood up to propose a future workshop before the Commission on the company's expansion plans. She spoke of the environmental benefits of the geothermal expansion and reduction of the carbon footprint. She said there would be no adverse impacts. Wardlow then mentioned that ORMAT pays \$1 million in property taxes every year in Mono County, has a \$2.2 million payroll and spends another million on purchases locally. She also said that an increased geothermal resource could provide heat for Mammoth's planned District Heating System.

A few speakers later, Mammoth Community Water District Manager Patrick Hayes walked up to the podium. He said he had no prepared remarks but wanted to respond to Ms. Wardlow's comments. Hayes described ORMAT's project as a threat to Mammoth's water supply. He said that the Water District maintains that ORMAT's environmental documents are deficient. He said the District wants to protect the groundwater of the Town of Mammoth Lakes. Hayes said, "We're looking for a monitoring and mitigation plan to address our concerns. Currently, there is no monitoring or mitigation required," he said. "Therefore, we need to continue this legal undertaking to protect the water supply."

Hayes said ORMAT's expansion project would drill up to 16 new wells essentially encircling Shady Rest Park. He said that an expert from the US Geological Survey assessed the drilling of two new wells in 2006 near Shady Rest which reduced underground pressure. Hayes said that trees are dying off at a higher rate. With the potential for 16 more wells, he said, "We call that more than a minor cause for concern. This is glossed over completely in the environmental documents."

Hayes told the Commissioners if they want to have a workshop with ORMAT, they should consider the full picture. Hayes said, "This is a matter of community concern." Commissioners assured Hayes the full issue would be considered.