Mixed reviews are coming in for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s proposal to develop a workable plan for long-term dust and habitat control on Owens Lake.

Interested individuals and organizations have said the LADWP’s proposal is a way to end controversial dust control decisions on the lake while cutting water use (which could mean more water for the Owens Valley). Others say the department’s move is simply a way to cut through bureaucracy and get work done. Still others say the LADWP is developing its own plan as a way to access groundwater on the lake and circumvent the Master Plan Committee, comprised of more than a dozen members, and develop a plan that will serve its needs while ignoring those of other members.

The LADWP announced last week that it planned to take the work done by the Master Plan Committee and draft a long-term plan for the lake that would meet the department’s needs and those of other member agencies, something the first draft plan, which was released in 2011, failed to do.

LADWP Water Systems Manager Marty Adams told the Board of Supervisors Tuesday that the LADWP currently has 60 employees dedicated to maintaining dust control mitigation projects on the lake. He said the department has also dedicated about 20 percent of the water in the L.A. Aqueduct to combat dust.

Adams pointed out that, per the Inyo-County, L.A. Long Term Water Agreement, water is not supposed to be used for dust control.

Also, because so much water is being diverted from the aqueduct to the lake, “there is no extra water for spreading for the ranchers” in the Owens Valley.

Adams said the plan LADWP hopes to complete and bring forward in a few weeks aims to reduce the amount of water used on the lake by implementing other, waterless dust control measures and, possibly, using groundwater pumped from below the lake.
Adams said that 15 percent of every LADWP ratepayer’s bill goes towards work on Owens Lake. He explained that if the LADWP can meet its goal of reducing water on the lake by 50 percent, “over 15 years, those investments will pay for themselves.” Adams also pointed out that “it takes more greenhouse gas to transport water from the delta to Southern California than we are saving on dust control measures.”

He also said that every drop of water used on the lake has “a direct tie” to the Sacramento Delta because LADWP purchases water from the coast to make up for water used on the lake.

Adams said LADWP is planning to establish a habitat sustainability model “to see what uses the lake and how,” and to conduct a study to see if water from beneath the lake can be pumped without negative impacts to nearby seeps and streams.

“We are looking ahead to the next 100 years because we have to do things differently,” Adams told the board Tuesday. “We want a plan where everyone benefits all the time, but some of these decisions are state decisions (the California Public Lands Commission owns the lake and must sign off on any projects there) and legal decisions.”

First District Supervisor Linda Arcularius said she backed the LADWP’s proposal.

“Reducing water (on the lake) and maintaining habitat is the goal,” Arcularius said. “I’m happy to see you’re making an effort to move forward.” Arcularius also recognized that the LADWP has the ability to move forward and draft a proposed plan “without the extraordinary efforts of the Owens Lake Master Planning Committee. The consensus collaborative effort created the outline for a plan that will be presented in a couple weeks.”

But not everyone in the Owens Valley is as optimistic.

Bishop and Los Angeles resident Phillip Ania told the LADWP Tuesday to “immediately stop wasting my money with litigation and complete the (dust mitigation) projects.” Ania went on to say that the LADWP’s announcement that it would be moving forward with the Master Plan “sounds like a eulogy for the burial of the Master Planning process. They should not be allow to circumvent the master planning group.”

Ania went on to say that the county is still dealing with disputes regarding pumping at Blackrock “and now the LADWP wants another well field” placed at the lake.

“What they are completely, 100 percent concerned with is the water,” Ania said. “It’s all about the water in the aqueduct. I would encouraged DWP to work within the process and finish what they began.”

Independence resident Nina Weisman said she too is concerned with the LADWP’s proposal.

Weisman encouraged the Board of Supervisors to “look a little deeper. This is a very serious issue and there are many things hidden in this request.”

Weisman said the LADWP is seeking the ability to construct new dust control measures on the lake in areas that are currently using water spreading, without penalties for falling out of compliance while new measures are implemented. “If that happens, then there aren’t any safeguards” to ensure that the LADWP follows through with its proposals, Weisman said.
She also pointed out that the LADWP is seeking a permanent right to execute projects on the lake without first seeking permission from the State Lands Commission. “ Anything with permanence is dangerous,” Weisman said.

Independence resident Nancy Masters said that if the LADWP is planning to “pull out and conduct unilateral planning, the other groups should come out with their own ‘must haves,’” and develop their own plan.

She also said that there is no guarantee that a reduction in water on the lake will mean more water for in-valley uses.

In a Thursday, April 4 Letter to the Editor, Bishop resident Sally Manning said Inyo County and LADWP already know that water cannot be pumped from Owens Lake without negative consequences.

According to Manning, “consultants hired by DWP recently completed a thorough and expensive analysis of lake-area pumping. It’s called the Owens Lake Groundwater Evaluation Plan. An update on the OLGEP was provided by county staff at a recent Inyo County Water Commission meeting.

“Not surprisingly, overall results of the OLGEP are the same as consultants found 14 years ago when DWP paid for a similar investigation. The results? There is no extra water near or under the lake. Virtually any pumping that occurs under or near the lake bed will cause aquifer depletion from north of Lone Pine to about Haiwee Reservoir (a distance of 35 miles north-to-south, and up to 13 miles west-to-east).”

Owens Lake Master Planning Committee Member Sam Wasson said he is behind the LADWP on its proposal to develop a plan.

“I had concerns, because we’ve come so far with this master plan, but I’m for moving forward on this,” Wasson said. “We need to move forward.”

Also speaking in favor of the plan was the Inyo/Mono Cattlemen’s Association, of which Supervisor Arcularius is a member.

Tom Noland of the Cattlemen’s Association said that “the environment of the Owens Valley has suffered because of the need for water on the Owens Lake” which has “compromised the ability for ranchers to grow grass for our cattle.”

Noland said he feels the LADWP has mitigated its dust impacts on the lake and should not turn its attention to finding ways to continue mitigating dust, but without the use of water.

“Before the whites came, there was dust there,” Noland said. “We need to save water and the city should share the savings and put water back on the land.”

Local rancher Scott Kemp said he agreed.

“Where the valley is being compromised is in stock water,” Kemp said. “When the lake was full, there would have been dust coming off it. We should find someone to direct the (Great Basin Air Pollution Control District) who is willing to compromise” with the LADWP on dust control issues.
LADWP lake plan stirs up mixed reactions

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