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Agency scales back Lake Mead water pump project

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The Southern Nevada Water Authority has scaled back an intake pump project at Lake Mead after a drop in the demand for water.

Putting the pumping station project on hold will save the water authority about $296 million — at least for now. That cuts the overall project costs from $817 million to $521 million.

The intake — sometimes called the "third straw" — is essentially a tunnel being bored under the lake to draw water from its depths.

It is needed because Lake Mead's water levels have dropped and officials worry that an original intake built in 1971 will stop working. That will occur if the surface of the lake drops to 1,050 feet above sea level. On Friday, the lake's surface was at 1,096 above sea level, the water authority said.

A second intake is already in place.

Water authority spokesman J.C. Davis said engineers believe that second pumping station can draw enough water to meet the current demand and delay the third pumping station "for a while."

Engineers will keeping a close eye on lake levels and demand to determine when the third pumping station will have to be built, Davis said.

The delay in the project will not translate into any cuts in water bills for Las Vegas valley resident.

It will, however, slash costs for Boulder City. The city's share of project construction costs was about $26 million. That will bill now be cut nearly in half — to $12.6 million.

Some cities and members of the Las Vegas Valley Water District pay the water authority a per-home connection fee of about $5,000 to fund capital construction projects.

Boulder City, which caps the number of new homes that can be built yearly, decided against paying connection fees and instead is billed directly for its share of project fees.

Information from: Las Vegas Sun, www.lasvegassun.com

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