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Iron County sees a pipeline as its water savior — but not from Lake Powell

By [EMMA PENROD](#) | The Salt Lake Tribune [CONNECT](#)

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(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Kelly Crane, district engineer, shows where a pipeline is planned in the Iron Springs area, near Cedar City, Friday, August 21, 2015

Thirst » Growing communities pin big hopes on the water from Pine Valley.



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Cedar City • Forget the Lake Powell pipeline.

In a community struggling with a depleted aquifer and land subsidence, the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District is banking on a 50-mile, \$150 million pipeline to ease the area's water shortage.

Still seven to 10 years away, the first phase of the pipeline project would pump up to 15,000 acre-feet of water — nearly 5 billion gallons — per year from Pine Valley in the West Desert to Cedar City.

The pipeline is key to supplying water to growing Iron County communities and maintaining the county's economy, said Paul Monroe, general manager of the conservancy district. It could sustain the valley's current level of growth for another 20 to 25 years and prevent further storage loss in the valley's aquifer, he said, but at a smaller cost than the Lake Powell pipeline.

"It's all part of our water portfolio," Monroe said, "of how we're trying to sustain ourselves here and also be more efficient."

The conservancy district opted out of the Lake Powell pipeline in 2012 amid mounting local opposition to the project. Including Iron County in the Lake Powell project was estimated to cost about \$450 million.

But the independent pipeline remains a long way off while the district works out the legal kinks and finalizes a route — and cost estimate — for the project. Eventually, the district proposes issuing a bond to pay for it.

"It's a process," Monroe said.

The aquifer that supplies water for the conservancy district and other area farms and communities is significantly overdrawn, according to a 2009 study by the U.S. Geological Survey. Area water users

pump out about 3 billion gallons more water than is restored to the aquifer by precipitation and runoff each year.

Because of its structure, the aquifer beneath Cedar City has started to collapse as large amounts of water are removed, permanently reducing the underground reservoir's capacity and causing the land above to settle unevenly, said Bill Lund, who is studying the aquifer's depletion out of the Southern Utah Regional Office of the USGS.

Monroe said the district hopes importing water from an area outside the Cedar Valley will reduce the pressure on the aquifer, ending the loss of storage capacity and giving the aquifer a chance to replenish itself.

"It's crucial for us in our area to be able to grow and develop and sustain what we have," he said. "Some of the wells in the area have dropped about 5 feet per year for the last 10 years."

It's not just man-made wells, either. Kelly Crane, an engineer for the conservancy district, said the area surrounding Cedar City once flowed with natural springs and artesian wells. But most of those flows dried up in the 1940s, he said.

Monroe said he believes the district could break ground on the pipeline project in seven years, but no sooner.

The district secured water rights in the Pine and Wah Wah valleys farther to the west in 2014, but those rights are undergoing a judicial review, according to deputy state engineer Boyd Clayton, with the state Division of Water Rights.

Beaver County and the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District requested the review almost immediately after the rights were approved, Clayton said.

Once all the legal details are sorted out, clearing the way for the conservancy district to break ground, Monroe said it would take another two to four years before the pipeline is operational.

Until then, he said, the district will continue to pump water out of the aquifer — the major source of water for Iron County, which does not have access to a reservoir or river from which it could draw — and stress conservation for local water users.

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Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Kelly Crane, district engineer, shows where a pipeline is planned in the Iron Springs area, near Cedar City, Friday, August 21, 2015

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Iron County sees a pipeline as its water savior — but not from Lake Powell



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Kelly Crane, district engineer, shows where a pipeline is planned in the Iron Springs area, near Cedar City, Friday, August 21, 2015

- **PlayNice** · 12 days ago

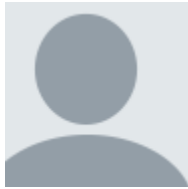
Or. We could stop growing, reduce population, and save \$150 million in the process. Is it really that hard to comprehend?

▪



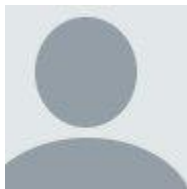
hankt27 PlayNice · 12 days ago

Exactly. Local govt. oversold water rights out there many years ago. The land is subsiding and there is a big crack in the earth that opened up a number of years back. It's sheer idiocy to do this.



powerofone PlayNice · 12 days ago

You beat me to it. This idea that we have to grow, grow, grow all the time is going to end up destroying what people value so much in the first place which is our water resources and our beautiful mountains and canyons. Having large families and building more homes, schools and churches is the last thing they need in Iron county as well as the rest of the state of Utah. Conservation is going to be the word heard most if climate change continues to wreak havoc with our water systems.



PlayNice powerofone · 12 days ago

It's a human characteristic. For animals, nature balances itself. It's often not pretty. For humans there's a disconnect. It's never, "Gee, we're running out of a resource. Maybe we should put ourselves in balance with it." It's, "Gee, we're running out of a resource. Where can we go to get more?" Eventually, nature will balance us. It's likely not going to be pretty.



This comment was deleted.



theshadow Guest · 12 days ago

Why don't we start with people who are too stupid to have a reasonable discussion ;



PlayNice theshadow · 12 days ago

Likely that would cause a step change in population that would have drastic short term effects. To quote Obi Wan, "We must be cautious."



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theshadow Guest · 11 days ago

Well, let's see. Who is it that's asking people "why do you hate people?" and "who should we kill first?"



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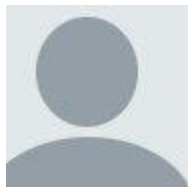
theshadow Guest · 11 days ago

Lol, no silly.



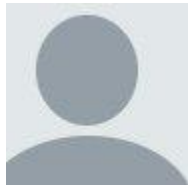
PlayNice Guest · 12 days ago

Fairly ironic account name you have there.



daryl PlayNice · 12 days ago

Apt in some ways. I think he just called out something stupid for the rest of us to laugh at. Not quite what he intended for the name I'm sure, but still fitting. Perhaps he should change it to "shoutingoutstupid" to be a bit more accurate.



PlayNice daryl · 12 days ago

I'm thinking it's today's QWERTY incarnation, but I don't worry myself with that game.



Suzy Sue [PlayNice](#) · 11 days ago

I didn't know SQWERTY worried about water, just Mormons and the homosexual.



Vulcanator [Guest](#) · 12 days ago

There is an easy way of doing this without killing anyone. Its called dropping births below the replacement rate. But it requires acknowledging you have a problem, just like spending more than you earn...and adjusting your life style to match reality.



This comment was deleted.



Vulcanator [Guest](#) · 11 days ago

You may very well be alive because of what China did. With the population it has right now, it has to produce 20 million new jobs annually to keep the masses from burning the place down, and hanging their leaders from the rafters. Just imagine if the extra billion people that policy prevented from being born existed...and the demand was for 40 million jobs a year. How do you think the Chinese would be behaving right now? They are already acting like a bully in Asia, trying secure resources to sustain its current population. Wars are generally started by desperate people fighting over resources. And they could have very easily averted a world war by being adult enough to both admit they had a problem, and making a hard choice.

America has that hard choice coming. But we were smart enough to get our birth rate under control sooner. Sadly places like Saudi Arabia and Iran haven't figured it out yet. Which means lots of poor desperate people...who will be more than willing to strap on a Kalashnikov, wave the black flag of ISIS, and wreak havoc for you and yours.



ChairmanMauzer Guest · 11 days ago

Do US parents value female children less?



ChairmanMauzer Guest · 11 days ago

Pathetic strawman.



powerofone Guest · 11 days ago

It's called limiting the number of people being born. There's something called birth control. I think you may have heard of it. You don't have to be the brightest bulb to figure that out.



Lance PlayNice · 9 days ago

PlayNice, Lets start reducing the population with you and all you're friends and family! Is it really that hard to comprehend?



PlayNice Lance · 8 days ago

Such a witty and original retort.

No one said anything about removing anyone currently on the planet, dumb AS!. It's about responsible population control and reproduction as we move forward. No, it's not that hard to comprehend.

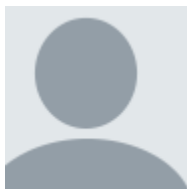


Vulcanator · 12 days ago

Sorry folks this isnt about sustainability. Nature is basically telling you are anything but sustainable. So you have pinned your hopes on a pipe dream...hoping it will let you continue to ignore reality for a few more years.



This comment was deleted.



theshadow Guest · 11 days ago

Lord, just because someone offers differing opinions you needn't be a jerk. Our society currently enjoys success, happiness, and population growth based largely on the fact that we have disrupted and engineered most natural systems to suit our needs. The earth is finite, water is finite, humans are not. There is no technological bullet that will give us more land, water, or air. You are correct that technological advancement will give us some new tools, but you can't "technologically" refill an aquifer that will require 6000 years to recharge naturally.



This comment was deleted.



Vulcanator Guest · 11 days ago

Selfish? The human race breeds like a virus...and you call the rest of the planet selfish. Holy cow. The capacity for human stupidity is amazing too.



theshadow Guest · 11 days ago

Maybe I read too much into your comment. Anyhow, I think if you come up with a technology to create water, you'll be a rich man. I was referring to the Ogallala Aquifer underlying the Great Plains. The "bread basket" of our country. Currently being depleted faster than it's being recharged by multi-state agreement. Similarly, the Colorado River doesn't even reach the Gulf of Mexico anymore, by multi-state agreement. Who cares, we get ours, right? And it was just dumping out ("going to waste") into the ocean anyhow. It's another natural system disrupted. The Vulcan and I are just trying to say that we seem to want to beat everything to suit us with our technology, but nature does have its limits.



Vulcanator Guest · 11 days ago

Your argument relies on the belief that because technology saved humans in the past, it will come perpetually to the rescue in the future. One of these days we are

going to make that bet, and its going to fail...and fail badly. Adding billions of people every decade is like doubling down on a poker hand...eventually the house is going to win and you'll be sitting on a house of cards. Ever seen the end result of a fruit fly population experiment? It isn't pretty.



This comment was deleted.



Vulcanator Guest · 11 days ago

Without any help from the interventionist crowd? You do realize that its because of that interventionist crowd...promoting birth control, family planning and the education of women throughout the world that the birth rate has been lowered dramatically...and that is the #1 reason the world population may peak at 9 billion?

And I don't look at just the US. Europe and the US are examples of what needs to start happening, in order for us to have a sustainable existence on this rock. Japan doesn't know it yet, but if it figures out an economic model that can handle shrinking population. Once it gets over that mountain...and there are 10's of millions fewer people to support...it will have reached the holy grail.

Nobody can tell me that in the long run America is better off having 390 million people to feed, house and cloth than the 175 million of 50 years ago.



This comment was deleted.





Vulcanator Guest · 11 days ago

Fences can be tunneled under, flown over, and circled around...its a wasted effort.



likeiwassaying Vulcanator · 11 days ago

Absolutely correct - the planet is already 3+ Billion heavy and the rampant oil excavations on land and underground on sea are causing havoc and tsunami's with the enhanced oil recovery -

There are answers to the problems facing the human race, it's just that we're putting faith in these 'experts' (bought and paid for pirate politicians' that dissuade any transparency for cash and plunder.



CW Vulcanator · 11 days ago

It's already a fail, we won't have to wait for the future. The human race is like a frog sitting in a pot waiting for the water to boil. When it boils it's too late and right now we're at about a 160 degrees and climbing.



t_rav_01 · 12 days ago

I wonder where pine valley will be getting their water from when their aquifer is depleted?
She swallowed a spider to catch the fly...



Smonster · 12 days ago

I know they don't want to hear this, but maybe you should not grow further in that area. Depleting a water source from a different basin isn't the answer here. Sometimes it gets to the point where it makes more sense to move to the water instead of moving water to you. This is one of those times. Not everywhere is suitable for growth.



CW Smonster · 11 days ago

There are few, if any politicians, particularly at a local level, that have the balls to place limits on growth, refuse to issue new building permits. And particularly in Utah, it's the "go forth and multiply" mentality.

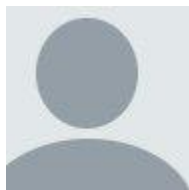


Dr. Cartel · 12 days ago

Dear Utah,

Once again another problem easily solved by 5 more children per household. Multiply and "replenish" everyone.

Best Wishes, Dr. Cartel



JG · 12 days ago

"It could sustain the valley's current level of growth for another 20 to 25 years."

So this pipeline will be totally worth it. We will get another 20 years of unrestrained breeding, then we will all die of thirst. And those aquifer projections are coming from the US Geological Survey, another one of those incompetent Federal agencies, so this is all Obama's fault.



Vulcanator JG · 12 days ago

Yes I had to laugh at that comment. Someone should have asked him, okay so you are already having problems. What happens after 25 years of ignoring the problem and doubling your population. What are you going to do next? Most logical human beings would say...well maybe we should just try to sustain the population we have..



Stink-(I) · 12 days ago

Breed Baby Breed



sternocreed · 12 days ago

Iron County's situation is a single example of human overshooting of resources around the globe. County officials have known about the overdraw for several years. Have they regulated the use of water? If not, why not? Likewise, what efforts have Iron County politicians taken to address climate change? If springs are disappearing around you, it only makes sense to ask why.



Vulcanator sternocreed · 12 days ago

Don't ask questions. Just Drill baby drill!!



sternocreed Vulcanator · 12 days ago

Amazing, right, Vulc, that these folks are making no connections to a shortage of water and the economic paradigm they promote.



theshadow sternocreed · 12 days ago

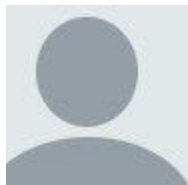
Much less long term survival...



Vulcanator sternocreed · 12 days ago

Frankly I know why the disconnect exists. Its a religious thing. First I am sure many of these folks expect the second coming to happen in the near future...so does worrying about the longer term matter. Second, many have the view that God gave them this land, and will help them find the resources to live on it. I have had this discussion on more than one occasion...and they literally believe in an infinite resources base...even though the events of their daily lives say otherwise.

Its essentially the equivalent of seeing that bridge is out at the end of the tracks, dismissing it out of hand, and praying its going to magically rebuild itself before you reach it.



PlayNice Vulcanator · 12 days ago

And in the mean time, how do we get this train to go fast



CW Vulcanator · 11 days ago

That is truly the scary thing--so many believe a mythical god will take care of things. Meanwhile the planet is slipping into a feedback loop of climate change, weather extremes, that will foster geopolitical consequences, famine, upheaval. In a hundred or so years future folks may well be living in a Mad Max world.