

Despite question of jurisdiction, Utah asks federal agency to resume Lake Powell Pipeline permitting process

Written by [Mori Kessler](#) August 24, 2018



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ST. GEORGE – State and local water officials are asking federal regulators to resume the permitting process for the Lake Powell Pipeline despite a lingering question of jurisdiction over the project.

The Utah Board of Water Resources and Washington County Water Conservancy District sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission asking the agency to again move forward on initiating an environmental study to determine the project's feasibility. FERC had been ready to move on the study and associated licensing in December.



Lake Powell, near Page, Ariz., photo undated, St. George News

[Read more: Federal agency OKs study, public comment on proposed Lake Powell Pipeline](#)

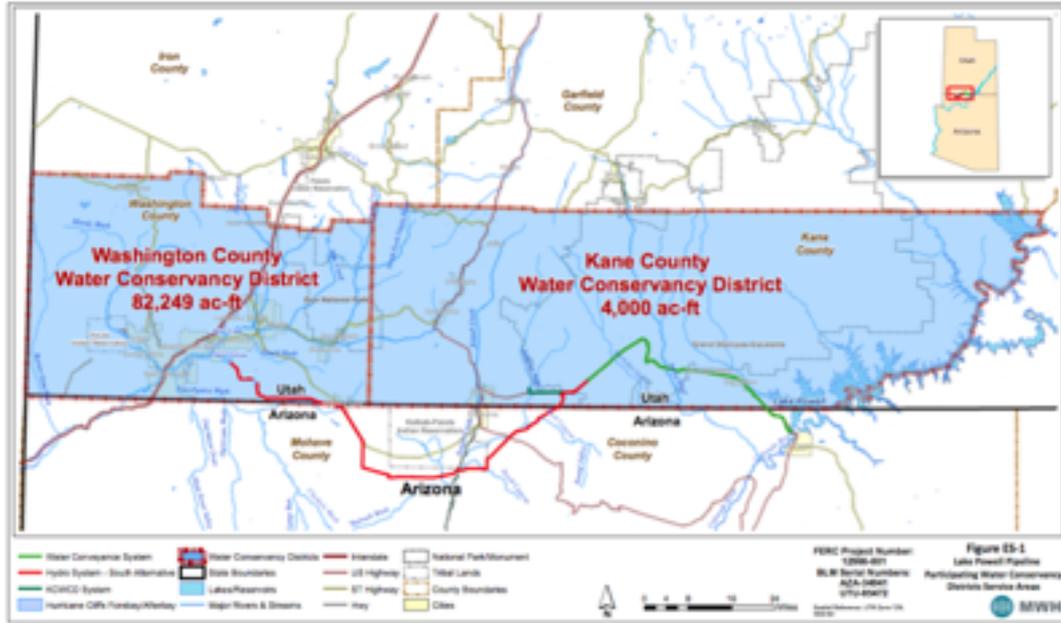
However, when FERC officials noted in the paperwork that their agency may not have jurisdiction over the project overall, Utah water officials asked for the process to be put on hold until the issue could be resolved quickly.

So far the question of jurisdiction has remained unanswered.

In their letter to FERC Wednesday, Utah water officials said they do not wish to delay the project any further.

“Because it is extremely important that the licensing of this critical infrastructure project for the State of Utah move forward expeditiously, UBWR and WCWCD desire to now have the procedural schedule reinstated.”

The proposed 140-mile long, 70-inch diameter pipeline is designed to take water from Lake Powell to Sand Hollow reservoir in Washington County. The pipeline is anticipated to bring 77 million gallons of water daily to 13 communities in Washington and Kane counties.



A proposed route for the Lake Powell Pipeline | Image courtesy Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, St. George News

According to FERC, the pipeline will carry water 50 miles uphill from Lake Powell to a high point in the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, with the remaining 90 miles running through a series of hydroelectric turbines on the way to Sand Hollow.

Utah officials applied to FERC for project approval since hydroelectric facilities are involved. While the agency approved the permitting process, federal officials were not certain if the agency had jurisdiction over the pipeline that would deliver water to those facilities.

“While the Commission has jurisdiction over the electric generating equipment and Project transmission lines, ‘the Commission has not yet determined whether [the] water delivery pipelines will be included as part of the licensed hydro facilities,’” the letter to federal regulators stated.

Communities in Washington County get their water from a single source: the Virgin River. State and county water planners have said for years that the county needs to diversify its water resources, especially in light of expected growth in population.



The Lake Powell Pipeline project was the subject of an open house held at the Washington County Water Conservancy District, St. George, Utah, Jan. 13, 2016 | File photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

Washington County is projected to have a population of over 400,000 by 2060. The Washington County Water Conservancy District has said the development of current water resources and conservation will only be able to make up a little over half of the water supply needed to sustain a population of that size. The Lake Powell Pipeline, water district officials say, will be able to supply the rest.

Opponents of the pipeline claim it isn't needed, will cost too much and will take water away from what they say is an already over-allocated Colorado River system.

Read more: [Letter to the Editor: Aren't we just a bunch of bullying bullfrogs gambling our way to the Lake Powell Pipeline](#)

While no solid price tag has been attached to the Lake Powell Pipeline yet, state and county water officials place the potential cost at around \$1.3 billion. Opponents claim it's closer to \$3 billion.

Conservationists groups that oppose the pipeline's construction include the Utah Rivers Council, Conserve Southwest Utah and Save the Colorado.

“When FERC re-starts the permitting process, we will continue to lock arms

with environmental colleagues across the American West to fight this river-destroying, unnecessary project,” said Gary Wockner of Save the Colorado. “At this point in history, proposing to take even more water out of the Colorado River is simply insane.”

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