



For Immediate Release

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Searles Valley Minerals Asks Court to Adjudicate Groundwater Rights in Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Basin

Trona, CA — Searles Valley Minerals (Searles) filed a cross-complaint in Orange County Superior Court today that seeks a comprehensive adjudication of all groundwater rights in the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Basin.

The purpose of the adjudication is to protect Searles' historic, prior and paramount groundwater rights, which are necessary for its continued business operations and the continued provision of domestic water to Trona. The move is also to ensure that Searles has a decision-making role in the adjudication.

Groundwater adjudications allow groundwater pumpers to ask the court to quantify the amount of groundwater that each pumper has the right to pump from the basin. Through this process, the court defines each pumper's groundwater right and has continuing jurisdiction to ensure compliance and adequate management of the basin.

This follows a recent decision by an Orange County judge that found Searles' claims about its prior and paramount groundwater rights, asserted by Searles against the Authority, can move forward in court for a determination on the merits.

"Searles has proudly operated here for more than 140 years. We employ hundreds of local residents and we've withstood the Great Depression, two world wars and a global pandemic," said **Burnell Blanchard, Vice President of Operations for Searles**. "The Authority's actions since becoming the designated GSA for the basin, including the adoption of an exorbitant \$2,130 per acre foot replenishment fee, ignore our groundwater rights, which are the most senior in the region. We owe it to our employees and Trona residents to protect those rights."

A 'Save Searles' campaign has been in place for several months, representing a coalition of Searles' employees and their families as well as local residents and businesses from the City of Ridgecrest and the town of Trona– many of whom live in what the federal and state government have classified as underserved and severely disadvantaged communities already suffering from economic burdens. As people have learned more about the Authority's proposed actions, the 'Save Searles' campaign has grown.

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