

# Opinion: Selling of groundwater proves policy needs rethinking

By John Bredehoeft and Newsha Ajami

Imagine a lake half as large as Lake Tahoe, containing 17 million to 34 million acre-feet of water. That is what lies under the Cadiz and Bristol valleys in the Eastern Mojave Desert in San Bernardino County. Cadiz Inc., a privately held company, owns 34,000 acres that overlie this vast groundwater basin. The company plans to extract 2.5 million acre-feet of the water, a public good, over the next 50 years and sell it back to the public at a profit.

This project raises several concerns, some of which are directly related to the project while others point to the need for a public debate and discussion about California's groundwater laws.

Here are some facts about the project: Cadiz is proposing to extract on average 50,000 acre-feet of groundwater from the basin each year for 50 years. The intended rate of extraction of groundwater is significantly greater than the estimated natural recharge rate (the speed that groundwater is refilled naturally by rain and snow) of 5,000-32,000 acre-feet a year, which will lead to unsustainable mining of groundwater during the life of the project. The groundwater will go into a 43-mile-long pipeline to transport it to the Colorado River Aqueduct, where it will be distributed to several water utilities in Southern California.

*John Bredehoeft, formerly with the U.S. Geological Survey, formed the Hydrodynamics Group, a Sausalito consulting firm. Newsha Ajami, a hydrologist specializing in sustainable water resource management, is a senior research associate at the*

*Pacific Institute in Oakland.*

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