

DC commissioners slow to work on water issues

By Kathryn Reed

Douglas County commissioners, while they say they want water districts to consolidate, are gun shy to take a step in that direction even though staff this month asked them to do so.

At their meeting in Stateline the electeds were presented with the option to financially separate the Cave Rock and Uppaway Estates water systems for accounting, budgeting and rate setting purposes. The unanimous vote was to table that idea indefinitely.

Part of the hesitation was not wanting to throw a wrinkle into the **lawsuit** filed last spring by a water district at Lake Tahoe against the county. But that argument didn't hold up after the district attorney weighed in.

"Whatever you do today will not hurt the lawsuit or our defense," DA Doug Ritchie told the commissioners. "This is only a policy issue."



Douglas County commissioners discuss water issues.

The water systems in question are owned by Douglas County. However, through the years the county has paired some together for accounting reasons and others for operational purposes. It has resulted in an efficient, inequitable situation.

In 2010 the county embarked on a path to consolidate all of the water systems. Then it was decided to keep the lake and valley separate. Ultimately when it came time to vote a couple years ago on the lake consolidation the electeds back-pedaled and said no.

While the consensus this month was still a desire to consolidate the systems, how to do so was not broached.

Commissioners Greg Lynn and Barry Penzel said they would like to develop a time line for consolidation, but one was not discussed that day.

“As an overall policy goal the ideal solution in the end is a single utility,” Lynn said.

Carl Ruschmeyer, public works director, said, “The challenge anytime you consolidate is you are going to have some winners and some losers at some level.”

Commissioners went back and forth at the meeting trying to decide how to go forward.

“I don’t like the fact that we would be doing this with the lawsuit going on,” Commissioner Nancy McDermid said. “Anything the board does today or has done in the past is subject to the court’s opinion on that.”

Still, earlier at the meeting she said people need to understand to get to the long-term goal of consolidation, there may be short term pain – and that maybe doing what staff asked for would be a good idea.

The county is in the process of coming up with preliminary engineering reports on the water systems. These could help

with decisions down the road pertaining to consolidation.