

New Water Department Director

On Nov 27, 2007 the Inyo County Board of Supervisors issued a press release stating that it had "decided to change the administrative direction of the Inyo County Water Department" and that "former Water Department Director Tom Brooks will be leaving employment with Inyo County to return to private industry!" The wording of the announcement raised an obvious question: how can a "former Water Department Director" leave Inyo County employment?! Whatever actually happened, the result was that Brooks left/was terminated with no notice.

Two weeks later, the Board of Supervisors hired Dr. Robert Harrington to be Acting Water Department Director. Bob was already on the Water Department staff as a hydrologist. He is widely known in the Owens Valley and I'm sure all of our members wish him well.

Bob undoubtedly realizes he's taking on a very difficult job. The fear-based approach to dealing with DWP is deeply ingrained in Inyo County leaders as well as in the Water Department itself. Inyo County desperately needs to attempt to enforce the Water . Agreement instead of continually finding excuses to acquiesce to DWP's excessive pumping. Dr. Harrington will have to show leadership skills lacking in his predecessors if this is to happen.

A place to start is at Blackrock Meadows (parcel BLK094). Last July, on behalf of the Bristlecone Chapter I wrote a formal request to the Technical -Group that management practices be changed in that area (I've written about this in recent newsletter articles). There is overwhelming evidence that current levels of pumping are inconsistent with the Water Agreement's goal to "avoid creating new pumping impacts in this parcel, yet the Technical Group has never discussed the problem. Harrington's predecessor, Tom Brooks, never even acknowledged to me that he had received my request. How this request is handled will give a good idea if things will change, or if the Water Department will stick to business as usual. Good luck, Bob!

Daniel Pritchett, Conservation Chair