Governments, districts still looking at cleaning Walker

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By: Keith Trout

Local entities continue to pursue the possibility of cleaning the Walker River in Mason Valley while the river is dry or low, including a conference call Tuesday with state officials.

Yerington city manager Dan Newell, Walker River Irrigation District manager Bert Bryan, Lyon County manager Jeff Page and Mason Valley Conservation District manager Ed Ryan met Monday afternoon about the river cleaning topic along with a representative of the Nevada Division of Emergency Management. Also present was an engineer from Farr West Engineering, which has done engineering work on the river for the city of Yerington for a dredge project and with National Fish and Wildlife for a proposed project to clear some old diversion structures from the river.

Page said Tuesday they were awaiting a conference call with the Division of Emergency Management after the emergency management officials was going to do some research regarding possible funding for the cleaning and about shortening of timelines for obtaining permits for the project.

The Lyon County Board of Commissioners and the Yerington City Council last month approved a resolution seeking an emergency or disaster declaration hoping it could facilitate cleaning of the river due to the possibility of a wet winter due to a predicted El Niño. The WRID board also took action to support the river cleaning project without any commitment of funding or other commitment.

During the WRID board meeting Friday, Bryan said he had talked with Ryan at the conservation district and it appeared the MVCD would take a lead role in permitting and for cleaning of the river.

He said in the past week he’d also spoken with the conservation district and with Farr West as well as the Division of Emergency Management.

Also at the WRID board meeting, director David Little asked Joy Morris, program director on the Walker Basin Project with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, if the rumor he’d heard was true that NFWF would fund the river cleaning project.

Morris said that wasn’t true; NFWF didn’t have funding for cleaning the river now.

Page and Bryan said they were seeing if there were any federal or possibly state funding sources for the cleaning project.
Bryan said he’d gotten some phone calls asking if the district could use some of the grant funding it has received from NFWF for a water leasing project. He said the district used some of that grant funding for a river cleaning project near the Weir but NFWF didn’t have funds to replace that so there would be less for the leasing project.

He said at the prior week’s meeting some farmers with property on the river had expressed support for putting up some funding for the project.

Watermaster Jim Shaw said MVCD’s Ryan was trying to find grant funding also for the river project, although he hadn’t taken this to the conservation district board for its approval. He said with the MVCD agreeing to take a lead role, “WRID won’t have to take a lead role for a change.”

Smith Valley rancher Steven Fulstone said WRID previously had cleaned the river at the Weir up to the drain. He suggested with the dry water conditions now is a good time to clean ditches out also, so ditch companies might want to consider that, and diversions might need some work also.

Bryan said at one time, Nevada Department of Wildlife had cleaned the river along property it owns at the wildlife management area.