

# Conservation project aims to divert usable water from reaching south end of Lake Quichapa

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**CEDAR CITY** — Water conservation efforts in Iron County have long focused on preventing the water from reaching Lake Quichapa, as the high concentration of salts and minerals in the soil within that ancient lake bed essentially prevents the water from ever being usable again.



But thanks to several aquifer recharge projects that have taken place in recent years, much of the water in the county’s closed drainage system is successfully diverted back into the ground, enabling it to be used again for drinking or irrigation.

One such project diverts water into a “lazy river” on the other side of state Route 56. The system guides the water along a winding path, allowing sediments to separate and settle and enabling it to be used for irrigating nearby alfalfa fields. Meanwhile, on the other side of the highway, a small reservoir built in 2017 is designed to catch the water just before it reaches Quichapa in a small marshland pond that’s usable as a habitat for waterfowl.

Now, in the latest effort, Iron County officials have joined forces with Central Iron County Water Conservancy District to construct an earthen dike that bisects Quichapa’s currently dry lake bed.

On one recent Friday, CICWCD employee Tracy Feltner and Iron County Commissioner Paul Cozzens spent the day at Quichapa, each using heavy equipment to build up the dike that will isolate the northern portion of the reservoir from the south.

“Once it gets to the south end of the lake, we can’t use that water for anything, irrigation or anything else,” Feltner explained. “So this end of the lake, the north end of the lake, has proven to be good water until it starts getting later on in the season.”

Feltner said the plan is to keep some of the water retained in the wildlife pond, with any excess running over a spillway and into the north portion of the lake. Earlier this week, equipment operator Curtis DeMille used an excavator to dig a connecting trench to facilitate the movement of the water up toward SR-56.



From there, Feltner noted, motors and pumps will move the water under the highway and into the lazy river system, and from there, to the agricultural pivots used to irrigate crops.

Cozzens called the project a “win-win for everybody” and thanked the nearby landowners for their assistance and cooperation, including Craig Jones, Kerry Jones, Brad Schmutz and Tyree Bulloch.

“These landowners have been very gracious in letting us use their land for whatever we need to help the basin,” Cozzens said.

“It’s nice to give back to them and help them out a little bit with some water that would normally be wasted,” he added.

“We used to separate the sediments and pump the water up to a recharge basin, but that’s not nearly as effective as actually putting the water into the pivots and having the farmers idle their wells, this in effect providing 100% recharge,” Cozzens added, noting that in times where there is an excess amount of water, the old recharge system will still be used.

Cozzens said he and other county officials appreciate the partnership with CICWCD.

“To help the water district to be able to fulfill this, we’ve donated equipment and some labor to see this project through,” Cozzens said, adding that the project is expected to take another two to four weeks to complete.