Massive Lake Mead project to guarantee water supply is complete

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LAKE MEAD (KTNV) - A decade-long engineering project at Lake Mead is finished.

The goal is to make sure the valley's water supply is all but guaranteed, even though the lake's water level continues to fall.

Engineers with the Southern Nevada Water Authority have built a third water intake structure, which is essentially like a straw that reaches down to the deepest parts of the lake to scoop water to transport to processing plants.

"It's one of the most technically challenging projects going on in the world today," said Erika Moonin, the project manager. "We've set a world record for the highest-pressure tunnel that's been constructed with a tunnel-boring machine."

The intake straw is ready to go now that the cap has been removed and brought to shore.

A three-mile tunnel that took three years to dig is flooded with more than 400 million gallons of water.

All that water is ready to be pumped, processed and seamlessly transitioned into drinking water.

Bronson Mack, a Water Authority spokesperson, says the structure will last at least 100 years and no fourth straw will eventually need to be built.

"Intake number three is located at one of the deepest points within Lake Mead, and even if water can't pass through the Hoover Dam because lake levels are too low, our intake will still have access to its supply so we'll continue to be able to provide water to our community," Mack said.

After 10 years of engineering and $800 million invested, engineers say completing this project is like finally hitting paydirt.

The Water Authority says growing population is not a large concern.

Officials say all water from indoor faucets like showers and sinks gets recycled. It's the water used outdoors that can only be used once.