

IWVWD General Manager's Column
September 12, 2014

Drought Challenges State and Local Leadership

By Don Zdeba

You have undoubtedly heard or read about the situation we face in California as we stare at the possibility of a fourth year of drought. The last significant drought in California occurred in the mid-1970's and lasted two years. By the third year, snowpack across the state was at 150% of the historical average bringing relief and teaching some valuable lessons about the need for additional storage during wet years. Our current drought is well into the third year. By April 1st, the state had recorded only 29% of the historical average snowpack during the current water year. This follows consecutive years with 50% and 41% of the historical average snowpack. Snowpack is measured by the water year which extends from October 1st to September 30th. Measurements are recorded April 1st, midway through the water year. 81% of California is now classified in "extreme drought" compared to 68% just three months ago. The impact on the state's economy has been significant, particularly on the agricultural community which accounts for about 60% of the water use in California.

According to a study by UC-Davis this summer, agriculture has experienced a \$2.2 billion shortfall this year including an \$810 million loss in crop revenue, \$203 million from loss of livestock and dairy revenue, and \$454 million from additional costs to pump groundwater to maintain production. In addition, over 428,000 acres of farmland has been fallowed and over 17,100 part-time jobs have been lost; nearly 4% of farm employment.

For years, "cheap" water was a resource that was taken for granted. As population has increased and more people have chosen to relocate to the Sunbelt, growth has put a stress on water resources. This is not an issue unique to the American Southwest. Access to clean potable water is a problem in many parts of the world. It may surprise you to know that only 2.5% of the world's water is fresh water. Of that, only 1% is accessible. The remainder is entrained in glaciers and snowfields. The picture does not get better when you consider the results of a study released by The Water Resources Group in 2012 citing global demand exceeding supply by 40% in 2030 if current trends continue.

Every challenge presents an opportunity and our leadership in California is recognizing there needs to be significant action taken to address not only the situation facing the state at this time, but to ensure we have the ability to effectively manage our water resources going forward. On August 19th, the State Legislature approved a \$7.545 billion water bond that has been five years in the making. The bond includes \$2.7 billion to fund much needed additional water storage projects. This bond will go before voters in November as Proposition 1. I urge you to study this proposition ahead of the November election. You can find additional information on the content and how the funds will be allocated at [http://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_1,_Water_Bond_\(2014\)](http://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_1,_Water_Bond_(2014))

On August 29th, the State Legislature approved and sent to Governor Brown for signature a three-bill package intended to create sustainable groundwater management throughout California. The bills would enact the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act creating the framework for improved management of groundwater supplies by local authorities. Key provisions of this legislation include a requirement for groundwater basins to establish groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) by January 2017 and for high and medium priority basins in overdraft to develop and adopt groundwater sustainability plans by January 2020. The plans would be required to be fully implemented by January 2040 and progress reports would be required every five years beginning in 2020. If basins are unable to develop sustainability plans, the bills also provide a mechanism for limited state intervention when necessary to protect groundwater resources.

Locally, Kern County, through the Planning and Community Development Department, is moving forward with the proposed Indian Wells Valley Land Use Plan intended to address groundwater supply and quality concerns by changing land use designations on existing vacant and developed land. A Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report was issued July 28th and department staff conducted a public scoping meeting August 11th at the Inyokern Senior Center. The document is available at <http://pcd.kerndsa.com/planning/notices-of-preparation> and I encourage you to study it.

These actions being taken will no doubt have both local and statewide implications for our future. It is important that we, as voters, stay informed and encourage our leaders to make sound decisions when it comes to water policy.

For now, each of us can do our part by using water responsibly. For tips on how you can reduce your water consumption, please visit the District's website at www.iwvwd.com.