

IWVWD General Manager's Column
June 14, 2016

“State Water Board Agrees to Leave Conservation to Local Agencies” **By Don Zdeba**

The “Godzilla” El Niño that had been predicted for California this past winter did not treat the state equitably. While reservoirs in Northern California filled to the point where water has been released due to concerns about flooding, storms frequently steered clear of Southern California and did not receive anywhere near its average precipitation. As a result, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) faced a decision on continuing water conservation initiatives that had been implemented in response to Governor Brown’s mandate issued April 1, 2015 to reduce water use by 25% statewide. The SWRCB had used this past winter to consider feedback from state water agencies about the fairness of the conservation rates that had been assigned beginning last June. The discussions focused on three local factors that influence water use and should be given consideration when conservation targets are set. These factors include climate, changes in population, and recognition for significant investments made by suppliers toward creating new, local, drought-resilient sources of potable water supply. Urban water suppliers were allowed to apply for credits of up to 8% to reduce their conservation targets. As a result, Indian Wells Valley Water District qualified for the maximum 4% reduction based on climate and the assigned conservation rate of 36% was reduced to 32% effective March 1st. The SWRCB then promised to consider further changes once the annual April 1st survey of snowpack in the Sierra was completed.

With the snowpack close to average and even exceeding average in some areas, the SWRCB felt it was important to take a new approach because it was very clear the conservation rates assigned previously are not sustainable and continuing to impose such severe restrictions, when areas of the state were releasing water from reservoirs, would result in a credibility issue. A public meeting was scheduled for April 20th in Sacramento during which comments were heard and considered for recommending changes to the process for establishing conservation targets. The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), consisting of over 400 urban water suppliers, weighed in heavily on the approach the water agencies would like to see. On May 9th, Governor Brown issued a new Executive Order directing action aimed at using water wisely, reducing water waste, and improving water use efficiency. The Order also directed the SWRCB to extend emergency regulations for urban conservation through the end of January 2017.

The SWRCB met May 18th to consider the proposal from staff for extending the emergency regulations. To their credit, the State Board listened to the approach supported by ACWA and recommended allowing local agencies to establish and self-certify their conservation standard. The new standard, once approved by the SWRCB would take effect for June 2016 and remain in effect until the end of January 2017. The procedure for determining an agency’s conservation rate involves averaging production for the years 2013 and 2014, determining what supply is available in terms of surface water, imported water, and groundwater and, assuming drought conditions continue for

the next three years, calculate if there is a shortfall. The difference between anticipated pumping and available supply dictates the conservation rate.

Because Indian Wells Valley is completely dependent on groundwater and there is certainly sufficient supply for the next three years, the conservation target using this method would be negligible. However, the Department of Water Resources has classified our basin as a medium priority basin in critical overdraft based on chronic lowering of the aquifer level. Consequently, the Board of Directors and staff of IWVWD believe it is prudent to continue conservation efforts while the local Groundwater Sustainability Agency is formed and allowed to develop the Groundwater Sustainability Plan. At the June 13th meeting, the Board voted to keep Ordinance 100 in place and establish a conservation target of 20% for the period of June 2016 through the end of January 2017. A copy of Ordinance 100 is available on the District's website, www.iwvwd.com or can be obtained at our office.

The Cash for Grass Program is still available for our residential customers desiring to replace up to 2,000 square feet of turf in their front yard with desert appropriate plants and landscape. We recently were approved by the state to expand the program to reimburse high water users for up to 10,000 square feet of turf removal. Details about the program are available on our website or at our office. To date, landscape conversions have achieved savings of almost 15 acre-feet of water annually. That is enough water to supply more than 56 families of four for an entire year.

For information related to state and local water issues I encourage you to "Like" and regularly visit the District's Facebook page (IWV Water District) or follow us on Twitter (@IWVWaterDist). Finally, the Board of Directors and staff of IWVWD thank you for using water responsibly.