

IWVWD General Manager's Column
December 12, 2014

Water Issues Dominated News in 2014

By Don Zdeba

2014 certainly was a noteworthy year, both statewide and locally, in terms of water issues. Shortly after we rang in the New Year, Governor Jerry Brown declared a statewide drought emergency January 17th as we prepared to face a fourth consecutive dry year. In response, he called on Californians to cut their water use by 20 percent. This was also the year that California finally joined the rest of the nation in establishing long overdue groundwater legislation. On September 16th, Governor Brown signed into law an unprecedented three-bill legislative package, known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014. Key provisions of this legislation include a requirement for medium and high priority groundwater basins in overdraft (as designated by the California Department of Water Resources) to establish Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) by January 2017 and to develop and adopt Groundwater Sustainability Plans by January 2020 and January 2022 respectively. On November 4th, Election Day, voters approved Proposition 1, a \$7.545 billion water bond that had been five years in the making. The bond included \$2.7 billion to fund much needed additional water storage projects.

Locally, concern over increasing extraction of groundwater within the Indian Wells Valley basin elicited a response from Kern County that culminated in the "Water Availability and Conservation Report" issued by Todd Engineers in January. The County Planning and Community Development staff followed up with a workday held in Ridgecrest May 15th where local stakeholders were invited to participate in a discussion of solutions to address the groundwater issues stated in the Todd report. Further action was taken by the County this summer when the Board of Supervisors directed staff to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Indian Wells Valley Land Use Plan (IWVLUP). The IWVLUP is a proposal intended to address declining groundwater availability and support of ongoing military air navigation operations in the valley. This would be accomplished by adopting changes to zoning classifications for existing vacant and developed land and an amendment to the Kern County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan that together are intended to reduce future water consumption, be compatible with the Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) study of 2011, and achieve consistency between existing land use designations and zone classifications required by State Law. According to a press release issued December 8th by the Kern County Planning and Community Development Department, the Draft EIR for the IWVLUP will be released for public review in mid-January. A public workshop will be scheduled locally following the release of the Draft EIR. The proposed changes are expected to be presented to the Planning Commission and ultimately to the Board of Supervisors for approval by late spring of 2015.

Much work lies ahead as we come together to forge the GSA required by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. What form this agency ultimately takes, who is

involved, and what the sustainability plan for the basin looks like are decisions that need to be made, and I would encourage everyone to stay informed and make your ideas known. These decisions will certainly shape the future of the Indian Wells Valley, so it is imperative that those charged with making the decisions consider input from all stakeholders.

Shifting focus to Indian Wells Valley Water District news, our consultants, Bartle Wells, have completed the 2014 Cost of Service Study that looks at forecasted District expenses, revenues and a ten-year projection of capital projects. The current ten-year District Capital Improvement Program includes projects totaling almost \$26 million that will permit us to continue to meet the commitment stated in our Mission Statement to provide our customers “the highest quality water at the best possible price while continuing to serve as respectful stewards of the environment.” The Board of Directors is considering suggested changes to the rate structure that will allow the District to continue to meet its financial goals to maintain a balanced budget (revenues meet expenses), generate a positive cash flow, incur no new debt service payments prior to 2018, meet debt service coverage, and meet reserve fund targets. The Board will consider these changes during the February 9th Board meeting. The decisions made at this meeting will impact all of our customers, so I would encourage our customers to study what is being proposed, and if possible, attend the meeting to ask questions or provide your input.

In closing, on behalf of the Board of Directors, the staff of IWVWD and myself, I wish you and those close to you a peaceful and joyous holiday season with hopes for a prosperous (and wet) New Year.