

notes from the underground

ASSOCIATION OF GROUND WATER AGENCIES NEWSLETTER Spring 2006



Regional Board Proposes Imported Water Discharge Requirements

By John Rossi

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Ana Region, has noticed a public hearing for July 14 on a proposed order that will have far-reaching consequences in the Santa Ana region if adopted.

This order, in a nutshell, would change the face of water recharge in the Santa Ana watershed, putting at peril millions of dollars in projects and hampering efforts to drought-proof the region.

Essentially, the Regional Board proposes issuing general waste discharge requirements for injection/percolation of imported State Water Project water, Colorado River water, or imported well water to recharge groundwater management zones within the Santa Ana Region.

As water agencies throughout the Santa Ana Region look for ways to increase water supply reliability, particularly during drought, conjunctive use projects are increasingly the answer. AGWA member agency Western Municipal Water District is just one of many agencies in the region with conjunctive use projects—in our case, the Riverside-Corona Feeder—that are dependent on our ability to recharge imported supplies in wet years for use in dry.

The Regional Board maintains in its staff report on the proposed order that "...before given the increased number and magnitude of the water recharge projects being contemplated, and in view of the extensive commitments that have been and will be made by dischargers and other stakeholders in the Region to develop and implement the new TDS and nitrate-nitrogen objectives, it is appropriate and in fact



John Rossi

legally required to assure that those projects are consistent with the objectives." The report goes on to state that, "Otherwise, Basin Plan objectives could be violated and the TDS and nitrate-nitrogen management activities undertaken by certain stakeholders could be compromised by the recharge activities of others."

The Regional Board staff recommends adoption of the order "to assure that imported water groundwater recharge projects do not cause or contribute to violations of applicable water quality standards, particularly the established groundwater objectives for Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) and nitrate-nitrogen."

In order to comply with the order, prospective dischargers would be required to file a Notice of Intent to comply with the terms and conditions of the discharge requirements; pay annual fees as required in Title 23, and file a project map and evidence of CEQA compliance, along

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Riverside Students Learn About Ice Cream, Bugs and Water

More than 50 students from John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Riverside spent a spring morning playing with bugs and eating ice cream, all while learning about water. It was all part of AGWA member agency Western Municipal Water


California, Riverside's Entomology Department led the students in discussion on garden-friendly insects. The students ended their environmental morning by releasing thousands of ladybugs up into the Riverside sky.



District's Earth Day celebration at Landscapes Southern California StyleSM, the District's outdoor water conservation education center.

The two classrooms of fifth graders began their journey through the garden by building and devouring an Edible Aquifer, ice cream concoctions that taught them about how water travels through the layers of Earth, pools in underground basins or aquifers and can potentially be polluted during this process by a variety of human activities. Next, graduate students from the University of

"Creating ice cream treats that actually teach about water is a super way to engage students," says Melodie Johnson, Western's public information officer. "That coupled with the environmentally friendly insect information and ladybug release really offers a fun yet educational way to celebrate Earth Day."

Western Municipal Water District provides water supply, wastewater disposal and water resource management to the public in a safe, reliable, environmentally sensitive and financially responsible manner. 


Continued from page 1

with a monitoring plan. Further, dischargers must demonstrate that the project is consistent with the applicable maximum benefit programs and commitments identified in the Basin Plan. The Regional Board staff would then determine whether or not to authorize a discharge letter. If a proposed project were not consistent with the maximum benefit program, Regional board staff would recommend wastewater discharge requirements that require compliance with the antidegradation TDS and nitrate-nitrogen water quality objectives.

Agencies in the Santa Ana region have demonstrated their commitment to protecting groundwater through participation in various studies and monitoring programs, along with millions of dollars spent on projects such as desalters and the Santa Ana Regional Interceptor, an industrial brineline constructed by local water agencies, that has removed thousands of pounds of salt from the watershed.

Further, agencies will be asking the Regional Board to engage in a collaborative process with the various stakeholders to develop an alternative method to address their concerns.

We question whether the order proposed by the Regional Board would bring any added groundwater protection.

John Rossi is general manager of Western Municipal Water District and currently serves as president of AGWA. He can be reached at jrossi@wmwd.com. 

New Huell Howser Series

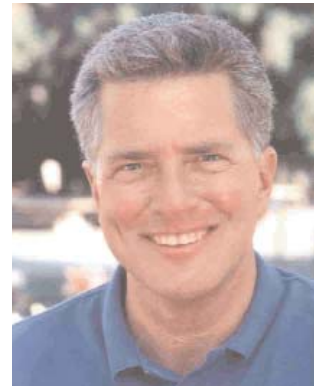
"California's Water" Airs on Local PBS Stations

A first-of-its-kind public television series produced by Huell Howser and partly underwritten by several AGWA member agencies, including Orange County Water District and Eastern and Western Municipal Water Districts, explores California's water resources. Airing statewide on PBS stations, "California's Water" highlights the complex system of natural and man-made features that has allowed growing communities, productive farms, industry and ecosystems to co-exist in a state that receives little or no rain for months at a time.

Segments began airing in April and will continue to roll out over the next several months on all 13 PBS stations. The first segment of the "California's Water"

District, Howser visits the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta by boat and gets a first-hand view of the important but vulnerable system of levees that protects farmland, homes, infrastructure and the water supplies for 23 million Californians.


"From the very beginning, water has been a critical, colorful and controversial part of life in our

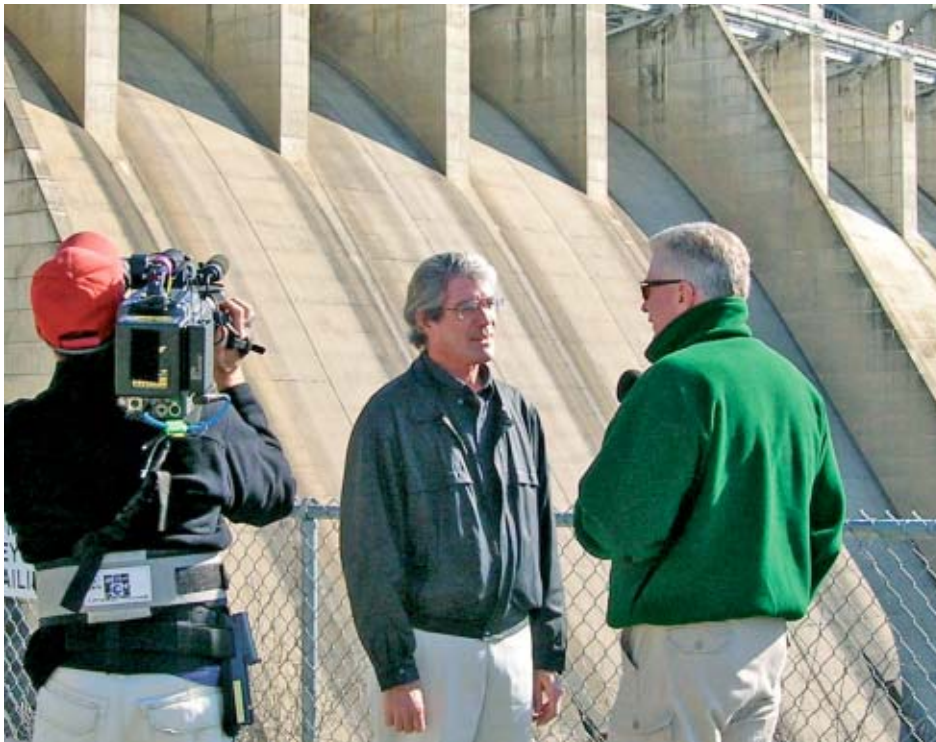


state," said Howser. "And obviously, we all know how important water is. But I guarantee you that most of us have absolutely no idea where our water comes from or how it gets to us. The series will set out to answer these questions."

In each "California's Water" segment, Howser visits features of California's water system and gets a first-hand look at various water management tools and challenges facing the state's water future. Known for his enthusiasm and his down-to-earth style, Howser hosts the long-running PBS series "California's Gold" as well as several other human-interest programs.

An updated list of airdates and times is available on www.acwa.com. The series, underwritten by members of the Association of California Water

Agencies (ACWA), covers issues identified in ACWA's policy document, "No Time to Waste: A Blueprint for California Water." The document, released in 2005, recommends a suite of actions and investments to ensure California has the water supply system it will need in future decades. 



public television series focused on climate change. The second episode, focusing on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, began airing in May on PBS stations statewide.

In the segment, sponsored by the Castaic Lake Water Agency and the Santa Clara Valley Water


Excess Water Benefits Kern County Recharge Operations



The improved water picture has provided wonderful recharge opportunities for AGWA member agency Kern County. There is excess water available from Friant Section 215 (located in Millerton Lake above Fresno), and Article 21 water from the State Water Project (SWP). Article 21 and Section 215 waters are made available from the State and from federal projects when conditions warrant their release.

Article 21 water is made possible when the Department of Water Resources (DWR) projects that it is imminent San Luis Reservoir will fill, and water is plentiful in the Delta allowing pumping of Article 21 water to SWP contractors. Article 21 water has been available since Jan. 1, 2006, and continues to be offered through May 10, 2006. Since supplies have been much higher than demand, all Article 21 water offered during this period has been on an unallocated basis. Approximately 1.6 million acre-feet (af) of

Article 21 water have been available for delivery to SWP contractors in 2006, but only 700,000 af were requested. DWR estimates that actual delivery of Article 21 water since January 1 has been 450,000 to 500,000 af and as of April 20, 2006, about 93,000 af have been delivered to the Kern Fan banking projects during 2006.

On the federal side, Section 215 water was available Jan. 10 through Jan. 26, 2006, and became available again March 25 through April 3, 2006, when the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation declared the availability of Friant-Kern floodwater. Approximately 32,000 af of Section 215 water were recharged. To prevent water from being spilled, it was released from the Friant-Kern Canal near Coffee Road into the Kern River and various local water districts and banking project facilities, where it could seep into the groundwater basin. 

Joseph Kuebler Appointed to EMWD Board




Joseph J. Kuebler, AGWA member agency Eastern Municipal Water District's second treasurer during its 56-year history, was unanimously appointed to fill the unexpired term of Richard R. Hall, who

announced his resignation in April. The unexpired term of Director Hall and the new director will end on Jan. 2, 2007. Voters on November 7 will then select the director for the next four years.

Mr. Kuebler will represent EMWD's Division 2, which includes Temecula, a portion of Murrieta and the unincorporated area of Murrieta Hot Springs. Appointed EMWD treasurer in 1996, Kuebler, of Temecula, is vice-president of Kuebler, Prudhomme & Co., CPAs. The firm serves more than 1,000 clients in the Inland Empire and has annual revenues exceeding \$2.5 million. He is affiliated with numerous business and professional organizations, and has been a guest speaker at the annual tax conference of the California Society of CPAs, and is a former tax conference chairman.

As EMWD treasurer, Kuebler is presently chair of ACWA Region 9, which includes water agencies in Riverside, San Bernardino and Imperial Counties. He has also testified before the state Assembly on behalf of Metropolitan Water District on agriculture water rates. As a member of the Monday Morning Group, the Valley Group and the Murrieta/Temecula Group, he has carried or chaired water issues to elected representatives in Washington D.C. and Sacramento.

The board announced that Kuebler would remain as treasurer until Dec. 1, 2006, allowing the District time to find a replacement. 

News Drops

- A wet spring means California water contractors will get all the water they need this year. In fact, California has surplus water for sale. The snowpack statewide is at 172 percent of normal, thanks to a March-April period that was the second wettest in the northern Sierra since 1921. In fact, the state Department of Water Resources has boosted its allocation to State Water Project contractors from 80 percent to 100 percent. It's the first time since the water project's founding in 1968 that contractors have asked for full contractual deliveries and will get those requests. The 100 percent allocation amounts to 4.1 million acre-feet of water. The largest customer is MWD, which uses half this total, followed by AGWA member agency the Kern County Water Agency, which takes 25 percent.
- One of the world's largest cheese companies paid California water regulators a \$3 million fine for polluting water for years by illegally flushing wastewater from its plant. The payment by Hilmar Cheese Co. is the largest fine ever paid to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, water officials said. Most of the money will fund an environmental study into salts from food processing plants that taint groundwater. The board had sought a \$4-million fine after regulators said the company had violated state water laws for nearly 16 years.
- More than 100 chemical plants on the banks of China's rivers pose safety hazards that could jeopardize drinking water and spread contamination widely, China's environment chief has said. The announcement, based on a government survey of the nation's 21,000 riverside chemical plants, amounts to a sobering acknowledgment by the Beijing government that rapid industrial development has outstripped the nation's ability to regulate environmental hazards. An article discussing China's water contamination crisis appears in the Jan. 25, 2006, edition of the *Los Angeles Times*.

OCWD Repairs Wetlands

Damaged By High Water Flows From The Santa Ana River

Last year's storms were a welcome surprise for Orange County's groundwater basin, but their effect was devastating to AGWA member agency Orange County Water District's wetlands. The high flows coming from the Santa Ana River ravaged through the Prado Basin, bringing with it debris and sediment that blocked the river. The river jumped its banks, flowed through the District's wetlands and dumped more than 500,000 cubic yards of sediment into the wetlands facility. The flood damage rendered most of the wetlands inoperable.

Thanks to a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the repair of the flood-damaged facilities, OCWD was awarded approximately \$2.9 million for wetlands restoration, which is 75 percent of the total reconstruction costs. Additionally, the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) is expected to fund 75 percent of the remaining reconstruction costs, or approximately \$750,000.

Reconstruction includes restoring the river to a course that does not threaten the Prado Wetlands, rebuilding wetland levees, installing culverts, replacing damaged canal gates; and redistributing 500,000 cubic yards of sediment and debris in the wetland ponds.

Redesign of the Prado Wetlands was initiated at the end of October 2005. Surveying and visual observation of the damaged wetlands have shown that the majority of the


damage and sediment deposition occurred in the western- and northernmost ponds. The river was moved back into its original chan-

Santa Ana River flows to further improve the quality of the water that replenishes Orange County's groundwater basin. The existing



nel and out of the Prado Wetlands in February 2006. Approximately 60,000 cubic yards of the invasive, non-native *Arundo donax's* debris were removed from the existing river channel before the river could be turned back to its historical course. The reconstruction of the Prado Wetlands is scheduled to be complete by late 2007.

As part of its long-term goals, OCWD is committed to providing wetlands treatment to all of the

Prado Wetland treats half of the water that comprises the Santa Ana River. The District is evaluating additional wetland projects on other tributary streams to the Santa Ana River to achieve 100 percent treatment. Development of new wetlands requires extensive planning, permitting and coordination—as well as outside financial support. The district continues to seek grants and other funding sources to construct additional wetlands. 

Water Replenishment District of Southern California Awards Six Women "Women of Water" Proclamations

In celebration of Women's Awareness Month, AGWA member agency the Water Replenishment District of Southern California (WRD)'s board of directors has awarded proclamations to five women who have made a positive impact in the water industry and on environmental awareness.

WRD recognized Congresswoman Grace Napolitano, Congresswoman Linda Sanchez, Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council founding board member Dorothy Green, Park Water Company general manager Jeanne Marie Bruno and Compton Unified School District Board Member Satra D. Zurita.

that California's most precious resource is protected is tremendous and I am honored that our board will recognize her for her efforts," stated WRD Board President Willard H. Murray.

Green of Santa Monica is being recognized for her pioneering efforts to protect the Los Angeles and San Gabriel area watersheds and beaches. Her grassroots activism gave birth to the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, the mission of which is to preserve, restore and enhance the many beneficial uses of the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds eco-system through education, research,

WRD's board of directors has awarded proclamations to five women who have made a positive impact in the water industry and on environmental awareness.

Congresswoman Napolitano is an avid promoter of conservation, water recycling, desalination and sound groundwater management and storage programs to address southern California's need for adequate water quality and supply. WRD Board Member Pat Acosta, in nominating the congresswoman said, "Rep. Napolitano's legislative efforts in the areas of a water management plan for California, protection of the fragile ecosystem in the Bay-Delta and promotion of the use of advanced technologies, all speak to her leadership in promoting sound water policy for our state."

Congresswoman Sanchez is being recognized for support of clean and recycled water programs and securing funds for a study of the Los Angeles Basin Watershed. The study was designed to explore ways to capture rainwater runoff in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, to increase the supply of clean drinking water, reduce ocean pollution and improve neighborhoods, mini-parks and habitat areas. In addition, Rep. Sanchez sponsored legislation to ensure the safety of California's Public Lands and Rivers. The legislation, H.R. 3325, was titled "Southern California Wild Heritage Act of 2004" and designates specified lands and rivers as wilderness areas protected under the National Wilderness Preservation System. "Congresswoman Sanchez's leadership in ensuring

planning and mediation. "Ms. Green's continued work as a member of the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council and numerous other environmentally focused endeavors speak volumes of her dedication to our waterways and environment," said WRD Board Member Rob Kat Herman.

Bruno, general manager of Park Water Company in Downey, Calif., is being recognized for her work in water quality protection and overall water policy efforts. Bruno is one of the few women general managers in the water industry. "Ms. Bruno stands as a beacon to all leaders in water policy," stated WRD General Manager Robb Whitaker.

Zurita, Compton Unified School District Board Member, is being recognized for her leadership in K-12 education. WRD Board Member Albert Robles praised Ms. Zurita for "promoting the need for sound watershed and environmental education for students."

Doud, assistant controller for the Water Replenishment District of Southern California, is being recognized for her efforts in shepherding WRD to the fiscally prudent agency it is today. Doud is part of a team of staff members that led WRD to receiving the prestigious California Society of Municipal Finance Officers (CSMFO) Meritorious Award for outstanding budget presentation and process for its 05/06 budget document. 