



# UNDERGROUND

Association of Ground Water Agencies Newsletter

Winter 1999

## 'Biggest water bond' needs approval in March election

Water agencies in semi-arid southern California are well aware that California voters will act on a \$1.97 billion water bond in the March 7 statewide

primary election. It is the biggest-dollar water bond ever to face voters in the state.

If approved, the measure will fund a variety of programs throughout the state to increase water supplies, protect and improve drinking water quality, and boost flood protection in vulnerable areas.

The Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection and Flood Protection Act—Proposition 13 on the ballot—will benefit virtually every city and county in the state.

The bond is supported by a broad cross section of business, labor, water and environmental leaders as well as Governor Gray Davis.

If enacted, the bond will fund a variety of water management programs that could increase water supplies by a million acre-feet—the annual needs of eight million people—and will provide urgently needed supplies when drought occurs. In California history, recurring drought is a periodic certainty.

In addition, the bond will improve and protect drinking water quality and promote more efficient use of existing water supplies. It includes funding for programs that will directly assist groundwater protection and improvement efforts.

Additional information about the proposed bond is available at a special web site, [www.prop13.org](http://www.prop13.org). Information is also available from the Association of California Water Agencies in Sacramento at (916) 441-4545 and at its web site, [www.acwanet.com](http://www.acwanet.com).

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- ['Biggest water bond' needs approval in March election \(page 1\)](#)
- [State's looming water crisis decried by business, labor groups \(page 2\)](#)
- [Report says California faces 'looming water crisis' \(page 2\)](#)
- [AGWA Actions \(page 3\)](#)
- [EPA celebrates 25 years of Safe Drinking Water Act \(page 3\)](#)
- [Compounds in most groundwater do not exceed water standards \(page 4\)](#)
- [DOI finalizes water banking rule \(page 4\)](#)
- [Groundwater contamination and quality issues making news in many ways \(page 5\)](#)
- [Small ranchers claim MWD reservoir is drying up their wells \(page 5\)](#)
- [Orange County WD to treat Santa Ana flows in wetlands \(page 6\)](#)
- [MWD nears finalization of new strategic plan \(page 6\)](#)
- [State Water Project atlas unveiled \(page 7\)](#)
- [What's on the docket \(page 7\)](#)
- [EPA settles enforcement actions against L.A., Burbank \(page 7\)](#)
- [Y2K is more like Y-OK \(page 7\)](#)
- [People make water news \(page 8\)](#)

Editors: D. Heil, C. Gehman  
Designer: D&D Communications  
Published courtesy of Orange County Water District  
Article contributions are welcome.  
Please call: (909) 928-3777 x4383 or e-mail: [heild@emwd.org](mailto:heild@emwd.org)  
Visit the AGWA website at: [www.agwa.org](http://www.agwa.org)

## State's looming water crisis decried by business, labor groups

A coalition of the state's key economic leaders has urged Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to intervene and avert a looming water supply and water quality crisis in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Water that enters both the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project flows through the Delta.

New water supply restrictions and operational constraints in the Bay/Delta system are increasing the possibility of severe water shortages for key industries and have already damaged water quality, the leaders note in a Jan. 4 letter signed by 11 associations representing hundreds of California businesses and thousands of workers.

In their strongly-worded letter, the groups express grave concerns about degraded water quality and declining supplies from the Bay/Delta. Unanticipated pumping restrictions in June resulted in the

loss of about 500,000 acre-feet.

San Luis Reservoir currently has a deficit of nearly 300,000 acre-feet resulting from those federal regulatory actions.

In December, federal regulators again throttled back the pumps, to just ten percent of their normal capacity, threatening the loss of another 200,000 acre-feet for the State Water Project. San Luis Reservoir is now a little more than half full because of the federal regulatory reductions.

"We're reaching the point where actions by a handful of federal regulators are going to have a very real impact on the jobs of thousands of people," said Chuck Center, director of the California State Council of Laborers. "Our water system is not supposed to work that way."

The group is asking Babbitt to return to a collaborative approach embraced by the 1994 Bay/Delta Accord and to implement corrective actions to restore balance to Bay/Delta decisions.

## Report says California faces 'looming water crisis'

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) has released a report summarizing the delicate state of California's shrinking water supply.

Titled "California's Looming Water Crisis: A Status Report," the document provides a compelling overview of the state's water picture in 24 pages of text, charts and color photos.

"Our water supplies have reached a point of profound vulnerability in the event of an even remotely dry year," said Steve Hall, ACWA's executive director. "We need new water supplies because competing water priorities have taken out almost all of the flexibility, reliability and surplus from California's water supply system."

According to the report, 1.4 million acre-feet has been lost to the system and will not be available when the next drought hits.

The report is available in PDF format on ACWA's website, [www.acwanet.com](http://www.acwanet.com). A color copy can also be obtained by mail by calling ACWA's Sacramento headquarters at (916) 441-4545.

## EPA celebrates 25 years of Safe Drinking Water Act

Signed Dec. 16, 1974, the Safe Drinking Water Act created the first-ever mandatory national program to protect public health through drinking water safety, notes a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statement that marked the Act's 25th anniversary in December.

Twenty-five years later, the Act has matured into a comprehensive, integrated and flexible law that is the Safe Drinking Water Act of today and of tomorrow, says EPA.

Initially, the Act established a national structure for drinking water protection activities; authorized EPA to establish national, enforceable health standards for contaminants in drinking water; and provided for public water system compliance through a federal-state partnership.

Also, according to EPA, the original Act established public notification to alert customers to water system violations; and it set up procedures to protect underground sources of drinking water.

Building on a quarter-century of experience, the Act and the national drinking water program have been transformed into a comprehensive environmental and public health protection effort.

The number and pace of contaminant regulation was increased in 1986, including the landmark disinfection and filtration requirements for drinking water.

Amendments added in 1996 created a new approach to regulating contaminants in drinking water, the EPA statement says. Rather than setting standards for a specified list or number of contaminants, the EPA now focuses on contaminants that pose the greatest risks.

The EPA statement notes that in the 21st century emphasis is expected to be placed on new public health protections, better treatment and delivery systems, enhanced public access to information, improved source water protection, and increased research.



October 18, 1999 ... The Board of Directors, meeting at the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster office in Azusa, unanimously reelected Bill Mills of Orange County Water District as AGWA chairman and Ron Palmer of Raymond Basin Management Board as vice chair ... accepted results of the annual review of AGWA's financial statements, which is in lieu of a formal audit. The accounts were found to be in order ... heard Ms. Leah Walker of the California Department of Health Services' Drinking Water Program report on the state's development and implementation of a drinking water source assessment and protection program, intended to assess all public drinking water sources and encourage local source water protection efforts ... heard a presentation by Ms. Margie Nellor of Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County on the soil aquifer treatment project. The project is analyzing the use of soil and groundwater aquifers to further treat reclaimed wastewater ... was updated on salinity management issues. The Salinity Management Coalition hopes to hold another "Summit" sometime in mid-2000 ... received the finalized "Drought Benefits Groundwater Basins" discussion paper. This document has been an effective communication tool on a number of issues.

November 22, 1999 ... The Directors, meeting at Chino Basin Watermaster offices in Rancho Cucamonga, held a productive discussion of groundwater salinity management, indicating that the association needs to collect data from key wells in each of the groundwater basins. That effort is underway. Also discussed was the salt loading problem associated with MWD's imported water ... noted the Water Education Foundation's excellent new video on conjunctive use, and discussed DWR's interest in conjunctive use potential in Southern California as it relates to the CALFED process in the Delta.

## Compounds in most groundwater do not exceed water standards

Groundwater used for drinking (in the U.S.) generally does not contain levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in excess of drinking water criteria, according to a national assessment by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Levels of VOCs in about six percent of urban wells and 1.5 percent of rural wells that were sampled, however, did exceed established drinking water criteria for these compounds.

The USGS estimates that about seven percent of the resource contains at least one VOC, but the levels typically do not exceed drinking water criteria. Groundwater in these areas is the source of drinking water for about 42 million people.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established drinking water criteria and monitoring requirements for community water systems for 27 VOCs because of health concerns. The EPA criteria are four times more likely to be exceeded in urban areas than in rural areas.

In urban and rural wells in the USGS study, the four most frequently detected compounds, in order, were chloroform, methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE), tetrachloroethene (PCE) and trichloroethene (TCE).

VOCs are found in almost all natural and synthetic materials and are commonly used in fuels, fuel additives, solvents, perfumes, flavor additives and deodorants. Potential health hazards and environmental degradation resulting from the widespread use of VOCs has promoted increasing concern among scientists, industry and the general public, according to a USGS statement.

## DOI finalizes water banking rule

Publication by the Department of the Interior (DOI) of a final rule establishing a new framework to allow the voluntary movement of Colorado River water among the lower basin states of Arizona, California and Nevada occurred October 28.

“This rule represents an historic step,” said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. “We now have a framework to facilitate the movement of water among the three lower basin states.”

Arizona, California and Nevada are apportioned a total of 7.5 million acre-feet of Colorado River water annually under a 1922 agreement. The water was further apportioned in 1928, allocating 300,000 acre-feet annually to Nevada, 2.8 million acre-feet to Arizona and 4.4 million to California.

Because demand for Colorado River water in the Lower Basin is exceeding supplies even in “normal” years, DOI, the states and other interested parties had been exploring more flexible, innovative approaches for voluntarily addressing water supply needs. The new final rule reflects the most promising of these new approaches.

For example, the rule would allow an entity in one state to pay the cost of storing water underground in the other two states. At some future date, the storing state could gain access to the water via the Colorado River.

## Groundwater contamination and quality issues making news in many ways

### DPR says pesticide use up

Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) reports that pesticide use went up five percent in 1998, based on pounds applied. DPR data also included some good news, showing that use of some highly toxic chemicals dropped to their lowest levels in years, while use of reduced-risk pesticides sharply increased.

DPR's preliminary data showed total reported use at 215 million pounds in 1998, compared to 204.8 million in 1997.

### Among findings in the 1998 data:

- All increased pesticide use from 1997 to 1998 could be attributed to sulfur, a natural fungicide favored by conventional and organic growers alike.
- Use of reduced-risk chemicals increased by more than 350 percent.
- Use of methyl bromide, a highly toxic fumigant, declined to its lowest level since 1991.
- Use of two other pesticides linked to surface water contamination also declined in 1998. Chlorpyrifos and diazinon are insecticides widely used in both agricultural and urban environments.
- Pesticides classified as reproductive toxins showed the lowest use since 1993.
- Use of cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides dropped almost 20 percent from 1997 to 1998, representing the lowest usage since 1991.

California is the only state requiring full use reporting, and DPR has compiled the reports in the most extensive database of its kind in the nation.

### EPA proposes arsenic rule

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to propose a reduction in the federal standard on arsenic from 50 parts per billion (ppb)

to 5 ppb. The proposed arsenic rule is expected to be released in March or April, with a 60-day comment period. It is anticipated that 5 ppb will be proposed as the lead regulatory option, but that comments will be accepted on 3 ppb and 10 ppb, as well.

### Radon comment period extended

The EPA has extended the comment period for the proposed regulation on radon in drinking water. The 30-day extension means comments will be accepted until Feb. 4. EPA is aiming for a final proposal by the statutory deadline of August 2000.

### MTBE a major topic at February conference

The controversial topic of MTBE contamination will be among the critical water quality issues addressed by scientists, engineers and contractors during the National Ground Water Association's 2000 Pacific Focus Conference in San Francisco Feb. 17-18.

Other scheduled topics include conjunctive water use and reuse, long-term management of residual contamination under RBCA and field implementation of remediation technologies.

More information about the conference is available by calling (800) 551-7379.

## Small ranchers claim MWD reservoir is drying up their wells

Wells are drying up on about 40 to 50 small ranches and rural properties in the Menifee Valley of western Riverside County, and most of the owners believe it's the fault of Metropolitan Water District's (MWD) Eastside Reservoir project. The properties are located about eight to ten miles west of the reservoir. MWD vigorously denies the allegation and is paying for third-party experts to investigate the cause and present a report. Most of the properties are 2 1/2- to 5-acre parcels, although some are considerably larger. Most have been occupied and pumping from private wells for 20 years or more. All are located within Eastern Municipal Water District's (EMWD) service area, but there is no water or wastewater service where these parcels are located. While most of the wells

in the area have traditionally yielded relatively small amounts of water, that has been sufficient to meet owners' needs. In the past year, however, many of those wells have dried up and, to date, not recovered. Many others are experiencing diminishing yields. While the matter is being sorted out and parched residents are deciding what to do, EMWD has installed a public pump station for domestic water, served by a nearby water main. Residents can drive to the station with their own containers—from 5-gallon jugs to tank trucks—and get all the water they want, free of charge. EMWD has four more, similar public pump stations at other locations in its heavily rural service area. But hauling water is a temporary solution, at best. A large group of residents is in discussion with EMWD officials about forming an assessment district to bring domestic water service to the area. If the assessment district is formed and a water project constructed, EMWD hopes to have it completed and serving water to the properties by the end of 2000. Earlier in the fall of 1999, after several public meetings where angry residents aired their problems and complaints, MWD invited field experts from the state Department of Water Resources (DWR) to walk the ground at MWD's expense and investigate the cause of the wells drying up. At several meetings, MWD agreed to pay for the new domestic water service project if the DWR experts establish that MWD is at fault. MWD says the area's geology is such that the reservoir project cannot possibly be interrupting the flow of water to the residents' area. They say many of the wells are tapping into bedrock and have historically been pumping only water that finds its way into fractures in the rock. They also say geological evidence establishes that the natural underground flow from the reservoir area turns southward and does not reach the troubled properties. Several subdivisions are being developed in the area, and blasting has been occurring. There is also a new golf driving range in the area that has its own well to irrigate the range. DWR staffers have been working in the area since mid-November. They expect it to take several more months before their report is issued.

## Orange County WD to treat Santa Ana flows in wetlands

Orange County Water District has established a goal of treating 100 percent of future Santa Ana River flows through constructed wetlands that provide natural water purification.

This means water percolated into the Orange County groundwater basin for future use by 2.2 million residents and businesses in north-central Orange County will be of even higher quality than it currently is.

The long range goal to provide wetlands treatment of all flows was made to ensure high quality water from the Santa Ana River in light of future increases in urban runoff and purified wastewater discharges from San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Currently, about half the river's flow runs through 500 acres of constructed wetlands behind Prado Dam.

## MWD nears finalization of new strategic plan

A framework of new guiding policy principles that will offer Southern California communities more water resource choices in their plans to meet future demands was proposed in a unanimous action Dec. 14 by Metropolitan Water District's (MWD) board of directors.

The 51-member board, representing nearly 300 cities and communities throughout urban Southern California, approved a series of six common interests that form the basic elements for MWD's new strategic plan, a process initiated in July 1998

*(Continued on next page)*

to address the evolving needs of its 27 member agencies, their retailers and the public.

The MWD board plans to address the outstanding issues and revised water rate structure in January and February. Opportunities for future public comment and review will be provided at public meetings following the board's action on a proposed new rate structure.

Final action on the policies and rate structure will only be taken after the public review process is completed in about April 2000.

## State Water Project atlas unveiled

A new atlas profiling major facilities in the 660-mile long State Water Project has been introduced by the state Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Through text, technical drawings and color photos, the 194-page atlas gives readers a detailed view of the SWP's features, including the tallest dam in the U.S. and almost 700 miles of canals and pipelines.

"The new SWP atlas is a beautiful book, as well as an accurate reference work," said DWR director Thomas M. Hannigan. "It's a coffee table quality book, describing one of America's most important water projects."

The SWP atlas is now being made available to members of California's water community—officials, directors, employees and retired employees of water agencies—for \$30, plus 7.75% sales tax and a \$5 per book shipping charge.

The publication is scheduled to go on sale to the public in May. At that time, the price will be \$50 per copy, plus sales tax and shipping charge.

Sales are by check or money order only, payable to the Department of Water Resources. To order or for more information, contact the California Department of Water Resources, P. O. Box 942836, Room 338, Sacramento, CA 94236-0001, Attention: Imaging and Records Management. Information is available by telephone at (916) 653-1097.

## What's on **THE DOCKET?**

The state legislature convened Jan. 3 for its 2000 legislative year. At the time of this writing, no information was available on bills that had been introduced. We'll have a full status report in the next edition of "Notes from the Underground."

## EPA settles enforcement actions against L.A., Burbank

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Dec. 23 announced settlement of enforcement actions against the cities of Los Angeles and Burbank for deficiencies in the regulation of industrial waste discharges to their sewer systems in the late 1980s.

Los Angeles has agreed to implement three environmental improvement programs worth over \$15 million. The city will also pay a \$118,000 penalty to the U.S. Government and perform projects worth at least an equal amount at the direction of the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Burbank agreed to construct an advanced wastewater treatment system worth over \$2 million at its water reclamation plant. The city will also pay a \$68,500 penalty and perform an equal amount of projects directed by the Regional Board.

## Y2K is more like Y-0K

Despite grave concerns expressed by a variety of groups and individuals as recently as a week or two before the end of December, water and wastewater agencies throughout the southern California region appear to have experienced few, if any, problems related to the rollover into the year 2000.

In mid-December, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) issued a report saying that 30 to 40 percent of the nation's water agencies were not ready for Y2K. That report fueled numerous rumors as well as other alarming stories in the news media.

*(Continued on next page)*

The dire predictions not only failed to materialize, but most agencies report that the only thing unusual about New Year's Eve was that it was even quieter than a normal weekend evening.

Most experts and observers, alike, however, acknowledge that the extensive (and often expensive) preparations made for the occasion were anything but wasted. There were numerous computer problems that had to be fixed or real problems would have occurred. Clearly, those problems were fixed.

Y2K preparations will also help many agencies better respond to other kinds of emergencies and natural disasters in the future.

As one water official observed, "Y2K was more like Y-okay."

## **People make water news**

Sharon Lien, a member of the public affairs staff at Orange County Water District (OCWD), has won the Edith Stevens Groundwater Education Award. The annual honor was established in 1997 to honor an individual who has demonstrated a high degree of dedication to groundwater education as an effective way to protect this precious resource. Lien is manager of OCWD's annual Children's Drinking Water Festival, the largest and most successful event of its kind in the country.

Thomas E. Lutz, mayor pro tem of Santa Ana, has been seated as the newest member of the OCWD board of directors. Lutz has extensive experience with water issues, including service on the board as well as the executive committee of Orange County Sanitation District.

Three officers of the OCWD board of directors have been reappointed for the year 2000. They include Irv Pickler, president; Lawrence Kraemer, Jr., first vice president; and John Fonley, second vice president.

Mojave Water Agency has elected new board officers. George Parker is the new president; Beverly Lowry, vice president; Scott Weldy, secretary; and Richard Hall, treasurer.

