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- Main
- Second Front
- Business
- Classified
- Sports
- Valley Life
- Have Your Say

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Water district plans ahead

By: Alisha Semchuck



PALMDALE - If water supplies were interrupted because of a future drought, an earthquake that damages delivery or storage facilities, a regional power outage or a toxic spill, Palmdale Water District officials have developed plans to persevere.

Ratepayers would still receive supplies.

The agency's strategy is detailed in the Water Shortage Contingency Planning that board members approved at a special meeting Wednesday night when they unanimously adopted a resolution for implementation of the agency's 2015 Urban Water Management Plan.

Lauren Everett, a water resource project manager with Kennedy/Jenks Consultants, a Pasadena-based engineering firm, reviewed the document draft with the water board.

"What is an Urban Water Management Plan?" Everett asked before answering her own question.

It provides a general framework for long-term planning, Everett said, noting that the plan must be submitted to state officials by July 1.

It offers urban water supply managers as well as the general public "a broad perspective on a number of water supply issues," the document draft stated.

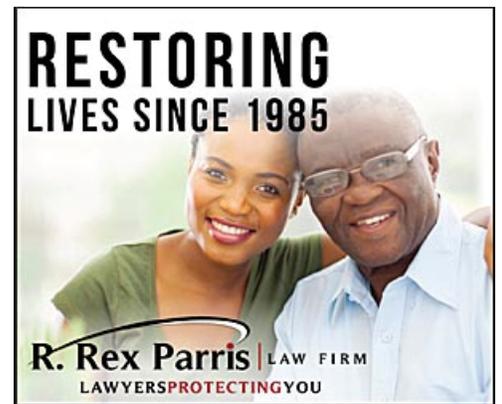
"It is not a substitute for project-specific planning documents" and was not intended for that purpose, when the California Legislature mandated it with passage of the Urban Water Management Planning Act of 1983.

The Legislature ordered the plan to have a section dedicated to describing opportunities for exchanges or water transfers on a short-term of long-term basis.

In the 1983 legislation, an urban water supplier is defined as a public or private entity that provides water for municipal purposes, either directly or indirectly to more than 3,000 customers, or supplies more than 3,000 acre-feet annually. An acre-foot equals 325,851 gallons, the amount consumed in the average Antelope Valley single-family household in a year.

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The legislation requires water supply planning to span a period of 20 years into the future, which would take the plan to 2035. However, Everett told water board members "The district went longer, (to) 25 years." That takes the agency to 2040.

The legislation also requires the plan to be reassessed and updated every five years, Everett said.

The resolution that board members passed states that the California Water Code requires water agencies to plan for shortages of up to 50%. The agency's plan is consistent with the Water Code and follows guidelines provided by the state Department of Water Resources Urban Drought Guidebook.

The last update of the agency's plan was due at the end of 2015, but the Legislature granted a six-month extension to provide time for water suppliers to respond to state Senate Bill X7-7, which requires water retailers to enact plans that reduce consumption by 20%, by the year 2020. It also required them to reach 15% reduction by 2015.

The agency's plan considers the current and projected population figures determined by using information from the Southern California Association of Governments, a regional council comprised of Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange and Imperial counties.

Everett said SCAG, as the regional council is called, projected 157,000 people living within the agency's service area by 2040. That's roughly the current population for all of Palmdale - east and west sides of the city.

According to Everett, "the 2008 SCAG projections were made during the high growth period."

Future water demands will grow at approximately the same rate as the population growth, Everett said.

SBX7-7 calculates baseline water use at 231 gallons per capita daily, Everett noted. The 2015 target was to bring the baseline down to 208 gallons per capita daily.

The 2020 target is 185 gallons per capita daily. And actual use in 2015 was 128 gallons per capita daily, Everett said.

The agency has already met its 2015 and 2020 targets, she noted.

By continuing existing methods of conservation, water district officials can ensure compliance by the 2020 deadline, she added.

Those methods include the Cash for Grass customer rebate program along with other rebates which encourage district customers to exchange existing fixtures like toilets for low-flow toilets, and appliances like clothes washers for appliances that save water, as well as budget-based tiered water rates.

Everett went over the district's 2020 Water Supply Portfolio - the resources depended upon for water supplies.

The largest contributor would be imported water from the State Water Project, in this area called the California Aqueduct. In 2020, 13,200 acre-feet or 35% of the supply is expected to come from that resource, based on a chart Everett displayed.

Then 6,280 acre-feet, or 17% will be pumped from groundwater.

"The amount of groundwater is based on the stipulated judgment," Everett said, referring to the settlement agreed on by litigants in the Antelope Valley groundwater court case, that dragged on for nearly 17 years, and ended in December.

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The amount of groundwater "will be reduced in the future," according to Everett. Another 17%, or 6,200 acre-feet will be imported in a water transfer from Butte County in Northern California.

The agency stands to get 5,000 acre-feet, or 13%, in water credits from groundwater return flow, meaning some type of recharge to the water table.

Local surface water, runoff from the San Gabriel Mountains into Littlerock Reservoir, will contribute 4,000 acre-feet, or 11%, and recycled water - wastewater treated to the tertiary level from the sanitation plant - will amount to 2,500 acre-feet, or 7%, Everett said.

The amount of "recycled water almost doubles," Everett said. And, she emphasized, a single dry year "greatly reduces the amount of imported water available." That water comes from the runoff of melting snow in the Northern Sierras. In years when precipitation is negligible, so is the runoff up north.

A highlight of the plan, according to Everett, in a multiple dry year, the agency should be "able to overcome supply shortages."

Peter Thompson II, the agency's deputy Water and Energy Resource director, told board members that the staff recommends adopting of the plan with two corrections - "how we deal with our groundwater, how it is disinfected and delivered into the system (and) the naming convention for the groundwater recharge and recovery (project)."

No members of the public showed up to offer comments during the public hearing portion of the water district meeting, and General Manager Dennis LaMoreaux said the document was put out for public review, but the water district "received no comments from the public" during the review period.

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