

IWVWD General Manager's Column
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“Progressing Toward a Groundwater Sustainability Plan”

By Don Zdeba

As we prepare to close the books on 2017 and look forward to a new year, I would like to reflect on some significant events that occurred this past year related to local water issues.

Perhaps the most significant event involved the evolution of the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA). The IWVGA was initially formed in 2016 through a Joint Powers Agreement to comply with the requirement of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), landmark legislation enacted in 2014. SGMA provides a framework for sustainable management of groundwater supplies by local authorities with a limited role for state intervention only if necessary to protect the resource. The IWVGA Board consists of elected voting representatives of Kern County, Inyo County, San Bernardino County, the City of Ridgecrest, and the Indian Wells Valley Water District (IWVWD) and appointed non-voting representatives from the Navy and Bureau of Land Management.

The IWVGA has developed an organizational structure to involve local stakeholders in the development of a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). Basins such as the Indian Wells Valley that are considered to be in critical overdraft must develop a GSP by January 31, 2020. Initial appointees to a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) were approved at the April 2017 IWVGA Board meeting followed by appointees to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) in July. The Board selected Stetson Engineers as the Water Resource Manager in August. Stetson has been tasked with developing the GSP with input from the PAC and TAC. An application for Proposition 1 grant funding to assist with development of the GSP was submitted in November. The Department of Water Resources is expected to announce successful applicants in mid to late January.

Progress was also made this past year on significant studies that have the potential to help shape the GSP. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) began work in May on a study to determine where the basin receives recharge and quantify an average annual recharge value, a key component of our water balance equation. The study, being funded jointly by the USGS along with grant monies awarded to Kern County, is expected to be completed in 2018. A local partnership consisting of Coso Operating Co., Meadowbrook Dairy, Mojave Pistachios, and IWVWD, has submitted an application for Prop. 1 funds for a Brackish Groundwater Feasibility Study that includes a pilot scale test to treat local brackish water at an economically feasible cost. The study presents a rather unique situation for inland brackish water treatment because there are two potential customers for the resulting concentrate from reverse osmosis treatment. Though technically still a local source and not “new” water, it could be used in applications currently using potable water thus using our groundwater resources more efficiently and effectively.

Lastly, funding is coming together from the Danish government, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Department of Water Resources, and local agencies to support Stanford University's Groundwater Architecture Project. The project involves aerial geophysical surveys using SkyTEM of three California basins: Butte County, San Luis Obispo County, and Indian Wells Valley. The SkyTEM survey for the Indian Wells Valley basin was completed in November. The data collected has been provided to a company named Ramboll for integration and development of a hydrogeological conceptual model. A group led by Stanford will use the results of the three basin surveys to develop a best practice for constructing robust geostatistical hydrogeological conceptual models based on existing data and supported by the new geophysical data collected by SkyTEM. The work by the Stanford team will yield additional knowledge from the survey results to describe uncertainties thereby further refining the conceptual model.

In retrospect, there has been much progress made in 2017 and we can look forward to the results yielded from these studies helping to form the foundation on which the GSP will be built. Kern County maintains a website with information pertaining to SGMA and the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. You can follow progress at www.kerncounty.com/WaterResources.aspx#.VvAN6OIrLct. Also, be sure to "like" and regularly visit the District's Facebook page (IWW Water District) for information and updates on local and state water issues.

On behalf of the Board and staff of Indian Wells Valley Water District, I extend wishes for a joyous holiday season and a prosperous, healthy and happy New Year.