

Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance

Last year the Governor issued a directive calling for a twenty percent reduction in per capita water use by the end of the year 2020. We have been informed by the Department of Water Resources that they will not approve bringing water from outside our valley unless we have a plan in place to achieve the Governor's directive.

The professional geologists and certified hydrogeologists that make up the Technical Advisory Committee of the IWV Water Management Group concur that significantly more water is being used within our valley than is being replenished. This is supported by recent work done in the AB303 Report and the Groundwater Flow Model. To manage the water resources of this Valley in a responsible manner, the City Council in early 2007 approved an MOU with the District to develop a Water Efficient Landscape ordinance for NEW development within the city.

The proposed ordinance was developed with input from a citizen's advisory committee comprised of diversified elements of the community. On this committee were a developer, a realtor, a landscape contractor, garden club members, representatives from the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce, East Kern Resource Conservation District, IWV Cooperative Groundwater Management Group, and citizens at large. With the input from the citizen's advisory committee, Water Management Group, Inc. drafted the ordinance. Water Management Group, Inc. is a consultant firm selected jointly by the City and the Water District. Their services are paid for by the Water District.

Also, water efficient landscape requirements do not impair growth. Las Vegas, Mesa Arizona, and Albuquerque are desert communities with water efficient landscape requirements and have in recent years enjoyed phenomenal growth.

The City is required to adopt the State model landscape ordinance by January 1, 2010 or adopt its own landscape ordinance that is at least as effective. The proposed ordinance is more effective because it covers all new development, not just new development with landscape in excess of 2,500 sq feet. Further, the proposed ordinance is much simpler to interpret, understand, and therefore enforce than the State model ordinance.

The proposed Water Efficient Landscape ordinance is only part of the solution to managing our water resources responsibly. The District's Water Management Committee has been tasked with finding measures and incentives for addressing existing landscape. The District Board of Directors, at its recent annual workshop, stated that "all options are on the table" for new programs and incentives targeting existing landscape. Also, the District is working on the treatment of brackish water, a water banking project, and alternative supplies from outside our valley. However, conservation is the single most important and the least costly piece of the long term solution to providing for a future with sustainable water resources for the citizens of the Indian Wells Valley.