

IWVWD General Manager's Column  
March 18, 2019

## **“Going Down the Rabbit Hole”**

**By Don Zdeba**

Alice: “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

Cheshire Cat: “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”

Alice: “I don't much care where –”

Cheshire Cat: “Then it doesn't matter which way you go.”

The saying “down the rabbit hole” refers to entering into a situation or beginning a process or journey that is particularly strange, problematic, difficult, complex, or chaotic, especially one that becomes increasingly so as it develops or unfolds. That could apply to our valley's groundwater situation and, unlike Alice in her exchange with the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's “Alice in Wonderland”, the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA) does care where we go from here.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 (SGMA) requires the Indian Wells Valley groundwater basin must be managed by a Department of Water Resources approved Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) by January 31, 2020, ten months from now. Simply stating the issue, annual natural recharge into the basin is now widely acknowledged to be 7,650 acre-feet per year (an acre-foot is approximately 326,000 gallons) while current groundwater pumping is almost four times that. In addition to meeting the needs of Indian Wells Valley Water District customers, groundwater pumping within the basin supports over 1,000 private domestic wells, the community of Inyokern, the Navy, Searles Valley Minerals, and agricultural operations, both large commercial and small family farms. Bringing the basin to a condition of sustainability presents a challenge akin to untying a Gordian knot. How do we acquire supplemental water sources to address the deficit between pumping and recharge? How much water is actually in storage within our aquifer and can we afford to continue to withdraw at current rates while implementing the plan? What is a reasonable and beneficial use of our water resources? Can we continue to grow as a community? What additional opportunities exist to conserve water? How much is all of this going to cost? Who is going to pay? These are just a sampling of the questions the IWVGA and Stetson Engineers, the Water Resource Manager, are addressing. I can, however, assure you progress is being made and the Groundwater Authority is focused on having a draft GSP available for review and comment by summer.

When the draft is released, the Groundwater Authority will be relying on input from the Authority's committees, the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) as well as input from the public at large. The plan that results will affect everyone who resides within the Indian Wells Valley as well as Searles Valley. As such, I encourage you to get involved. Attend meetings of the Groundwater Authority, the PAC and TAC. If you are unable to attend, Groundwater Authority meetings, held at 10:00 am on the third Thursday of each month in City Council chambers, are streamed live on YouTube and recorded and posted in the Media Vault on the City's website,

<https://ridgecrest-ca.gov>. TAC and PAC meetings are the first Thursday of each month, at 1:00 pm and 6:00 pm, respectively. Audio recordings and meeting notes of the PAC and TAC meetings are available on the Groundwater Authority's website, [www.iwvga.org](http://www.iwvga.org).

IWVWD, as one of the five voting members of the IWVGA, plays a significant role in both shaping and implementing the GSP. We have partnered with other stakeholders to fund two recent significant studies; the Brackish Groundwater Feasibility Study and the Stanford Groundwater Architecture Project (GAP), both of which I have mentioned in previous columns. These studies will assist in answering some of the questions I posed earlier and contribute to development of the plan.

As a side note, IWVWD wishes to acknowledge our customers' contribution toward conserving our groundwater resources. In June 2016, the Board of Directors voted to submit a voluntary 20% conservation rate to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). Since that time, we have achieved a 19.9% decrease in water consumption, compared to 2013, the pre-drought baseline year established by the SWRCB.

IWVWD has information on local, regional and statewide issues on its Facebook page (IWV Water District) and our website, [www.iwvwd.com](http://www.iwvwd.com), has a wealth of information about the District. I encourage you to visit both.