

Part IV: Los Angeles water—the soft path

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Editor's Note: This is the final article in a four-part series that has examined the sources and infrastructure of Los Angeles' water. The other three articles, "A journey down the aqueduct," "From pueblo to city," and "Los Angeles' other water sources" can be found in the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2000 Newsletters.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), in its 2000 Urban Water Management Plan, sets a goal of meeting the challenges of growth by "pursuing cost-effective water conservation and recycling projects to increase supply reliability." This focus on wringing more water from existing water supplies is the theme that underwrote the protection of Mono Lake. In addition, DWP's positive experience with water use efficiency is proving to other water agencies that the so-called soft path—conserving and reclaiming rather than damming and diverting water—is equivalent to finding new supplies.

How is it possible that Los Angeles can expect to meet the bulk of its growth needs from conservation and reclamation? Annual water consumption in Los Angeles today is approximately 640,000 acre feet (AF) (one acre-foot equals 326,000 gallons). By the year 2020, the City expects to increase its water use to 800,000 AF. In the 1980s DWP's customers averaged a 2.1% growth in demand each year. Now, DWP expects the average annual increase in demand for water over the next twenty years will be 1.3%. Along with improved management of current water supplies and the City's groundwater basins, DWP forecasts that with continued improvements in water use efficiency there will be enough water available to the City to meet the 20-year needs of residents, business and industry, and government.

Water Recycling

Over the next 20 years, DWP expects to increase its water supply with 74,000 AF of recycled water. Of that total amount, 42,000 AF will be used for recharging groundwater basins with highly treated water from local sewage treatment plants and nearly 32,000 AF will be used for



Committee board members and staff on a tour of the East Valley Water Reclamation Project with DWP.

irrigation, industry, and seawater intrusion barrier purposes.

The importance of reusing wastewater from sewage treatment plants lies in the nature of water. There is no new water. Yet, the wastewater stream is growing by leaps and bounds. It makes sense to reuse a source of water that is increasing—if it can be done safely. And, therein lies the challenge. As scientists improve their knowledge about health risks from recycled water, Federal and State regulatory agencies must add new rules or tighten old ones to ensure safety standards. As scientists learn more about effective water treatment, the cost of treatment is going down.

The Mono Lake Committee has made the challenge of turning recycled water into a safe water supply a high priority. The Committee will use its experience to help target federal and state dollars

toward Los Angeles reclamation and conservation projects. Now the focus is on helping Los Angeles and other water agencies secure the funds that are needed to provide treatment. The Committee will also use its experience in education and outreach to help the public understand the relative risks associated with recycled water in order to make informed choices about public investments in water reclamation and conservation.

Water Conservation

Over the next 20 years, DWP also expects to use conservation measures to meet a substantial portion of increases in Los Angeles' water demands. One of the most successful conservation measures in Los Angeles has been the Ultra-Low-Flush Toilet (ULF) Replacement Program, which offers rebates and direct distribution of toilets by community-based organizations. Over \$83 million of its total \$100 million investment in conservation since 1990 has been used to install almost 900,000 ULF toilets in the City. DWP will continue to distribute these toilets and it estimates current water savings will double to over 66,000 AF per year by 2020.

Since the early 1900s when the City installed water meters, causing a 30% reduction in water use, water conservation in Los Angeles has come to its citizens through regulations, technology, financial incentives, and education.

- Between 1988 and 1999, the City adopted regulations requiring water-efficient landscaping in new construction, restructuring the price of water to encourage conservation, and mandating the installation of ULF toilets in single-family homes prior to resale.
- The City has promoted conservation technologies, such as ULF toilets and showerheads, and more recently, toilet flappers and water and energy-efficient washers for which there is a

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High Efficiency Rebate Program at DWP. For landscaping there is a pilot program evaluating the effectiveness of evapotranspiration devices and a proposed program using a weather-based irrigation timer, which controls water application based upon actual local weather conditions.

- DWP gives financial incentives to residential, commercial, and industrial customers to retrofit their plumbing. The Department is developing a pilot program to provide city facilities with loans for water conservation incentives to commercial and industrial customers. DWP will also seek to enhance the incentives in its pricing structure.
- To support the statewide conservation effort, DWP is active in the California Urban Water Conservation

Council. This Council of agencies, environmental organizations—including the Mono Lake Committee—and water-related businesses monitors implementation of fourteen Best Management Practices for conservation.

- In addition to the programs described above, DWP is part of a regional effort to increase the capture and reuse of rain water on residential, school, and business sites.

Over the last decade the Mono Lake Committee has played an important role in DWP's conservation program. The Committee has helped support water conservation and recycling in many different ways—from helping to raise state and federal funds to educating inner

city youth through the Outdoor Experiences program. It is our goal to help Los Angeles develop even better and more aggressive water conservation programs in the future.

Lastly, DWP has done an excellent job on conservation in recent years—allowing the protection of Mono Lake without transferring water demands to other areas—and the Committee knows that Los Angeles is only beginning to scratch the surface of what is possible. 🐾

Frances Spivy-Weber is the Committee's Executive Director of Policy. She is planning a weekend ice-breaking canoe tour in January.

Free Drawing winners!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the free drawing and to the wonderful sponsors who made the event possible. We are happy to announce this year's winners....

Mono Lake Committee Field Seminar gift certificates go to Steve Brown of Mansfield, Pennsylvania and Mark Lewis of San Diego. A Mono Lake Library will be sent to David Livingston of Cayucos and Fred and Marianne Jacobs of Petaluma. Linda Petrilla of Placentia, Jack Robbins of Berkeley, and Eugene and Rita Russell of N. Highlands won Obata Artwork Packages. Mono Lake Gift Packs go to Ronald Orozco of Mammoth Lakes, Bruce Rorty of Palos Verdes, and Carol Wiley of Victorville.

The Flyfishing Package donated by The Trout Fitter in Mammoth Lakes was won by Ron Starr of Mohave Valley, Arizona. Watersaving showerheads donated by Whedon Products were won by Yvonne Israel-O'Hare of San Francisco and Richard Webster of San Diego. A black and white print by Richard



Photo by Arya Degenhardt

Event Coordinator Shannon Nelson and Membership Coordinator Brett Pyle chose this year's lucky winners.

Knepp goes to Bill and Pam Herrera of Walnut Creek.

Diane Harlan of Dublin won the Birdwatching Kit donated by Eagle Optics and the Mono Lake Committee. Ed Grat of Santa Barbara won gear donated by Patagonia and REI. The Friends of the River Whitewater Adventure was won by Adelia Lichau of Petaluma. Del Hodges of Sonora won the Mono Basin Weekend with donations from Murphey's Motel, The Lee Vining Market, and the Mono Lake

Committee. Joel Fithian of Santa Barbara won a weekend at Sorensen's Resort in Hope Valley. The Mammoth Getaway weekend with donations from The Royal Pines Resort and The Chart House was won by Ed Kern of Redwood City. Sara Calhoun of Martinez won a June Lake Weekend with donations from Reverse Creek Lodge and the Mono Lake Committee.

A great package of deluxe camping gear donated by Wilsons Eastside Sports was won by D.S. and B.J. Young of Sparks, Nevada. Gordon Frankie of Berkeley now has a 2000–2001 ski pass to Mammoth Mountain donated by Mammoth California. Dr. Carl Hopkins of Los Angeles won two round-trip airline tickets on Southwest Airlines. And Chester Kaczanowski of Dearborn Hts, Michigan now has a signed Ansel Adams Lithograph, donated by The Mono Inn at Mono Lake and The Ansel Adams Gallery.

The funds raised from this event go to help restore the Mono Basin, protect this natural resource, and educate people about Mono Lake. Thank you for your support! 🐾