

California Water Conservation in the Works

by Frances Spivy-Weber

Recent reports about California's future water supply emphasize water conservation. Urban water agencies that in the mid-1980s said it would be hard to save one million acre feet (maf) of water statewide now acknowledge they are saving over a million acre feet in Southern California alone, largely through changes in fixtures inside the home. The next two to three maf of savings lies in reducing outdoor water use and water used in the commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors.

The state of California has challenging urban and agricultural conservation goals that it will only achieve through a coordinated local, regional, and statewide campaign targeted toward those who shape public opinion, including city and county elected officials, chambers of commerce, commercial builders, outdoor landscape vendors, and the media. This means, among other actions, letting the price of water encourage waste reduction, enacting new state and national water efficiency standards, and providing financial incentives for low-flow and waterless appliances.

Most of the investments in water conservation will be cost effective locally, but there are reasons to look beyond that as well. Reducing new demands for water gives local water agencies time to develop other local supplies, and can enable communities and the state to restore water to the environment.

Future generations will judge today's water leaders on how well their water supply strategy anticipated future risks—earthquakes, climate change, and drought—while meeting the water needs of people, the economy, and the environment. Based on what we know today, those leaders who have a water conservation strategy will undoubtedly get high marks.

Following are reports on California's water future:

The **California Water Plan 2005** (www.waterplan.water.ca.gov) concludes that the state can meet its projected urban, environmental, and agricultural water needs in 2030 if water users adopt modest conservation measures currently available. See www.waterplay.water.ca.gov/docs/cwpu2005/highlights/Highlights-web.pdf for a summary of what water is available statewide.

In **Water for Growth: California's New Frontier**, the Public Policy Institute of California (www.ppic.org) finds that there are plenty of opportunities for balancing the supply and demand of water, but the state will have to play a role in creating the right incentives at the local level. In addition, local and regional agencies will have to make sure they develop those conservation, recycling, and groundwater storage options.

The **Investment Strategy for California Water**, coordinated by the Planning & Conservation League (www.pcl.org) projects an estimated state need of 3–3.4 maf of

additional water to meet future water supply demands, and more than this amount can be supplied from urban and agricultural water conservation, recycled water, groundwater treatment, and brackish water desalination.

In **Waste Not, Want Not: The Potential for Urban Water Conservation in California**, the Pacific Institute (www.pacinst.org) estimates that one-third of California's current urban water use—more than 2.3 maf—can be saved with existing technology. At least 85% of this can be saved at costs below the price of tapping into new sources of supply.

In **Energy Down The Drain: The Hidden Costs of California's Water Supply**, the Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org) and Pacific Institute underscore the value of urban and agricultural water conservation to reduce energy use and energy bills. The single largest user of energy in California is the State Water Project (SWP), which accounts for 2–3% of all electricity consumed in California. When water conservation in Southern California reduces the need for importing water through the SWP, the state saves money and energy statewide. ❖

Frances Spivy-Weber is the Committee's Executive Director of Policy. She will be working with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his appointees to make sure the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power maintains its role as water conservation leader in the region.



Today Los Angeles is home to almost 4 million people and is expected to add 368,000 people over the next 25 years. Per capita consumption of water has dropped from 180 gallons per day in the 1980s to 155 gallons per day on average since 1996.