

Water on Tap: Truckee Meadows Water Authority

October 15, 2015

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by Eric Wolfe

Photos by John Storey

Reno's water begins high in the Sierras, but it takes plenty of human ingenuity before that water reaches the tap. And for that, thank highly-skilled IBEW 1245 members employed by Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

The water comes from Lake Tahoe and other lakes and reservoirs in the Truckee River watershed. On the river's approach to Reno, some of the water is diverted and carried by flumes to three power houses that can generate up to 6.7 megawatts.



John Stewart at Verdi Powerhouse

“That energy is really important for TMWA [pronounced TUM-wah] because it helps offset their energy costs to treat and distribute water here in Reno, Sparks and Washoe County,” says John Stewart, an IBEW hydro operator at Verdi Powerhouse.

The on-going drought curtailed that power production for the summer, Stewart says, but over the past two years TMWA's powerhouses have completely offset the costs of treating and pumping water—savings that get passed on to the TMWA's customers.

Contrary to what you might think, curtailing power production makes more work for hydro operators like Stewart.

“We're taking advantage of the opportunity to do a lot of maintenance projects you're not able to do when there's water in the river,” he says.

Stewart joined IBEW in 2014 “after seeing things in the past that made me want to be part of this union's future—just how well they've done to negotiate our benefits, our pay increases.”

“I know it’s really hard out there, and people are struggling to get raises, and I feel that we’re treated 100% fairly and that’s due in part to the representation of our union.”

The Flumes

When it comes to flumes, Roy Callahan is TMWA’s go-to guy.

In the mid-1970s, while he was in college, Callahan spent summers as a temporary worker helping rebuild flumes for Sierra Pacific Power. Ownership of the water system, including the flumes, passed to TMWA in 2000, but Callahan is still the guy who knows these flumes better than anyone.



Pipe Inspector Roy Callahan, left, and IBEW Shop Steward Chip Chadwick take a look at the new flume and discuss the changes that have occurred since Callahan first worked on the flume system as a temporary worker in the 1970s.

As a pipe inspector for TMWA, he oversees contractors at pump stations or wherever pipe is being put in the ground. When it became clear that the flume conveying water to Fleish Powerhouse needed replacing, TMWA turned to Callahan to oversee the work.

For generations the Fleish Flume has run alongside the mountain, visible to travelers along Interstate 80. But winters are hard on wooden structures and TMWA decided to bore a tunnel and run the new flume through a 1500-foot section of the mountain, protecting it from the weather.

Callahan takes obvious pride in getting the details right on a structure that should last for generations. “There’s a lot more to it than just building a box,” he says. Proper measurements are key to making sure that the turns aren’t too steep and that you don’t create unwanted lateral pressure as the water courses its way to the powerhouse.



Callahan and Chadwick talk shop at the site of the new flume. The old flume can be seen in the background.

“You want to make it nice and easy and gradual,” he says.

About TMWA, Callahan has nothing but praise, saying he likes the agency’s vision and the way it’s managed. “We’ve got a great group of guys working ... It’s a pleasure to come to work and do what I’m doing.”

Callahan first learned about the IBEW from his father, who was a machinist at Tracy Power Plant.

“He talked about the security, and the camaraderie with other union members,” Callahan recalls. “This is a right-to-work state, so people have a choice (about belonging to the union), but to choose not to belong doesn’t make any sense to me. The more members the stronger you become.”

The Treatment

IBEW members don’t just wrangle the Truckee River into the hydro plant, they’re waiting downstream to tame that river into something you can welcome into your house. Ted Saxe is foreman of a four-man crew that runs the Chalk Bluff Water Treatment plant 24-hours a day in 12-hour shifts.



Ted Saxe, water treatment foreman, monitors treatment processes from the control room.

“We take water from the Truckee River, we clean it up and make it drinkable,” says Saxe. In a process known as flocculation, particles are coaxed out of the water, which is then gravity fed through filters “to really clean it up.”

A disinfectant—sodium hypochlorite—is added to meet legal requirements, but care is taken to not over-chlorinate, says Saxe.

“We take pride in what we do. We strive to put out a good product, even as far as how it tastes. Getting the water to the people with good pressure and good quality is the main thing. We take a lot of pride in that.”

Saxe started at Sierra Pacific Power in 1985 as a meter reader, moved to the water side of the business in 1992, and stayed the course when TMWA took over in 2000. He says the IBEW helps TMWA employees get “a livable wage” and helps make sure that operators are recognized for the important role they play at the agency.

The Wells



Sheryl Houlihan and Mike Witt in front of the 8,000-gallon “bleach tanks” that store the sodium hypochlorite used to disinfect the water.

Some days you’ll find Sheryl Houlihan and Mike Witt at one of MTWA’s three treatment plants, taking deliveries, repairing lines, or otherwise maintaining four 8,000-gallon tanks of chemicals. On other days you might find them taking those chemicals to wherever they are needed.

On July 23, when the Utility Reporter was visiting, Houlihan and Witt were at the Chalk Bluff plant, getting ready to head out to a well that has been out of service for five years. With the Truckee shrunken by drought, TMWA has relied increasingly on a system of ground water wells to quench their customers’ thirst. The number of wells in TMWA’s service area more than doubled after the recent merger with the Washoe County Department of Water Resources.

Fortunately, the workforce has also been expanded to deal with the extra workload. Houlihan came over from Sierra Pacific Power way back when; Witt came from Washoe County at the beginning of the year.

Houlihan says ground water is much easier to treat than river water because there’s no sediment to contend with. “Basically, with the wells, we add the bleach and that’s it,” she says. The main issue is to make sure they get the dose just right.

Witt hired on in 2005 at Washoe County, where his interests were represented by an association that included management. Wages lagged there, and they had to take pay cuts in recent years, so he welcomed the move to TMWA at the beginning of the year, saying they offered the incoming workers “great positions.”

Houlihan has been a member of IBEW 1245 for nearly 23 years. To her, the union means equality:

“It means I’m getting the same wages as everybody else. I don’t have to go negotiate. I know you guys are taking care of that for me. And that’s huge.”

Emergency Response



TMWA crew responds to an unexpectedly serious water pipe leak. Working on the crew were Steve Welch, Fitter; Gerald Garza, Operator; and Greg Bates, Foreman.
The call came in as “urgent” so Greg Bates and his crew cut their lunch short and headed out.

“It’s only a three-quarter inch water line,” said Bates, surveying the damage. “It shouldn’t have been bad.”

But it was bad, and if you’re not ready for the unexpected then brother, you’re in the wrong business. The leak was in a giant sand pocket.

“Everything just imploded, everything fell in, like a big sink hole,” Bates said. There was a gas main adjacent to the hole, and a gas service, and some big cement pillars, adding urgency to the task at hand.

They started vacuuming out water, but the “vac” truck filled up before they could get down to the valve to shut off the service. As a backup they got two pumps going and waited for the vac truck to return.



“It’s just like beach sand,” said Bates, keeping a wary eye on the hole. “With the water in it, it just flows.” He estimated the little $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch leak could turn into a 12-hour job. Not ideal, but these guys take it as it comes, and stay on it until it’s done. Because that’s just what they do.

In quieter moments you might find Bates rustling up members for the monthly union meeting. Like other unit chairs, he knows you have to go the extra mile to publicize the meetings and encourage members to attend.

In the days before each meeting Bates tacks up posters on all the bulletin boards, puts additional copies on every work table in the ready room, makes verbal announcements there as well, and sends out emails to the entire bargaining unit. He’s been a shop steward for 20 years and thinks the value of the union is pretty obvious:

“We’ve kept people from losing their jobs on several occasions. So there’s power there.” The union brings power to the bargaining table, too, which are a couple of good reasons why Bates plans to keep posting those meeting notices.

The Money



Service Utility Worker Amanda Filut checks on a transmitter at a residence.

You have to be quick to keep up with Amanda Filut. As a service utility worker, she can read customer meters from her vehicle, thanks to transmitters located on customer meters. She also updates the transmitters when needed (but she has to get out of the truck to do that.)

No business survives without cash, and the meter is where the skilled services provided by IBEW Local 1245 members get converted into revenue to keep TMWA afloat.

Filut is a seven-year IBEW member and currently serves on the union’s benefits committee.

“In the beginning I had no interest in doing it, but I was asked to do it and I said, ‘Why not?’”

It’s a chance to learn more about the union—and do her part to defend the benefits the union has negotiated for the members.

TMWA Customer Feedback Helps Outline 2016-2035 Water Resource Plan

Posted: Nov 09, 2015 9:41 PM PST <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, November 10, 2015 12:41 AM EST *Updated: Nov 09, 2015 9:41 PM PST* <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, November 10, 2015 12:41 AM EST

By Amanda Ketchledge

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Link to Video interview: <http://www.ktvn.com/story/30477426/tmwa-customer-feedback-helps-outline-2016-2035-water-resource-plan>



The Truckee Meadows Water Authority held an open house to gather public input on the updated 2016 - 2035 Water Resource Plan. At the first of five public meetings scheduled to get feedback from customers, experts discussed climate conditions and water management.

Dawn Costa lives in Spanish Springs and came to educate herself, after having concerns about water resources.

"I'm concerned about running out of water. I'm concerned about growth. I'm concerned about quality of water. I think it's all very important," said Costa.

TMWA says they have enough water resources to meet current and future demands during both drought and non-drought years.

"Because of everything we mapped out, strategically over these many years, we have a water supply sufficient to cover us for the next twenty, thirty, forty years," said John Erwin, Director of Natural Resources for TMWA.

Some customers expressed concern about how TMWA manages their surface and ground water resources.

"I just want to know where the water's coming from. I want to be assured that our wells won't be depleted," said Larry Thomas, from Spanish Springs.

John Enloe, the Operational Strategy Manager for TMWA said, "It gives us an opportunity to let them know really what's happening as far as their water supply goes."

Every five years, TMWA updates this plan looking out 20 years in order to ensure needs are met.

TMWA's 2016-2035 Water Resource Plan and Meeting Dates: http://tmwa.com/water_system/resources/2035wrp

76% of California Voters View Drought as “Extremely Serious,” New Poll Finds

Submitted by Pamela Martineau on Tue, 10/13/2015 - 9:00am

in

- [Conservation](#)
- [All](#)
- [Water News](#)



A far greater percentage of current California voters view the state’s drought as “extremely serious” as compared with voters in 1977 during the state’s last severe drought, according to a new poll commissioned by Save Our Water and the Field Research Corporation.

The poll was conducted through a partnership between [Save Our Water](#) – California’s official statewide conservation education program – and the [Field Research Corporation](#). It was designed to gauge [Californians’ attitudes](#) toward continued water conservation into fall and winter and their willingness to make permanent landscape changes.

Save Our Water sponsored two poll questions in the survey, which was conducted in late September and early October among 1,002 registered voters. The survey found near [universal support](#) for continued conservation and a strong willingness among Californians to make changes in their yards to cut back on water use.

"Water conservation concerns are up and there is a clear consensus among Californians that saving water continues to be important even as the state moves into the rainy season," said Mark DiCamillo, senior vice president of Field Research Corporation. "For Californians, saving water is starting to mean more than just emergency conservation and they are beginning to see the importance of making permanent changes to their water use - particularly outdoors."

According to the poll results, more than 95% of Californians polled said it was very or somewhat important for residents across the state to continue to reduce their use of water, both inside and outside their homes. Respondents also were asked how important they think it is for California homeowners to make permanent changes to their outdoor landscaping – whether the state remains in drought or not. More than 85% indicated they thought it was very or somewhat important to make permanent changes in their outdoor landscaping. Public support for conservation is critical as mandatory State Water Resources Control Board water use restrictions remains in place through February.

Save Our Water, which launched its statewide [“Fix It For Good”](#) public education campaign last month, is capitalizing on Californians' interest in fixing their landscapes for good by making fall landscaping a primary focus of the program.

“While raindrops may hit the windshield, the state remains in the strong grip of drought,” said Jennifer Persike, ACWA's deputy executive director for external affairs and member services. “Fall is the best time of year for Californians to rethink their yards and landscaping and Save Our Water is offering great tips and information on how to make landscaping more California-friendly.”

Other findings in the poll revealed that some 76% of current California voters view the drought as “extremely serious” as compared with 51% in 1977. The current percentage of 76% of voters viewing the drought as “extremely serious” is up from 66% who said the same in a May survey and 60% who viewed the drought that way in April 2014.

Large majorities also believe the state's residential water users (63%) and agricultural water users (54%) are doing their part to help the state get through the current drought. However, far fewer voters (38%) believe the same for the state's business and commercial water users.

A majority of voters (58%) also believe the drought is directly impacting themselves or their families.

The interviews were conducted by phone among English and Spanish speakers

Senate Holds Hearings on Drought Bills

Submitted by Josh Abel on Thu, 10/08/2015 - 2:05pm

in

- [Federal Relations](#)
- [Federal Affairs Committee](#)
- [Water News](#)



The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee today examined legislative proposals to mitigate the impacts of the drought that has crippled California and many communities throughout the West.

Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) in her opening remarks said “Everyone, especially those in California and throughout the West, knows that the effects of this long-lasting drought are devastating. But this is not just about California either. It is being felt across the Colorado River Basin, in the Pacific Northwest, and in Alaska – contributing to a terrible wildfire season this year.”

In her testimony, California Sen. Dianne Feinstein said, “This drought is the worst of my lifetime, and Senator Boxer and I are joined at the hip with our legislation.” Sen. Barbara Boxer said, “It’s time for congress to act but I won’t let legislation pass that reignites water wars.”

Rep. David Valadao, speaking on behalf of the House-passed legislation, said, “An important part of my bill is to help streamline the regulatory process and bring relief now.”

ACWA member Jeffrey Kightlinger, general manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, said “I encourage you to utilize measures from both bills that would provide better monitoring on a real-time basis, as we’ve learned good monitoring and good measurement, using sound science, will lead to better management and opportunities to safely capture water.”

Sarah Woolf, a member of the Westlands Water District Board of Directors, provided constructive suggestions -- crafted by a broad cross-section of local community leaders that included the mayor of Fresno and growers from all over the Central Valley -- that provide a unified set of concepts helpful for bridging the differences among the bills discussed today.

The legislative proposals examined by the committee were:

- [H.R. 2898](#), the Western Water and American Food Security Act;
- [S. 1894](#), the California Emergency Drought Relief Act;
- [S. 1936](#), the New Mexico Drought Preparedness Act.

Archived video, witness testimony, and Murkowski's opening statement from today's hearing is available on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee [website](#).

Ask the RGJ: Does NV law discourage drought innovation?



[Mark Robison](#), mrobison@rgj.com 10:55 a.m. PDT October 16, 2015



(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

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This week's questions are whether Nevadans can or should waste water — leave on a spigot, say — in order not to lose their water rights and whether Nevada water policy actually discourages water-saving innovation?

•**Short answer:** State law requires water be put to “beneficial use” or else rights can be taken away. Intentionally wasting water is prohibited. And, yes, Nevada law probably needs to be updated to encourage more water conservation — but a long process is required before losing water rights so innovators shouldn't worry too much.

Full question

David Barrett of Dedicated to You — a Reno greenhouse company specializing in organic and non-GMO plant production for the consumer, supplement and

pharmaceutical markets — wrote in to ask about Nevada’s “aging and primordial water laws.”

Dedicated to You’s greenhouse technology uses 80 percent less water than conventional agricultural methods, he says.

“One of the most frustrating aspects of Nevada is the use of water with respect to water rights. For example, water not being used can mean the loss of water access and usage,” Barrett wrote.

“Several months ago, we were looking for about 100 acres of land for our \$125 million indoor CEA (Controlled Environment Agriculture) project. The Realtor asked us how much water we intend to use. I gave him an estimate and claimed that we will use what we need, not more. The Realtor then responded that the water assigned to us must be used or our water access can be denied. He advised that we turn on the spigot and waste the water that we would not use so we maintain our water right usage!

“This was quite shocking to us especially when the wasted water could not be reclaimed and would evaporate to be totally lost. How does Nevada expect to recover from a severe drought with laws that do not encourage water conservation based on usage?”

This same issue had come up in an RGJ story last month looking at how much water is used by crops in Nevada. In it, Jay Davison of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension said, “The water seems to belong to you but really it belongs to the state of Nevada. So if I found a miracle alfalfa that uses half the water of the 4 acre-feet I’m allotted, then the state has the right to take those unused 2 acre-feet of water. That’s a problem — we have no incentive to save water.”

Full response

To learn more, I contacted Jo Ann Kittrell, spokeswoman for the Nevada Department of Conservation & Natural Resources.

She said every month, people forfeit or have their water rights canceled in Nevada because they are not putting them to beneficial use.

A few main water principles are written into Nevada law. One is that the oldest right to the use of water is the last to be cut off in times of shortage. Another is that water must be used beneficially or not at all. And a third is use your water rights or lose them.

“This system of laws was developed to assure that all the water was beneficially used,” Kittrell said. “However, the willful waste of water is absolutely prohibited. It is of concern that a Realtor advised the wasting of water as that is against state law.”

The idea behind somebody losing their water rights, she said, is that “whatever water is not needed should be freed up for the next person who wants to use water.”

If for five consecutive years, all or any part of underground water is not beneficially used for the purpose for which the right was acquired, that right can be canceled or forfeited “to the extent of the nonuse,” she said.

“Canceling” a right happens when someone gets a permit to develop a resource and didn’t get to the point of using the water beneficially in the time allotted. “Forfeiting” a right happens when you’ve already got water being put to beneficial use, but then you stop using all of it or using it beneficially.

But, Kittrell added, “the law also provides a method for applying for relief from the actual beneficial use requirement in order to avoid forfeiting the water right, which may include consideration of drought or whether the holder has demonstrated efficient ways of using the water for agricultural purposes, such as center-pivot irrigation.”

In the hypothetical case of the miracle alfalfa crop that uses half the water of a conventional crop, Kittrell said that people can apply for an extension to avoid forfeiture if they can demonstrate “efficient ways of using the water for agricultural purposes.” But eventually they must demonstrate the water is being used or forfeit all or part of their rights.

Nevada law says water belongs to the public. So when someone loses a water right, it reverts to the public and can then be appropriated to someone else or in another way.

Kittrell did say that a conundrum arises in basins where all water rights are spoken for and no new ones are being issued. Those rights become worth a lot of money and so nobody wants to lose them even if they aren’t using the full amount of water.

Water generally cannot be piped or trucked to another place legally, and so it might be secretly and illegally wasted so the water appears to be getting used.

“This issue begs the question ‘What’s the incentive for a water right holder to become more efficient and use less water if only to have their unused portion taken away?’ ” Kittrell wrote and then responded: “This may be the impetus for some changes to our water law, particularly in times of drought.”

Lake Tahoe's Water Level Remains Low

Posted: Oct 20, 2015 5:08 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, October 20, 2015 8:08 PM EDTUpdated: Oct 20, 2015 5:54 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, October 20, 2015 8:54 PM EDT

By Paul Nelson

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The water level at Lake Tahoe has slowly dropped, after four years of below-average winters. The lake's elevation is 1.13 feet below its natural rim of 6,223 feet above sea level.

"The Truckee River stopped flowing towards Reno about a year ago," Madonna Dunbar, Tahoe Water Supplier Association Executive Director said. "So, we've had some nice rain over the last couple of days. It might have brought it up a little bit but we are waiting for a big, wet winter."

The low lake level has changed the landscape along the shoreline, in some areas, including El Dorado Beach in South Lake Tahoe. The beach stretches more than 100 yards to the water's edge, concrete boat anchors stick out of the sand, and piers dead-end.

"I'm surprised just to see how low the water was, that's for sure," Brandon Yager said. "I know there hasn't been much snow. So, I know the skiing has been pretty rough."

Some residents say it is sad to see the lake in its current state, but are enjoying some new experiences because of it.

"We never took the walk that we discovered to take this year because it would've been on the lake bottom," Jeannie Purver said. "When you go to other beaches around the lake, you see things you've never seen because they were all underwater."

Purver says she has even noticed new plant growth, including wildflowers and grasses.

"One of my walks within the past month, I said 'I feel like I'm walking on someone's lawn,'" Purver said.

An average of 3.8 feet of water evaporates from Lake Tahoe, every year. October is typically has some of the highest evaporation in comparison to the water that drains into the lake. This month has been better than most Octobers, so far. While this has been an historic drought, the water level is still 1.6 feet higher than it's all-time low in 1992. The question is how long it will take to recover.

"It's taken a couple of years for the lake to drain, so it's going to take probably a couple years to come back up," Dunbar said.

Records show that it took five years for Lake Tahoe to increase six feet, after the drought of the 1970s. After the 1990s drought, it only took three years to gain eight feet of elevation on the lake. What happens at the end of the current drought depends on how much snow falls in the coming winters.

Don't let pipes freeze - free workshops (how-to video)



[Mark Robison](mailto:mrobison@rgj.com), mrobison@rgj.com 9:23 a.m. PDT October 21, 2015



Don't let frozen pipes happen to you.(Photo: AP file)

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Avoid costly mistakes by learning how to turn off your sprinkler system and protect pipes — inside and out — from the cold at three free winterization workshops.

Truckee Meadows Water Authority workshops will take place Wednesday Oct. 28, Tuesday Nov. 10 and Tuesday Nov. 17. The hour-long workshops start at 5:30 p.m. at TMWA's main office, 1355 Capital Blvd. in Reno.

To RSVP, e-mail conservation@tmwa.com or call 775-834-8005.

Can't make a workshop? View step-by-step instructions at tmwa.com/conservation/winterize or watch the video below.

Read or Share this story: <http://on.rgj.com/1RUIjLV>

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Can't make a workshop? View step-by-step instructions at tmwa.com/conservation/winterize or watch the video below. Read or Share this story: <http://on.rgj.com/1RUIjLV>

Water bills will creep up next year in L.A. because we've conserved so much



Water bills for DWP customers will rise about \$1.80 per month next year to offset a loss of revenue from L.A. residents' conservation efforts.

(Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

Matt Stevens and Alice Walton Contact Reporters

Under orders to slash their water use in the fourth year of a statewide drought, Los Angeles residents and businesses have largely risen to the challenge.

But this week, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power officials said that because its customers have done such a good job saving, the agency is short on revenue.

To help fill in the gap, the Board of Water and Power Commissioners approved a pass-through charge that will require an average customer to pay about \$1.80 more a month, beginning in 2016.

“We have no other way of recovering the revenue to maintain the system for our customers,” Neil Guglielmo, director of budget, rates and financial planning for the DWP, said Wednesday.

The DWP fell about \$111 million short of its revenue projection in the fiscal year that closed this summer, in part because Los Angeles residents and businesses reduced their water consumption about 10% more than expected, officials said.

[Open link](#)

The 18 billion gallons of unsold water left the utility about \$57 million in the hole. Officials say they need that money — about \$380 million in total — to cover “fixed costs” such as pipe repairs, aqueduct maintenance and continued operation of water-treatment facilities. A city ordinance allows the utility to recover those costs from customers using a so-called water revenue adjustment factor.

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Guglielmo emphasized that even with the rate adjustment, the average water-conscious customer is still saving money: about \$3.26 each month compared with fiscal year 2013-14. Back then, officials say, customers were using more water each month and paying for the added use.

“If they’ve conserved, they’re still going to save on their bill,” Guglielmo said.

The water agency has used its adjustment tool periodically since it was established in 1993 after another California drought. The commissioners last approved an adjustment in 2011, which took effect the following calendar year.

The DWP is [not the only water agency to struggle](#) with revenue shortages tied to conservation. Some water districts want to double their basic service charge. Others have implemented “drought surcharges” to help cover costs.

“When sales go down, you can end up in the red,” Ellen Hanak, director of the Water Policy Center of the Public Policy Institute of California, said in a previous interview. “It can be tricky in the near term.”

Heather Cooley, water program director of the Pacific Institute, said that even when demand for water decreases (as it has in L.A.), a utility’s fixed costs usually remain about the same. Those costs are then spread out among fewer units of water, making each gallon more expensive, even as a customer’s overall water bill goes down.

FOR THE RECORD:

DWP bills: In the Oct. 22 California section, an article about a planned rate increase for Los Angeles water customers quoted Pacific Institute water program director Heather Cooley as saying that the per-unit cost of water can rise when demand declines because a utility's operations and maintenance costs remain about the same and must be spread out across fewer units. Cooley referred to fixed costs in general.

 That paradox can be difficult for customers to “wrap their heads around,” Cooley said in a recent interview. “Then it becomes a problem of communication.”

Guglielmo said he and his team are constantly adjusting their revenue targets for future years and building conservation into their projections. It’s impossible to know for sure whether an adjustment will be necessary next year, but, Guglielmo said, “We hope we don’t have to use it.”

The 3.6% adjustment approved Tuesday expires at the end of 2016. But DWP officials have spent much of the last year advocating for a much [broader rate hike](#), which would change how customers are charged for water and increase a typical residential customer’s bill by about 3.4% each year for five years.

On Wednesday, DWP officials sent an email to customers promoting two online videos that make the case for the five-year rate hike. The videos have been part of the utility’s presentation to Angelenos since the summer.

The first explains the need to upgrade the city’s power infrastructure, while the second lays out the details of the rate proposal. By the end of the year, DWP representatives expect to have participated in 45 community presentations on the rate hikes.

Officials are expected to bring the five-year plan before the board by mid-December. It would require additional approvals before it could take effect as early as next spring.

In a statement, the DWP urged its customers to share the videos online using the hashtag #LADWP, but a search of #LADWP posts shows Angelenos complaining about power outages — and the recent pass-through water charge.

“#LADWP hikes rates because they aren't making enough revenue. We're saving water like we're supposed to,” one user tweeted. “U mad? I am.”

TMWA Meeting: Drought, GM Review, Customer Satisfaction and More

OCTOBER 21, 2015 BY [BOB CONRAD LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

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“We have plenty of water to meet the projected demand, going out to 2060.”

Today’s Truckee Meadows Water Authority Board of Directors covered a lot of ground with a bulk of the meeting focused on future efforts.

Drought Update and El Nino

A long-lingering question is whether and how the region will survive the drought. During public comment, Janet Phillips, president Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway said that ,“compared to where we were in ’92, you guys are in great shape.”

Phillips credited senior water rights and conservation planning efforts as testament to the area’s ability to survive drought years.

TMWA’s Bill Hauck said that an El Nino winter is looking likely. He said that he analyzed available data and said that above-average snowpack is anticipated this upcoming season.

Customer Satisfaction

TMWA’s customer satisfaction remains high. Sara Hart of Infosearch International said that TMWA’s satisfaction ratings among customers is “higher than what is seen typically.”

Overall customer satisfaction is up from 78 percent in 2002 to 92 percent in 2015, demonstrating a steady increase.

“You may have hit the ceiling (of positive ratings),” Hart said.

TMWA’s highest rating: maintaining an adequate water supply. The lowest rating — but still high, Hart said – was public input in decision making.

Board member Naomi Duerr recommended that TMWA incorporate metrics in the future on ranking public input.

“It might be good have a metric ... on how we’re measuring public participation,” she said, recommending that goals be set for public participation.

Water quality was rated by 85 percent of customers surveyed as excellent or good; 77 percent of respondents indicated that they rarely or never have a problem with water taste.

TROA

The on-again, off-again Truckee River Operating Agreement has been held up in courts since it was officially **signed in 2008**. But John Erwin, TMWA’s director of natural resources planning and management, said, “finally, we’re there.”

The agreement is expected to go into effect in the near future and will bring **additional drought storage reserves to the area**.

“It’s an amazing benefit to the community,” said Sue Oldum, TMWA’s outside legal counsel.

Water Resource Plan

The “Tesla Effect” and Reno’s projected population growth are well noted, but will there be enough water to match projected growth?

“I’m 95% certain at this point in time that (Washoe County’s) population at 2100 will be (about 550,000),” said Shawn Stoddard, TMWA’s senior resource economist. “We have plenty of water to meet the projected demand, going out to 2060.

“Today, this is my projection. Based on everything we know, all the data we have ... this is where it takes us.”

Customer water use has declined by more than 11 percent in the past few years due to TMWA’s conservation and outreach efforts, as well as changing in plumbing standards and technological efficiencies, said Laine Christman.

General Manager’s Performance Review



TMWA General Manager Mark Foree received praise by the TMWA board for his performance.
TMWA General Manager Mark Foree received praise for his performance.

Foree was praised for maintaining financial stability, the merger with the county, conversion of flat-rate meters and TROA.

Employee feedback could be solicited for future evaluations, said Neoma Jardon, board member. She praised Foree’s availability to meet with the board.

“I appreciate you staying open,” she said.

Andy Gebhardt, TMWA’s customer service manager, speaking during public comment, said that TMWA staff is regularly praised by Foree.

“While Mark gives a lot of credit to staff ... I don’t think he gets the credit he deserves for leading us,” he said. “If I had one phone call to make when everything hits the fan, I’d call Mark.

“I’ve enjoyed working with Mark.”

Foree was asked what he could improve on.

“I think better communication with board members, and more frequent, is something to look toward,” he said.

Jardon agreed, and Board Member Vaughn Hartung said he thought Foree has done a good job of communicating with the board.

He received a 2.1 percent salary increase.

RGJ Environment Reporter Moves On

In other news, the *Reno Gazette Journal's* longtime environment reporter Jeff Delong announced during public comment that he had taken a buyout and would be leaving the paper next week. RGJ has been culling a number of its reporters, many of them senior reporters, in the recent past through buyouts and retirements.

Delong said, in reference to RGJ's coverage of TMWA, that there were "a lot of tense times, but it all went well." He received applause and praise from the board and members of the public in attendance.

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Master Gardener: Are you ready for a winter flood?

John Cobourn 11:43 p.m. PDT October 22, 2015



This riverfront home in Dayton was torn apart by the 1997 flood on the Carson River.(Photo: RGJ file)

6 CONNECT [5 TWEETLINKEDIN](#) 1 COMMENTEMAILMORE

Nevada Flood Awareness Week is Nov. 1-7. The purpose of this event is to help Nevadans prepare their home, family, businesses and animals for flood disasters. There will be a flood awareness booth and an interactive flood model at the Reno Fall Home and Lifestyle Show, held Nov. 7-8 at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. There will be a similar booth at Carson City's north Walmart on Nov. 1 from 1-3 p.m. Events in other communities are listed online at www.NevadaFloods.org.

Why are we concerned about flooding during our four-year drought? Flood Awareness Week is in early November because we get our biggest river floods in winter. When a winter weather pattern called the Pineapple Express or atmospheric river occurs, a series of strong storms moves from Hawaii to California and Nevada. When they reach the snowy Sierra, they can bring heavy rainstorms as high 10,000 feet. When this happens, the rain melts much of the snow, and the

rivers draining the mountains can rise to flood stage. The National Weather Service in Reno says this can occur any winter, regardless of the presence of a drought or an "El Nino."

The Truckee, Carson and Walker rivers have had 15 large floods in the past 150 years, or about one every 10 years. The largest river floods since 1950 occurred in 1955, 1963, 1986 and 1997. In 1997, some Reno casinos near the river had 5 feet of water on the first floor, and the runways at the Reno-Tahoe airport were inundated with over 3 feet of water. The total estimated cost of flood damages in Washoe County in 1997 exceeded \$686 million. The Carson and Walker river watersheds sustained damages estimated at close to \$30 million. Major Humboldt River floods have occurred in 1910, 1952, 1962 and 1984.

Nevada has a different kind of flood hazard from late spring through early fall. While our summers are generally dry, monsoons can bring moist air and flash floods to western Nevada from the Gulf of California. Monsoons in the last two summers produced flash floods in Clark, Washoe, Douglas, Carson City and Lyon counties. These summer floods are caused by cloudbursts, so they affect smaller areas than winter storms. About 30 minutes after an intense thunderstorm above a local mountain range, a wall of water can emerge from a canyon onto an alluvial fan at its foot. Each time this occurs, possibly every 30 to 60 years, the fast-moving water, carrying sand and rocks, can cut a new path down the convex surface of the fan. Near urban areas, many homes have been built on alluvial fans since they last received a large flood. Almost all neighborhoods on alluvial fans are at risk for flash flooding.



Buy Photo

The Truckee River flooded many businesses in downtown Reno on Jan. 2, 1997. (Photo: Marilyn Newton/RGJ, RGJ)

How can Nevada Flood Awareness Week help you? Visit a Flood Awareness event and the award-winning website www.NevadaFloods.org to learn if your home or workplace is at risk for flooding, how to prepare for flood hazards, and the ins and outs of buying flood insurance. Don't wait until flooding is imminent. Become flood-aware now!

John Cobourn is the water resources specialist with University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. For information about Nevada's droughts and floods, visit www.livingwithdrought.com, www.NevadaFloods.org or email cobournj@unce.unr.edu.

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City Gets \$100,000 Grant for Virginia Lake Water Quality Improvements

SEPTEMBER 22, 2015 BY [BOB CONRAD](#)

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Virignia Lake Image by [raymondtan85/Flickr.com](#).

The [suffering and sullied Virginia Lake](#) may be getting a fix.

The City Council will hear a recommendation at tomorrow's council meeting to accept a [\\$100,000 grant from the Truckee River Fund at the Community Foundation of Western Nevada](#), matched with more than \$200,000 in the hopes of improving the lake's water quality.

The project is designed to improve the lake's circulation and enhance water quality. Upon council approval of the funds, the project is expected to begin this fall.

Edgewater Development has contributed \$116,315 toward the project and another \$113,184 is coming from a Public Works capital projects fund.

The city has been promoting improvements to the lake with a [public outreach campaign](#).

City Councilmember Naomi Duerr [said previously](#) that "the water quality issue at Virginia Lake took more than 50 years to develop. It is going to take several years to truly understand the underlying cause and implement a long-term solution.

“While we want to make an impact as soon as possible, we are not looking for a quick fix.”

Poor water conditions at Virginia Lake have caused citizen complaints, and the lake is recognized as having historic water quality problems.

A **public health advisory** was issued last year because of harmful algae blooms and diseased and dying waterfowl.

Group to work toward curtailment resolution

[Keith Trout](#) 9:53 a.m. PDT October 9, 2015



Antique water well.(Photo: Getty Images)

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Monday's first hearing for the Mason and Smith Valley draft curtailment orders on supplemental well pumping went shorter than expected and a group is looking to reach consensus toward other options.

The hearing for Mason Valley ended before noon Monday, so the second day wasn't needed. The Smith Valley hearing begins at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday in Carson City.

Darrell Pursel, president of the Lyon County Farm Bureau and one of the speakers Monday, and Louie Scatena, a leader for the Farmers Against Curtailment Order (FACO), in interviews Monday night with the Mason Valley News, said State Engineer Jason King came into the audience after the meeting and talked about working together towards an agreed resolution.

Ultimately, Pursel said, four people were chosen for an informal committee to try to contact water rights owners in Mason Valley and come back with another plan. A meeting with King and his staff was set for Oct. 16 with this group, although Pursel allowed they would likely not have a resolution proposal.

Others in this group include Paul Taggart, attorney for FACO, who also spoke Monday; Brad Johnston, attorney who represents several farmers in the area and who formerly was a staff attorney for Peri & Sons; and Jeff Rife, a local accountant and a water rights owner who has represented farmers.

Among those also speaking Monday were George Thiel, a civil engineer representing Nevada Copper, who asked a number of questions, and Lyon County Commissioner Don Alt.

Pursel said they were asked to come up with a plan or settlement or agreement that could do the same as the curtailment order would do, but with agreement from water rights owners. He said they are supposed to meet with King and his staff on Oct. 16.

Last week Scatena said he had never been to a hearing of this type but it apparently was a requirement for the curtailment order.

He noted many people didn't favor that this draft curtailment only involved supplemental water rights pumping and included priorities and not more across the board.

Pursel said how the curtailment is planned to be implemented is complicated and difficult to understand. He said there were referrals to wet and dry water that could be confusing.

He based his comments at the hearing, he said, on points from the state drought summit he attended in September. Among those was that cuts should be small or incremental as if "you draw a line in the sand you end up in litigation." He said parties need to work together was part of that message from the summit.

Pursel also said there was talk of a pilot program that hasn't been part of the State Engineer's proposals.

The State Engineer has been using a water model of Walker River Basin prepared by Desert Research Institute and Pursel said some question how accurate it might be.

He said one part of state water law he doesn't like is that there aren't incentives for conservation, that there seems to be the opposite as you could lose rights if you don't use them.

"There need to be incentives for conservation," he said.

Of the four-member group's task, Pursel said, "It won't be a real easy deal. It will take a lot of work. ... It's a work in progress, but I hope we get somewhere."

He said they decided Smith Valley is different and thus should be handled separately.

King previously said he hoped to issue the final curtailment order in October and Scatena said that still appeared to be the case, he wanted it out by the end of this month.

The draft order said the ultimate curtailment amount would be based on the percentage of the April 1, 2016, streamflow forecast released by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and then based on a chart or table in the draft curtailment. The curtailment could go down if the June streamflow forecast is a higher percentage of average.

The draft curtailment says, “While this order applies to holders of supplemental groundwater rights, the State Engineer strongly encourages all water right owners that are not subject to this curtailment, including owners of domestic wells, to conserve water during this prolonged drought.”

It says supplemental rights were “issued pursuant to the system yield of the basin and are considered to be a class of water rights that are subordinate to primary, stand-alone water rights,” and the State Engineer declares these supplemental rights in the two basins are “a nonpreferred use.”

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Los Angeles DWP considers releasing names of big water users

Posted: Oct 26, 2015 5:29 AM PDT <em class="wnDate">Monday, October 26, 2015 8:29 AM EDTUpdated: Oct 26, 2015 5:29 AM PDT <em class="wnDate">Monday, October 26, 2015 8:29 AM EDT

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is considering changes to its water conservation ordinance that would impose fines for heavy water use and make the names of those using water excessively public.

The Los Angeles Times reports (<http://lat.ms/1k4rdQi>) that the Public Records Act does not permit water agencies to release customer information on usage unless the customer has used the utility in a way that does not match usage policies. Los Angeles City Council members have been pushing for major water consumers to be identified.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District released the names and consumption rates of heavy users last week, pointing fingers at Oakland Athletics executive Billy Beane and a retired Chevron Oil executive, among others.

DWP officials say their customers deserve privacy.

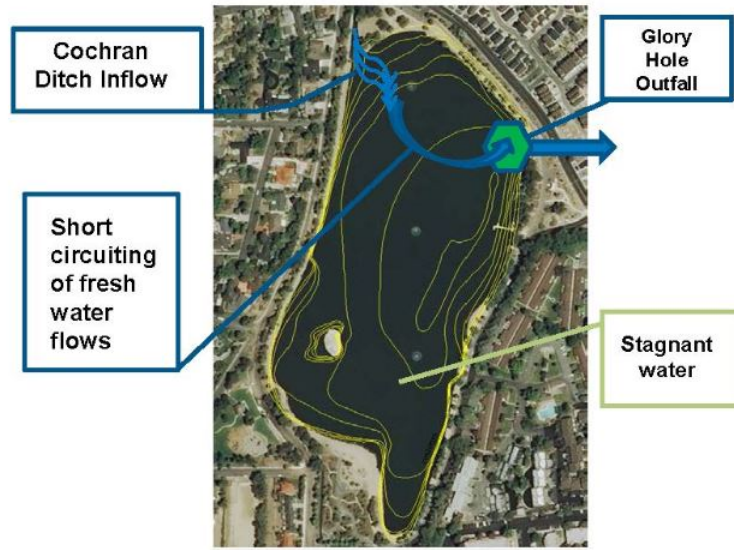
Information from: Los Angeles Times, <http://www.latimes.com/>

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City of Reno Begins Work on Virginia Lake Circulation Project

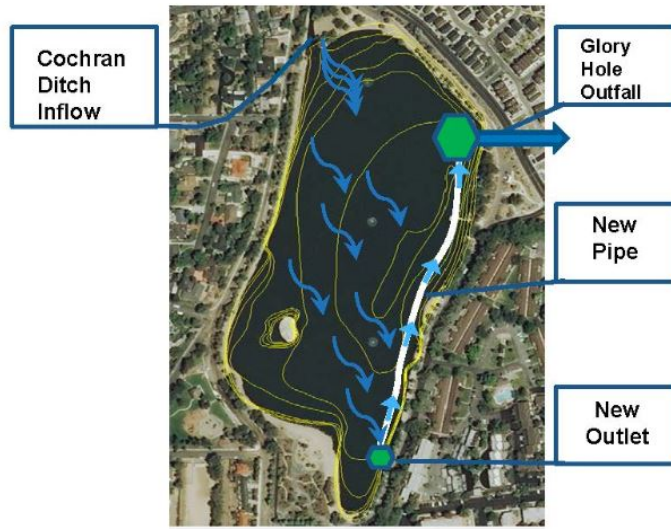
Posted: Oct 27, 2015 10:10 AM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, October 27, 2015 1:10 PM EDT Updated: Oct 27, 2015 10:10 AM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, October 27, 2015 1:10 PM EDT

Figure 1: Short Circuiting of Fresh Water Flows



Courtesy: City of Reno

Figure 2: New Outlet Eliminates Short Circuiting



Courtesy: City of Reno

From the City of Reno:

Construction of a new primary outlet structure and connecting pipeline at Virginia Lake is underway, and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The circulation project will be an important lake management change and is expected to improve water quality.

Detours have been set up near the work area, on the east side of the lake, so that pedestrians can still walk around the entire lake during construction.

Background Information

The City of Reno has made it a priority to engage residents and compile valuable input regarding the Virginia Lake Water Quality Improvement Project. A variety of engagement methods are being used to reach residents and provide a convenient, meaningful public participation process.

"We want to be as inclusive as possible and reach out to everyone we can," Ward 2 Reno City Councilmember Naomi Duerr says. "We are open to hearing what the residents have to say about this issue. The public input we've received is very important to the City of Reno and will continue to be factored into the decision-making process, just like the decision to move forward with this improved circulation project."

The City hosted three public meetings (September 18 and December 4, 2014; and June 2, 2015) to present information regarding potential water quality improvement actions at Virginia Lake. Citizens who attended the most recent public meeting voted in favor of implementing the circulation project, which has been designed to eliminate short-circuiting of incoming fresh water and consequent stagnation occurring at the southern end of the lake (see Figure 1).

A 1,300-foot pipeline will be submerged along the eastern perimeter of the lake. This will connect the existing outlet at the northeast end to a new relocated outlet structure near the southeast shore in order to improve lake circulation.

Noticeable changes to Virginia Lake's water quality will not occur, however, until flow within the Truckee River reaches a normal level and water again enters the lake via the Cochran Ditch along the northwest shore of the lake.

The current drought condition at Virginia Lake (no water flowing in from the Truckee River) and the resulting low lake level occurs only during extraordinary drought years, or only 10 percent of the time since 1960.

On September 23, 2015, Reno City Council approved the contract for the circulation project with Reno Tahoe Construction, Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$329,000. For more information, visit Reno.gov/VirginiaLake or call 775-334-2350.

From the City of Reno



[Print Story](#)

Published: 10:37 am

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Updated: 10:43 am

RENO, Nev. (MyNews4.com & KRNV) -- Truckee Meadows Water Authority is offering a workshop to teach residents how to turn off sprinkler systems and protect water pipes from breaking during the winter.

TMWA staff at these workshops will discuss how to protect inside and outside pipes from freezing to avoid pipes bursting, causing inconvenience and financial cost.

The first workshop will be hosted on Oct. 28 at 5:30 p.m. Two more workshops will be hosted on Tuesday, Nov. 10 and Tuesday, Nov. 17 at 5:30 p.m. The workshops are free.

TMWA's main office, located at 1355 Capital Blvd. To RSVP, please e-mail conservation@tmwa.com or call 834-8005.

For more tips and how-to videos on winterization, [CLICK HERE](#).

Reno begins work on Virginia Lake circulation project



[Seth A. Richardson](mailto:srichardson@rgj.com), srichardson@rgj.com 7:10 p.m. PDT October 27, 2015



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Reno Councilwoman Naomi Duerr speaks at a news conference about the pipeline for Virginia Lake. Duerr said the pipeline should help with the water quality, which in recent years has become fairly toxic in recent years.(Photo: Seth A. Richardson/RGJ)Buy Photo

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The city of Reno announced the beginning of a more than \$300,000 construction project on Virginia Lake to help remedy some of the water toxicity problems in recent years.

The project is a \$329,000 joint venture between the city and the **Truckee Meadows Water Authority** to construct a 1,300 foot pipeline along the east side of the lake to help circulation. The city announced its intention to address the water in June before holding a news conference Tuesday about construction beginning.

Councilwoman Naomi Duerr said the pipeline will help water that flows in from north circulate around the entire lake. Currently it exits on the northeast side.

“Once this is completed, this \$330,000 project, water will no longer short circuit, but will flow in at the top and out at the bottom,” Duerr said. “That will really help mix the water and create an overall better water quality.”

For its part in the project, the city put in \$329,000 while the Truckee Meadows Water Authority gave \$100,000 in the form of a grant. Reno Director of Public Works John Flansberg said the project should be completed before the beginning of 2016.

The project will not directly help with water quality during drought years when the Truckee River is too low to flow into the lake.

“This will help the 80 to 90 percent of the time we do have water coming in. ...” Flansberg said. “What it will do is it will offer circulation for the entire lake, so we’ll start with a better water condition before we have droughts.”

The project will cause intermittent construction delays along the east side of the lake, but Flansberg said the city will do its best to keep pedestrian traffic open. There will be intermittent traffic delays along Lymbery Street while the pipeline is built.

Flansberg said the water quality in Virginia Lake has been declining for some time. In 2014, officials had to post signage warning visitors to keep themselves and their pets away from the water because of the toxicity.

“The water quality is not good,” he said. “We didn’t have any birds die off this year, but last year we did. That’s why we’ve become very concerned about this and what we can do to control the overall water quality.”

Flansberg said there are several reasons why the water might be of such low quality, including fertilizer runoff and bird excrement, which might be causing toxic cyanobacteria growths – more commonly known as blue-green algal blooms.

As part of the water quality initiative, the city formed a volunteer scientific working group to study Virginia Lake and form public policy. Duerr said the first round of testing, which is scheduled to run for two years, would be released shortly.

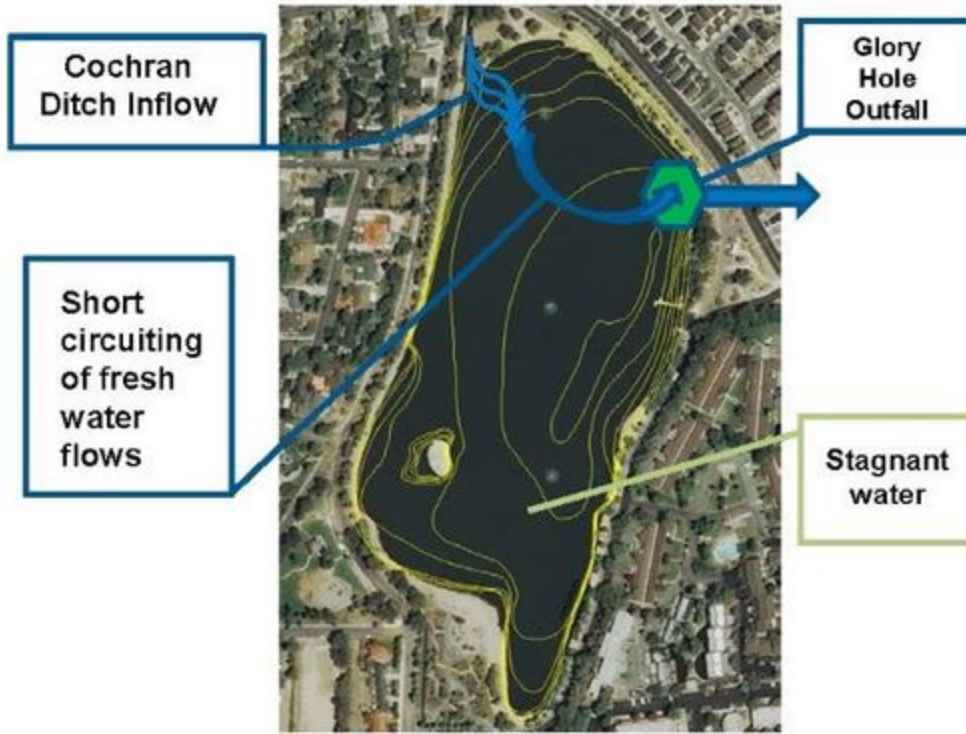
"People love Virginia Lake, so we have a huge amount of public support for this," she said. "There is a division of opinion which is why we’ve called in the scientists so we can talk about making decisions based on data instead of feelings."

Duerr said the community has gotten more involved as well. Neighbors of the park organized a cleanup day from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Nov. 14 to help. The city might consider removing the island from the middle of the lake or introducing floating gardens.

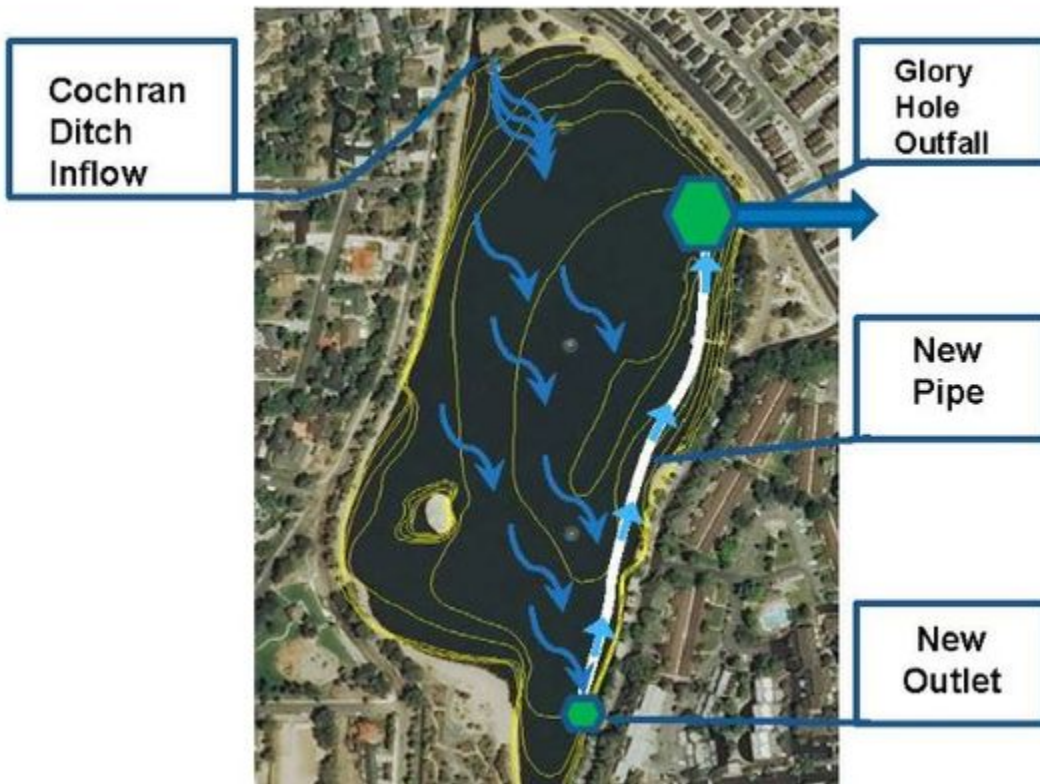
Duerr said she hopes it is the first of many as the community tries to revitalize a popular destination.

“What I would like to see is people never have to fear Virginia Lake again and that they come here even more often,” she said.

Figure 1: Short Circuiting of Fresh Water Flows



Reno is beginning work to improve water quality at Virginia Lake. (Photo: City of Reno)



A 1,300-foot pipeline will be submerged along the eastern perimeter of the lake. This will connect the existing outlet at the northeast end to a new relocated outlet structure near the southeast shore in order to improve lake circulation (Photo: City of Reno)

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Reno staff reverses tack in Renown v St. Mary's bidding war



[Anjeanette Damon](#), adamon@rgj.com 7:58 p.m. PDT October 27, 2015



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Renown Regional Medical Center in Reno(Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ)Buy Photo

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After giving St. Mary's a chance to match its competitor Renown's rates for a hospital contract, city of Reno staff is no longer recommending the city switch its hospital services contract to Renown.

The two hospitals are in an out-and-out bidding war for the business of a coalition of Northern Nevada's largest employers who pool together to increase their health care buying power. Coalition members include the city of Reno, the Washoe County School District, the city of Sparks and other large private companies.

The Reno City Council is trying to decide whether to follow the lead of the school district and Sparks and ditch its hospital services contract with St. Mary's. Part of that deal also includes switching its health care provider network to Renown-affiliate Hometown Health Providers and contracting with HHP to provide third party administrator services.

Three weeks ago, city staff recommended the city go with the Renown and HHP contracts, without detailing specific savings the city could incur by making the switch. Council members also objected to not being able to see the actual contract, which is not a public record because it is between the coalition and Renown.



Here's a 60-second look at what's on tap for the Reno City Council meeting that starts at 10 am Wednesday Anjeanette Damon

Meanwhile, St. Mary's Regional Medical Center offered to match Renown's rates on the hospital services contract, which is valued at about \$4 million a year.

On Wednesday, staff will recommend contracting with both Renown and St. Mary's, which would mean city employees would continue to have a choice between plans with both companies.

"I will be recommending (keeping the) choice," Finance Director Robert Chisel said. "A big part of that is St. Mary's has come in with some very competitive prices."

Since the Oct. 7 meeting, city staff has provided the council with more details on how much each contract would save the city over the next two years. Renown also offered to make its contract available for review if council members sign a confidentiality agreement.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[City of Reno considers jumping to Renown Health plans](#)

The decision to contract with both health care providers would cost the city about \$477,764 over the next two years more than if it contracted solely with Renown and HHP.

But council members are concerned about reducing competition in the market place by shifting so much business to Renown and HHP, as well as the providers' ability to deal with an influx of new patients from the coalition.

The hospital and third party administrator contracts are a small part of the city's overall cost to provide health care to its employees. Chisel estimated the total cost the city's self-funded insurance plan will be about \$25.9 million this year

Las Vegas outs its water hogs -- at least when asked



The Bellagio's water show put the hotel among the top commercial water users in Las Vegas for 2013, along with several other major casinos on the Strip.

(John Locher / Associated Press)



John M. Glionna Contact Reporter

What do Sheldon Adelson, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and the Sultan of Brunei's brother have in common?

Well, they're all mind-bogglingly wealthy. But here's something else: They're all listed on a recent tally of Las Vegas' biggest water users, each draining Lake Mead of up to 18 million of gallons a year -- hundreds of times more than the average resident.

Water hogs, all of them.

"We're not talking about your average homeowner, someone who lives in your typical housing tract," Bronson Mack, spokesman for the Southern Nevada Water Authority, told the Los Angeles Times. "These are the owners of some very, very large and very lush properties. We are talking a lot of grass."

As California and the American West grasp for water amid a lingering drought, providers such as the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power have resisted releasing the names of the top residential users.



Decades before someone coined the Twitter hashtag #droughtshaming and people began posting YouTube videos of their neighbors' drowning lawns, California water suppliers encouraged conservation by releasing the names of their biggest water hogs.

Among these wealthy and powerful water guzzlers was...

(Monte Morin)

The California Public Records Act bars them from divulging such customer data, authorities say.

That's not the case in Nevada.

Las Vegas officials have released the names of known abusers of the tap, faucet and spigot for decades.

But this is no shame game. They don't flaunt the list on their website. They don't run ads in the local newspapers.

These water cops prefer the carrot to the stick.

"We don't ever anticipate being in the position where we'll publicly shame our customers," said Mack. "That would be counterproductive. Our goal is to work with people to comply with our conservation measures."

Open link

Since the 1990s, Vegas water watchers have released the top-users list -- for both business and residential -- in response to a Federal Freedom of Information Act request, usually made by the media.

"We did it a little in the 1990s," Mack said. "But it became pretty much an annual request after 2000."

In 2008, the leading water-users list was dominated by "casino executives, entertainers, professional athletes and billionaire business giants," according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

At the time, the top prize went to Prince Jefri Bolkiah, brother of the Sultan of Brunei, whose 16-acre compound used enough water in a year to supply more than 100 average Joe Blow homes.

In second place was Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, whose 33-bedroom mansion sucked nearly 14 million gallons of water a year. That's a lot of long, hot showers.

In 2013, the most recent list available, some old residential offenders were still at it. But Public Water User No. 1 was (drum roll, please):

Well, you wouldn't recognize the name, but the person owns several contiguous properties.

The Sultan of Brunei's brother still ranked No. 2, although his water use (or abuse) had dropped from 18 million gallons to 11.3 million.

Some other notables:

- The Fertitta family, owners of the Station casinos (No. 4)
- Phyllis Binion, wife of the late casino owner Ted Binion (No. 36)
- Floyd Mayweather Jr. (No. 46)
- Sheldon Adelson (No. 78)

As for commercial overusers for 2013, major casinos on the Strip held the top spots (no surprise there), with the Wynn, Mandalay Bay, Venetian, Bellagio and Caesars leading the way.

State officials defend the casinos' usage, saying they use recycled water in their landscaping and water shows (read: Bellagio), so the numbers (555 million annual gallons for the Wynn) aren't as bad as they might seem. Most of the water used in the city is cleaned and returned to Lake Mead, officials say. As for the casinos, Mack said, 97% of the water they use goes back to Lake Mead.

The 2014 water list has not been released, and Mack said it would take several weeks to compile.

So what happens when a new high-water list is about to be issued?

As a courtesy to residential users, water officials will alert them that their names will be released to the public in a way they probably wouldn't want.

"The most typical response we get is that people want to know how high they are on the list," Mack said.

Sometimes, public scrutiny reduces flagrant overwatering.

In 2013, officials reached out to casino executive George Marnell, who was surprised to learn that he was No. 25 on the list.

"He said, 'I didn't realize that my water use was that high,'" Mack recalled.

Then Marnell asked officials to help him devise ways to cut back.

You might wonder why the uber-wealthy use so much water.

One guess: They look at their neighbor's gargantuan lawn and act on an old adage:

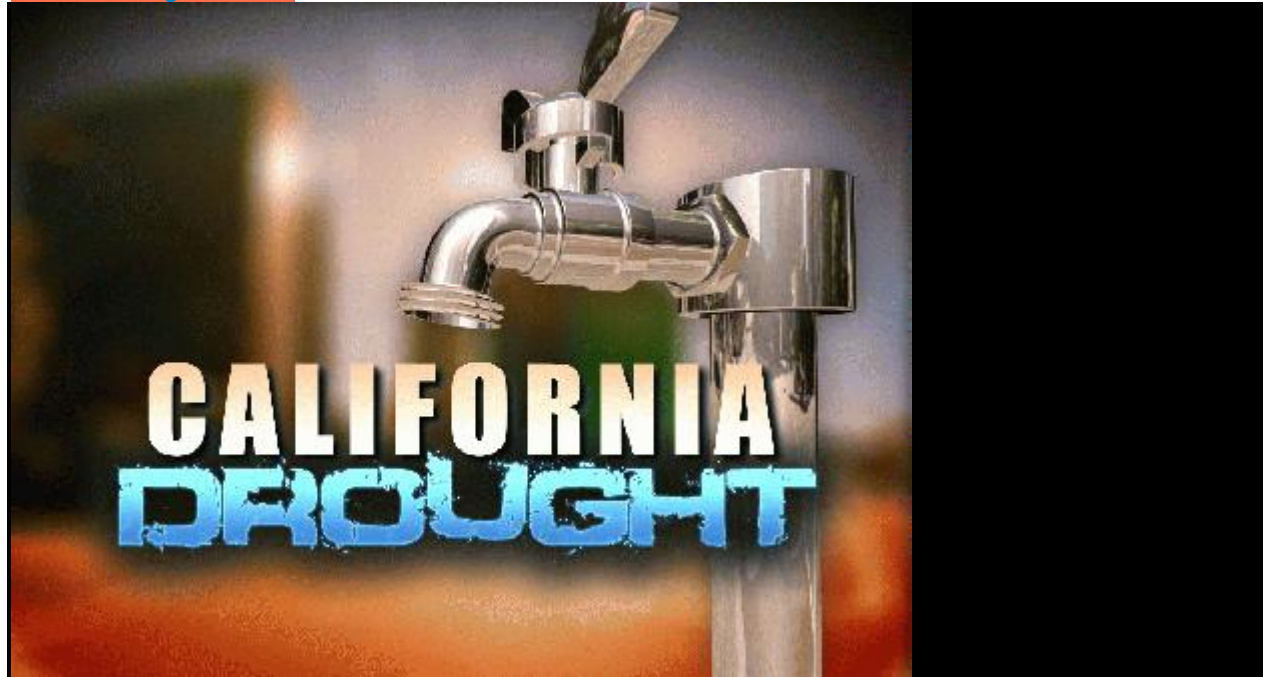
The grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

[@jglionna](#)

California imposes first round of \$61,000 fines against 'water hogs' in drought

Updated: Saturday, October 31 2015, 04:40 PM PDT

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LOS ANGELES (CNN) -- Officials battling the historic California drought have issued their first round of \$500-a-day fines against four communities for being water hogs the past several months.

The four communities have accumulated fines of \$61,000 each, and they are all located in Southern California: Beverly Hills, the city of Indio, the city of Redlands, and the Coachella Valley Water District.

Under Gov. Jerry Brown's mandate to conserve water by a statewide average of 25%, the State Water Resources Control Board said the four urban communities "have consistently failed to meet their water conservation goals," according to an announcement Friday.

"Up and down the state, residents and water suppliers are making the necessary sacrifices needed to help California meet its conservation goals. However, some urban water suppliers simply have not met the requirements laid before them," Cris Carrigan, director of the Office of Enforcement, said in a statement.

"For these four suppliers, it's been too little too late to achieve their conservation standard," Carrigan added.

To achieve the 25% reduction statewide, emergency regulations assign each urban water district a figure between 4% and 36%, with the higher numbers assigned to those communities that use a lot of water.

Beverly Hills will impose its own penalties on water wasters and hire more staff to address water violations, officials said in a statement.

Beverly Hills city officials are "very concerned about not meeting the 32% (conservation) goal set by the state" and added that some of their water-saving program began just as penalty surcharges took effect.

The Indio Water Authority is also working towards a 32% reduction goal and is offering a turf removal rebate program to residential and commercial customers, among other conservation measures, officials said in a statement.

"While we are disappointed with today's action, like other water agencies across California, we are concerned about not meeting the 32% goal set by the state. IWA will continue to explore additional programs to help us achieve the reductions we need. So far this year, we have participated in over 100 outreach events in our city. We are committed to conserve" Brian Macy, the authority's general manager, said in a statement.

Representatives with the other two communities didn't immediately respond to a CNN request for comment.

Overall, Californians reduced their water usage by more than 26% in September, exceeding the 25% mandate, the state agency said.

"Millions of Californians have saved water during the summer months, which are the four most critical months to save water," Felicia Marcus, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board, said in a statement. "Now, we need to keep it up as best we can, even as we hope for as much rain and snow as we can safely handle. We're in the position of having to prepare for drought and flooding at the same time, but that's what we're faced with."

California is in its fourth year of one of the most severe droughts on record. In May, the state water board imposed an emergency regulation requiring an immediate 25% reduction in overall potable

urban water use, with a sliding scale for communities that have already reduced their water use through past conservation, the agency said.

California-Drought-Water-Hogs-Fines-2
(Originally Published: 10/30/2015 6:57 PM)

Update 5:23 p.m. -- Tweaks graf 3. Adds two communities' comments, grafs 6-11. New highlight. Revises other two highlights.

Highlights

NEW: Beverly Hills and Indio are "concerned" about not meeting 32% reduction goals, they say

They, along with the city of Redlands, and Coachella Valley Water District are fined \$61,000 each

The four communities didn't meet a mandate to save water in California's historic drought
California imposes first round of \$61,000 fines against 'water hogs' in drought

By Michael Martinez and Cheri Mossburg

The-CNN-Wire

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Sacramento residents exposed to carcinogen in their drinking water

Link to video:

<http://www.abc10.com/story/news/investigations/2015/11/04/75112994/>



An exclusive investigation with some scary revelations about the city of Sacramento's drinking water. For almost a year the city added a new chemical to the drinking water. Nov. 3, 2015

Thom Jensen, Joe Rubin, ABC10 9:01 a.m. PST November 9, 2015



ABC10 Investigates Sacramento's drinking water secret. The carcinogen the public was never told about.(Photo: ABC10)

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In 2013 and 2014, the City of Sacramento tested a new chemical at its main water treatment plant, and an ABC10 investigation found the substances that formed in the city's drinking water system as a result, could cause cancer.

Testing of the chemical called aluminum chlorohydrate, or ACH, almost immediately sent up warning signs that something was seriously wrong, and even though those red flags continued for an entire year, the city didn't stop and didn't warn people about a hazard.

The byproducts Sacramento residents were exposed to are called disinfection byproducts, or DBPs. DBPs are considered likely carcinogens. Studies have also linked the byproducts to low birth weight and even miscarriages.

City officials allowed the testing to continue, despite early warnings the new chemical being tested was creating DBPs at levels that the Environmental Protection Agency says could be unsafe, especially with long term use.

It started as a short-term test of ACH to replace another water treatment chemical called ALUM.

Sacramento's Utility Director, Bill Busath told ABC10 the test was all about one thing, "There was an expectation that we would be able to save quite a bit of money."

"Its deceptive, its mismanagement. You lied. You lied."

Erin Brokovich

More on that claim below.

Coagulants like ACH and ALUM are important. They take river water and bond with impurities after they enter a treatment plant. The chemical weighs down the silt and other impurities, so they fall to the bottom of giant pools. The sediment is then swept away.

Now, Sacramento officials acknowledge there was a serious flaw with their chemical test. In a report the city filed with state regulators, the city admits the test caused DBP numbers to rise to "historically high levels when using (ACH) aluminum chlorohydrate."

To make up for the chemical's lack of effectiveness, the city pumped in more chlorine. But, when chlorine and these organic compounds spend too much time together, the chlorine can turn into disinfection byproducts, or DBPs, in your drinking water.

"She wrote in an email to managers, "I'm nervous about the distribution samples."

A Sacramento City Chemist

Busath said, "As soon as the levels got to where we thought that we wouldn't be in compliance, and hence wouldn't be protective of public health, we stopped the trial."

The city did eventually stop testing in May of 2014, but that was after the chemical trials went on for an entire year. During that year, according to internal tests the city was performing, reading after reading went above what the EPA considers safe for long-term exposure to DBPs.

A man who grew up working in the water treatment industry, Bob Bowcock, said what the city did endangered the health of citizens. "This community was basically looked at as a laboratory guinea pig, in that they were exposed to violation level trihalomethanes for up to one year without any proper notification whatsoever," Bowcock said. Trihalomethane is one type of DBP. They're often referred to THMs.

Bowcock managed water treatment plants in southern California for decades. Today he works as an adviser to Erin Brokovich, made famous by the movie about her fight against chemically-tainted water in Hinkley, California.

Pregnant women and unborn babies, Bowcock said, are especially vulnerable to DBPs. "In first trimester pregnancies, there's a significant rise in miscarriages, and in third trimester there's evidence of low birth weight," he said, describing how the DBP-tainted water is even more dangerous when its mists are breathed in while showering or washing dishes.

Sacramento isn't the only city that has had problems with DBPs. Flint, Michigan had a problem earlier this year. But unlike Sacramento, health warnings went out to Flint residents. The elderly, the very young and pregnant women were told they might want to consider filtered or bottled water. Churches even gave away safe water to the poor.

People in Sacramento were never notified about the dangers, never given that choice to opt for bottled water, even though the city had all kinds of data showing they had a serious problem.

The troubling data came fast. A city chemist noticed the problem on the third day of the testing. She wrote in an email to managers, "I'm nervous about the distribution samples." A chart that went along with that email showed DBPs well above EPA limits.

“The California Environmental Protection Agency Division of Drinking Water told ABC10 that they never told the city it had to do a year-long trial of ACH or any other chemical.”

Thom Jensen

"I think the testing should have stopped immediately," Bowcock said. "I think they should have called the Division of Drinking Water."

Sacramento officials didn't call that state agency or stop the test. Instead, they expanded it, telling the city council they needed enough money allocated, \$850,000, to buy a truckload of ACH every week for a year for more testing.

In July of 2013, Busath and other utility officials told the city council in a staff report the State of California "has now mandated that the trial be extended from three weeks to a full year."

1 of 5

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That sounds like a good reason if the state mandated it, but it's also not true.

The California Environmental Protection Agency Division of Drinking Water told ABC10 that they never told the city it had to do a year-long trial of ACH or any other chemical.

In fact, CalEPA said it was the other way around. "The city approached us," said Division of Drinking Water Deputy Director Bruce Burton. "It was the city who asked us if they could use that chemical at their water treatment plant."

When we asked the city about that discrepancy with the state, we got an admission from Busath with the utilities department. "The word mandate used in the council report was probably a poor choice of words," he told ABC10.

"Every corner you turn, on this particular project, it's red flag, red flag, red flag," Bowcock said. "It's like peeling back an onion. There is just another layer. The closer you get to the center, the stronger the smell.

So how much was the public exposed to DBP's in some neighborhoods?

ABC10 obtained data showing dozens of readings in excess of the EPA standard of 80 parts-per-billion during the year-long trial. In the Westlake neighborhood, near Sleep Train Arena, during a two-month period between August and October 2013, 11 of 13 readings were above EPA limits. Then in March of 2014, readings were way up across the city. Some people were drinking water with DBP levels above 130 parts-per-billion.

“Emails reveal the city intentionally switched water sources from the city to the county, days before an EPA water test.”

ABC10 investigation

ABC10 asked Busath, the utilities director, about those numbers and why he allowed the testing to continue. He always gave the same answer. "Because we had the anticipation of saving money with using ACH," said Busath.

And when asked why his department didn't share all that data, all those alarming numbers with the public and with regulators, Busath told ABC10, "As long as we were in compliance, we don't need to contact them." He said what really matters, is that the city DBP numbers were within safe range for quarterly EPA mandated tests. "All this time, we were within the guidelines for the disinfectant byproduct levels, which is a one-year running average," he said.

Busath is right, by law the city did not have to report its unusually high DBP levels unless its annual average of those quarterly samples was higher than the safe drinking water standard set by the EPA.

But, ABC10 found evidence that for one of those tests in January 2014, the Sacramento River Plant where the chemical trials were being performed was turned off, and the city took water from another plant on the American River.

And for another one of those quarterly tests, emails reveal the city intentionally switched water sources from the city to the county, days before an EPA test.

This was the subject of one email; "Request for emergency water service from Sacramento County Water Agency to the City of Sacramento."

What was the emergency? If the city didn't get water from another source, it was certain to exceed yearly standards for its disinfection byproducts.

“I would light up the city council, make sure that there are repercussions, and every assurance it doesn't happen again and that you are delivering safe drinking water to every person in your district.”

Erin Brokovich

Erin Brokovich had strong words for the department concerning that staff report and the alleged manipulation of water sources to control test results. She told ABC10, "Its deceptive, its mismanagement. You lied. You lied."

If the annual averages exceeded 80 parts-per-billion, by law, the city would have had to tell the public about the problem just like utilities officials did in Flint, Michigan.

When pressed about why his department continued testing because of believed cost savings, even in the face of all of that troubling data, Busath said, "Of course, our main goal, is that we have to stay in compliance."

Busath said everything that the city did was legal, including switching out water sources.

Brokovich had some advice for Sacramento residents. "I would light up the city council, make sure that there are repercussions, and every assurance it doesn't happen again and that you are delivering safe drinking water to every person in your district," she said.

In the end, the alleged money savings Utilities Director Busath was talking about appears to have been overstated or completely wrong. The staff members said in a report to council that they expected to save up to a million dollars using ACH. But, ABC10 found the department used bad data. The actual numbers show that not only was the original chemical safer, it appears it was also cheaper.

[Read the Consumer Confidence Report \(CCR\) here.](#)

[Read a letter from the Sacramento Water Quality Superintendent to a California Department of Public Health associate sanitary engineer.](#)

[Read the City of Sacramento response to our investigation.](#)

[ABC10 responds to the city's statement.](#)

[State lawmaker responds to ABC10 News investigation.](#)

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Arizona county aims to protect water as foreign firms arrive

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By FELICIA FONSECA
Associated Press

Leaders of a rural Arizona county want help from the governor and other state officials to protect their water supply as companies from the Middle East move to the state to grow alfalfa they intend to ship overseas to feed their cattle.

Companies from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have bought thousands of acres of land in the Arizona desert for large-scale farm operations.

China-based companies have done the same in other parts of the West. Some of the companies are moving to the U.S. and elsewhere after running low on water in the Middle East.

La Paz County leaders are upset about the trend, saying the companies are exploiting Arizona's groundwater law in a time of drought that allows farms to pump as much water as they want. County leaders are worried about the future water supply and believe the companies should pay more in property taxes and fees based on water depletion.

"We just want to make sure the people who have lived here, who have invested in La Paz County will not run out of water," said county Supervisor Holly Irwin.

The farming operations have also brought attention to the quirks of Arizona's 1980s groundwater law. The state's major population areas like Phoenix and Tucson have limits on how much water can be taken from the ground, but rural counties largely are without restrictions.

Water users there must do little more than register the wells with the state and put the water to beneficial use, which includes farming.

As a result, Scottsdale, Tucson and Phoenix have bought land in La Paz County in hopes of harvesting groundwater and sending it back to their communities through a canal system, county officials said.

That land can be worth millions - in part because of the water below. The city of Phoenix sold 13,000 acres in La Paz to a U.S.-based farming corporation for \$30 million in recent years, county officials said.

Almarai, a Saudi Arabia-based dairy company, has been farming alfalfa in Arizona under a subsidiary, Fondomonte Arizona LLC. The company bought nearly 10,000 acres in Vicksburg last year for \$47.5 million to preserve water resources in Saudi Arabia.

Fondomonte legal counsel Jordan Rose said the company is skilled at farming in arid environments and uses a drip irrigation system that allows crops to grow with less water than a typical alfalfa farm. Alfalfa typically requires large amounts of water.

Down the road, a company called Al Dahra Farms USA with ties to the United Arab Emirates operates another large-scale farm, Irwin said. Neither Al Dahra nor the International Farming Corporation - the company that bought the land from Phoenix - responded to requests for comment Friday.

La Paz is one of Arizona's least populated counties, with about 20,000 residents spread across 4,500 square miles in the western part of the state. Less than 6 percent of the county is privately owned, with large swaths of it federal land, county officials said.

Residents in La Paz County could seek to have the groundwater regulated, including by asking state lawmakers to impose a tax on water use and petitioning the Arizona Department of Water Resources to carve out areas for groundwater management.

Department spokeswoman Michelle Moreno said county officials have not inquired about the water basin that includes the Fondomonte farm but have asked for a hydrological study of an adjacent water basin. The department had concluded that the water demands of the county could be met for 100 years. The farms aren't required to report water usage to the state.

"People are concerned about the water embedded in crops, obviously," said department Director Tom Buschatzke. "However, our viewpoint is that there is an economic value in growing of crops. Those folks have as much right as any other individual in the state of Arizona to grow their produce, grow their crops, sell them, export them."

Gov. Doug Ducey's office did not return calls seeking comment.

The Arizona Legislature has not made any major changes to groundwater laws since 1980. Ducey's office recently announced an initiative building on a plan to look at the demands for water and challenges, starting in rural areas, over the next five years. Groundwater modeling is one of the things recommended in the plan, said Moreno.

Irwin said the county welcomes farms and the jobs they bring to the county that struggles without a large tax base. She said the county should have the right to protect its groundwater supplies.

"Back when the laws were made, they probably didn't think of this problem," she said. "Of course now water became a huge issue. They're talking about droughts all over."

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Legitimacy – the key to successful implementation

October 21, 2015,

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What is required to facilitate the adoption of new technologies such as potable water reuse?
According to a study carried out by environmental social scientists in California, users need to see

not only how an innovation benefits them personally, but also that it is compatible the community's values and can become a routine part of daily life. *By Andres Jordi*

For water utilities in many parts of California – a region suffering from chronic water scarcity – the introduction of potable water reuse has proved to be a hard sell: innovative systems enabling drinking water to be obtained from reclaimed wastewater have met with widespread scepticism. Although the technology is safe and proven, and the treated water meets quality standards, numerous projects have foundered on public opposition. Why is this? According to Bernhard Truffer, an environmental social scientist at Eawag, “Many engineers and scientists still believe that people will accept a new technology as long as you give them sufficient information, but usually it takes more than just public education and marketing.”

What it takes to gain acceptance for potable water reuse is shown by the case of the Orange County Water District (OCWD) utility in California. This agency has been operating a state-of-the-art groundwater replenishment system since 2008. Here, conventionally treated wastewater is purified in a three-step process, comprising microfiltration, reverse osmosis and disinfection with ultraviolet light and hydrogen peroxide (Fig. 1). The treated water is then pumped into recharge basins. The OCWD plant produces 265,000 cubic metres of high-quality water per day, meeting the needs of around 600,000 people.

Targeted communication and public engagement

Together with colleagues at the University of California at Berkley, Eawag scientists Bernhard Truffer and Christian Binz investigated how the strategy pursued by OCWD differed from cases where the implementation of potable water reuse projects failed. The study involved in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including utility managers and executives, public relations consultants, regulators, academics and engineering consultants. Ultimately, the success of OCWD was found to be explicable in terms of legitimacy, a key concept in sociology and innovation studies. Public acceptance of an innovation is thus based on three fundamental factors: users must be able to perceive the direct benefits it offers, its compatibility with societal values and its potential to become a routine part of daily life. An organization seeking legitimation for the introduction of a new technology must ensure that its strategy addresses all three types of legitimacy (Fig. 2).

This was found to be the case with OCWD. For example, the water utility invested considerable time and resources in education campaigns. In over 1200 presentations, it informed the community about the benefits of potable water reuse – in particular, how the new technology would guarantee a safe, reliable water supply into the future. It communicated in comprehensible language adapted to the target groups, with information not only provided in English, but also translated into Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese. As Truffer points out, “By becoming personally involved in outreach campaigns, OCWD managers established themselves with members of the public as trustworthy and competent experts.” Citizens were also able to express their wishes and concerns through representatives on the project's advisory board. Their feedback was incorporated into project planning and implementation.

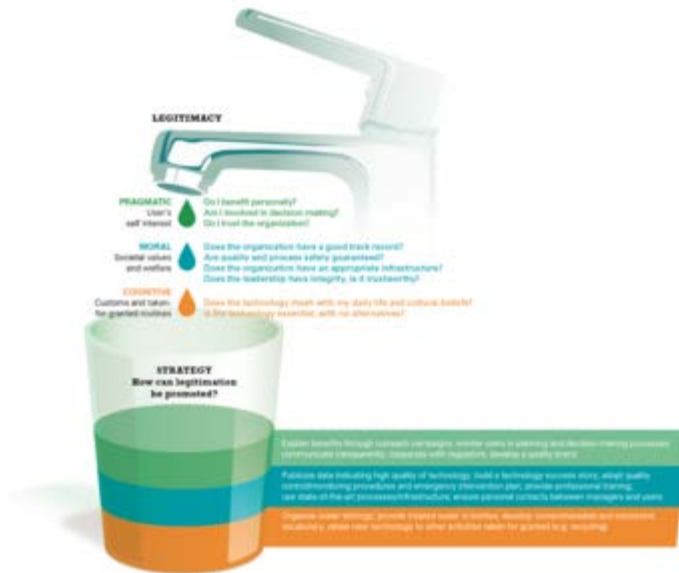


Fig. 2: The legitimacy of a new technology is evaluated on three different levels, all of which need to be addressed if the technology is to be successfully introduced. The legitimation strategy employed will vary depending on the context (region, culture, etc.) and target group (users, policymakers, associations, etc.) (Graphic: Peter Penicka)

Quality, transparency – and the right choice of name

OCWD's position was further strengthened by its long experience in the water sector, with a 30-year track record of safe and reliable operations. Truffer observes: "Because of the organization's good reputation, the community had faith in its capacity to conduct potable water reuse responsibly." Another measure inspiring confidence was the utility's adoption of testing procedures going beyond regulatory requirements. At its state-of-the-art on-site water quality laboratory, OCWD monitors for 335 chemicals (only 122 are prescribed by law). In addition, it developed standard operating procedures and protocols for emergency intervention. The facility offered regular tours for the public, giving residents an insight into OCWD's 24/7 water treatment operations.

Thanks to its transparent communication strategy, OCWD managed to enhance its reputation as a trustworthy and competent organization even in a crisis situation. In 2000, the utility discovered that small amounts of N-nitrosodimethylamine – a carcinogenic compound – were being produced as a by-product of a treatment process. Rather than waiting until the issue was resolved, OCWD informed the media immediately and explained how the problem would be addressed. Truffer comments: "This proactive approach was very well received by the public." In the newspapers, the episode was described, not as a threat to public health, but as a minor incident which was in the process of being fixed.

According to the study, public attitudes were also favourably affected by the choice of name – groundwater replenishment system (Fig. 3). Rather than suggesting a new, unfamiliar technology, this name led the public to associate potable water reuse with the practice of adding freshwater to groundwater so as to prevent saltwater intrusion into the aquifer – which OCWD had already been

doing for decades. In addition, by consistently using the term “water recycling”, OCWD linked the technology to an idea which was already taken for granted by most people in their daily lives. Consequently, environmental groups were among the first to support the new system.



Fig. 3: The name chosen for the new treatment system also promoted legitimization of the project among users in California. (Photo: Jim Kutzle, OCWD)

Customized, long-term strategy

OCWD’s painstaking efforts to legitimize the treatment system were rewarded with a high degree of legitimacy among the public. In contrast, as Truffer notes, “The failed projects’ strategies did not address all the dimensions of the legitimacy concept, and there was considerable opposition as a result.” In some cases, the public was not sufficiently involved in planning and decision-making. In other projects, procedural standards were inadequate, there was a lack of knowledgeable spokespersons, or the public did not trust the operator’s intentions. Sometimes, inappropriate choices were made: for example, one utility advertised its potable reuse project as a wastewater management strategy rather than as a means of improving drinking water supplies.

The environmental social scientists emphasize that a comprehensive legitimization strategy is not in itself sufficient to guarantee success. “In a given context,” says Truffer, “certain projects may not be legitimate.” However, the legitimacy framework does indicate what is needed, in addition to sound technology, in order to gain public acceptance. At the same time, a successful strategy cannot be directly applied to other projects or stakeholders. Instead, a legitimization strategy needs to be developed in the light of the specific culture, values and history of a region or target group. Truffer concludes: “The authenticity of a project and its initiators seems to me to be one of the most important criteria for a high level of credibility.” The example of OWCD also shows that legitimacy cannot be established overnight, but is a long-term process: “Quick, poorly thought-out marketing campaigns are not advisable and can undermine the foundations for successful implementation.”

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Sparks will tackle homeless camp issue



[Chanelle Bessette](#), cbessette@rgj.com 11:34 a.m. PST November 5, 2015



A homeless camp sits along the Truckee River in Sparks in August.(Photo: Photo courtesy of Nick Lee)

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Sparks has noticed a recent slight increase in homeless camps within city limits, with around 10-15 newly established campsites along the Truckee River.

“We have a small tent city from basically Fisherman’s Park to Rock Park to the back side of the water treatment center,” said Sparks city manager Steve Driscoll.

City regulations say that camping is not allowed in public parks, so Sparks police officers have begun to take action, especially as the weather gets colder. According to Driscoll, the Sparks Police Department has started giving people verbal notices to vacate their camps within 24 to 48 hours. Officers have also provided various forms of assistance, such as connecting the homeless with shelter resources.

However, Driscoll said, even though the city can compel homeless people to re-locate, authorities have to inventory their property and store it until it can be recovered within a certain time frame.

Sparks has worked with the Reno Community Assistance Center at 335 Record St. to obtain storage facilities for personal property previously held at homeless camps, and the city also works with the center to put people in touch with the appropriate resources for getting long-term help.

The Reno Community Assistance Center is operated by the Volunteers of America. It is used and funded by Sparks, Reno and Washoe County, with the lion's share of funding coming from Washoe County. The organization runs all of the shelters in the area, which include separate shelters for men, women and families. It also connects its clients with case workers who help them find stable housing as well as mental health and disability programs, among other services.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[Program to pay Reno homeless for river cleanup](#)

“There’s always more to the story when it comes to homelessness,” said Sandy Isham, senior development and community relations officer for Volunteers of America.

With cold weather becoming a greater threat, local shelters have set up overflow locations and other safe spaces to help keep people out of the elements. Another potential danger for homeless people who sleep outside, Isham said, is that they may targeted for violence. Many chronically homeless people in the area have unresolved mental health and substance abuse issues, she said, which sometimes go hand-in-hand as they try to cope with their situation.

According to Driscoll, the Sparks Police Department has officers who are trained in giving mental health assistance, and mental health professionals ride along with officers a couple of days every week.

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Water wars

How politics beat science in the West

By [Dennis Myers](#)
dennism@newsreview.com

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This article was published on [11.05.15](#).

Wallace Stegner (1987): “*The West is defined, that is, by inadequate rainfall. ... We can’t create water or increase the supply. We can only hold back and redistribute what there is.*”

In the 19th century, as settlers moved West, the gold seekers got most of the attention and publicity. But more of them traveled West for a less exciting reason—to farm. In many cases, it never occurred to them that the land might not be suitable for the purpose. Some reports reached the East about desert lands, but they circulated mostly in educated circles. More common was talk of the fertility of Oregon, California and other places. Besides, farming increased rainfall.

As white settlement moved West, the federal government sent four survey parties to case the joint. Led by Clarence King (1867-78), George Wheeler (1872-79), Ferdinand Hayden (1867-78), and John Wesley Powell (1869-1879), they took scientific approaches to their work.

The experience of Powell in trying to give the public reliable information on the West and water, and Congress’s effort to discredit science, provided an early model that politicians follow to this day. That experience can explain things like today’s climate change debate and also explain contributing factors to today’s Western water shortage.

Though portrayed by John Beal in Disney’s *Ten Who Dared*, John Wesley Powell was not the usual dashing explorer type. Relatively short, he lost a forearm in the Civil War. After the war, he was a natural sciences professor and later became curator of the Illinois Natural History Society Museum. But to a populace that did not usually *see* their heroes, he was dashing enough.

He and the nine men he led launched in four boats onto the Green River in Wyoming on May 24, 1869, joining the Colorado River downstream. In Utah, they lost provisions, some instruments, and one of the boats. On August 5, they entered Grand Canyon. Rapids nearly ended the expedition, and the party became divided and demoralized. It split up, three departing to die on the trail. The rest continued with Powell and they reached what is now the site of Lake Mead, where he called a halt.

Two years later, Powell led an 11-person crew on another exploration, this one lasting 17 months. He began writing about the expeditions and became first director of the Smithsonian’s Bureau of Ethnology, then U.S. Geological Survey director from 1881 to 1894. He was now in a position to influence public policy on much of what he and the other scientists in his parties had learned in the West.

Report of the Exploration of the Columbia River of the West and Its Tributaries was published in 1875. It was not what the members of Congress who had funded the surveys were expecting. Nor was Powell’s subsequent report, *Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* (1878), which contained an objectionable adjective right in its title.

Senators from Western states already admitted to the union—California, Nevada, Colorado, Oregon—were disbelieving. How could they attract new settlers and businesses to their states if they were described as arid—much less as *deserts*?

Territories—the Dakotas, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah—had similar concerns.



Construction of Lahontan Dam to provide more water for the Truckee Carson project
 Advertisement

The arid region, according to Powell's reports, begins about midway in the Great Plains and extends across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Powell pulled in most of the area where rainfall was less than 20 inches. He wasn't wrong, but his reality did not fit the image of the West that had been created in the East.

Powell wanted planning that avoided disruption of communities and made the best use of water for the largest number of settlers—not for the large ranches and farm operators.

Allowed to choose from *any* public lands, new arrivals would likely settle along rivers—that is, in flood plains—or on water-hungry land with low productivity at high elevations that would gobble three or four times more water than more fertile land in the valleys, using up water by a few instead of all. The rampant fraud that accompanied the Homestead Act—doghouses built on homesteads by phantom settlers to satisfy the residence requirement in order to obtain the water allotment for larger operations—was another of Powell's targets. He proposed that settlers choose their lands from those designated irrigable, not from any public lands. At one stroke, large monopolies would be dealt a blow and the success rates of families hiked dramatically.

But small farming families do not fund U.S. House campaigns or provide the money for bribery in an era when U.S. senators were appointed by state legislators.

Nevada's U.S. Sen. William Stewart had initially supported Powell, co-sponsoring a study of whether Powell's agency should inventory what public lands were and were not irrigable.

The two men traveled in the Middle Border territories together, and the trip did not irrigate the relationship. They addressed the North Dakota constitutional convention and other groups and became better acquainted with one another's views. Thereafter, Stewart emerged as a fierce critic. Stewart, a mining lawyer with dubious ethics who believed the West was there to be plundered—preferably by his big business cronies—supported irrigation but not necessarily rules and niceties.

Powell, with 20 years of experience in the West to draw on, filed reports filled with terms like *arid* and *desert*, terms that grated on the sensibilities of congressmembers:

"In very low altitudes and latitudes the grasses are so scant as to be of no value; here the true deserts are found. These conditions obtain in southern California, southern Nevada, southern Arizona, and southern New Mexico, where broad reaches of land are naked of vegetation, but in ascending to the higher lands the grass steadily improves. . . . In addition to the desert lands mentioned, other large deductions must be made from the area of the pasturage lands. . . . If the filling of the streams and the rise of the lake were due to a transient extreme of climate, that extreme would be followed by a return to a mean condition, or perhaps by an oscillation in the opposite direction, and a large share of the fields now productive would be stricken by drought and returned to the desert. . . . Near to the mountains the grass lands are fair but they have been overpastured and greatly injured. Out among the Basin Ranges little grass land of value is found. . . . Their streams are spent before the summer comes; and only a few springs are perennial. The result is a general desert, dotted by a few oases."

Powell recommended that Congress withdraw all public lands "of the arid region from 'sale, entry, settlement, or occupation' except those selected as irrigable lands, and to allow titles to irrigable lands to be acquired only through the operation of the homestead laws and the desert-land laws."

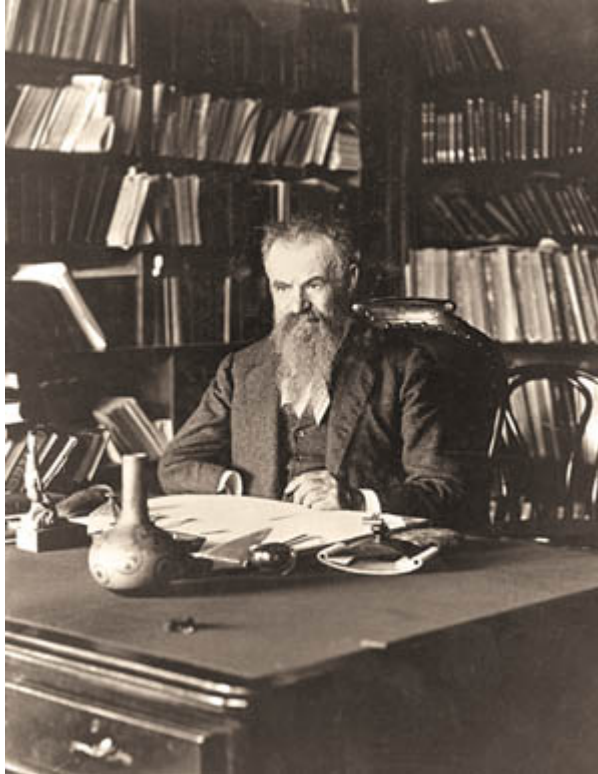
U.S. Sen. Gideon Moody/1890: "Of course, I have got a great respect for scientifically educated gentlemen, and I am always very much interested in their researches and all that, but ..."

U.S. Rep. Mark Amodei/2013: "I recognize that some scientists believe that global warming is caused by failed environmental practices; however ..."

When congressional hearings were held on the Powell reports, Stewart attended along with a committee he chaired. The hearings were rough for Powell. Wallace Stegner later wrote, "They wanted to know who had defined the 'arid region,' and implied that it was a fiction of Powell's own, designed to get him extra powers."

U.S. Sen. Gideon Moody of South Dakota, a lawyer from Deadwood, asked about wells as a source of irrigation. Wheeler candidly said all the artesian wells in South Dakota could irrigate only a single county. Bang went Moody's support for science—and for Powell.

Just as the 20th century tobacco industry and 21st century Republicans, when confronted with unfavorable science, went shopping for different scientists, some of the 19th century legislators decided there must be alternatives to Powell who would tell them what they wanted to hear. There were takers—not many, Powell's science being sound, but cherry-picking is the name of this game, and enough rent-a-scientists and rivals of Powell could be found. And there was rain-follows-the-plow.



JOHN WESLEY POWELL

According to a pseudo-science of the time, if land was plowed and cultivated, rainfall would increase. We are not making this up. The term was coined by Charles Dana Wilber, who wrote:

“Suppose [a section of farmers] 50 miles, in width, from Manitoba to Texas, could acting in concert, turn over the prairie sod, and after deep plowing and receiving the rain and moisture, present a new surface of green growing crops instead of dry, hard baked earth covered with sparse buffalo grass. No one can question or doubt the inevitable effect of this cooling condensing surface upon the moisture in the atmosphere as it moves over by the Western winds. A reduction of temperature must at once occur, accompanied by the usual phenomena of showers. . . . To be more concise, Rain follows the plow.”

In addition, Powell had his rivals, and congressmembers who had ignored them now gave them forums to smear Powell or just to spread a less reliable version of science. Paleontologist/ichthyologist Edward Cope planted nasty stories about Powell in a New York newspaper.

After Powell’s death years later, his geographer colleague William M. Davis would write, “Powell’s large share in promoting a correct knowledge of the arid parts of the United States and their possible utilization will not be realized by readers today unless they recall the time when so much was said about taking the words ‘Great American Desert’ off the map.”

But Stewart and company did not represent all congressional sentiment and in 1888, Congress closed public lands to settlement until Powell’s agency could classify the lands of the West as irrigable or otherwise.

But the West was a big place, and lawmakers like Stewart wanted the classification of lands done yesterday. Powell estimated it would take six to seven years to complete. There were speculators, rainmakers and others of more serious intent who were not willing to wait. As the years passed, pressure built on members of Congress to throw open the public domain. When they were pressured, they needed someone to blame. Powell was handy.

Just as current lawmakers like Dean Heller and Mark Amodei today attack Barack Obama for using the power Congress gave him to create national monuments, soon legislators were blaming Powell for the moratorium on settling public lands they had enacted. And they found other grounds on which to make a case against him. He believed in small farms, because it appeared that no more than 20 percent of the public lands were irrigable, and he considered it criminal to let people settle on plots “where they cannot maintain themselves.” Nor was he as susceptible to influence as congressmembers. “It is to be borne in mind that this survey is not primarily designed for the benefit of private person,” he wrote. And he considered rain-follows-the-plow nonsense.

But members of Congress were losing their patience and finally they repealed the closure of public lands before Powell’s work was complete. The public domain was thrown open to however anyone wanted to use it.

As “private persons” tried to make irrigation work in the West, the West became littered with failed irrigation projects. One of them was in Nevada, headed by Francis Newlands, a Californian whose political career had stagnated in that state. He turned to Nevada for better luck after marrying money. He lost about a half million of it on his Truckee Irrigation Project, deciding thereafter that the public’s money was needed for desert reclamation—“reclaiming” the desert for agriculture. In 1902, as a U.S. House member from Nevada, he won passage of the Reclamation Act. Even then, Congress was still ignoring science and Powell, who had called for Western farms of 2,500 acres. The Act provided for the kind of farms that might succeed in the wet and fertile East—160 acres (320 for a married couple).

Leah J. Wilds, Danny A. Gonzales and Glen S. Krutz/1994: “And finally, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation water is among the most inexpensive (at least for irrigated agriculture), highly subsidized, and inefficiently used water in the American West.”

Some projects, such as construction of Hoover Dam, require government aid because so much capital is needed that private companies cannot accomplish it. But it should have occurred to someone that the reason commercial irrigation projects failed was not that they were underfinanced but that most of them simply didn’t work or make profits, meaning that a government program would face the same problem. It might also have prompted officials to start with model projects and see what worked and what didn’t. Instead, within days of the enactment of the Act, five were announced in five states—including Nevada’s Truckee Carson Irrigation District—then dozens more, and within a decade the program was bankrupt. (The TCID was intended to put more than 200,000 acres into agriculture. It has not yet reached 75,000 but it has destroyed a wildlife refuge, lowered Pyramid Lake’s level 70 feet and its surface area one-fourth, impeded the upstream spawn of the Lahontan trout—making it extinct in the lake—and destroyed the Pyramid tribe’s fishing industry that fed Nevada mining camps.)

The money troubles didn’t slow reclamation down. Congress pumped a loan from the treasury into it, keeping it alive. In 20 years, the loan was unpaid, and most projects were losing money.

As the reclamation projects failed, they drifted along on federal loans, interest exemptions, subsidies, extended payment periods. Eventually, the federal government started building often unnecessary hydroelectric dams to generate revenue to pay for the money-losing reclamation projects. As the projects piled up, the pool of red ink became wider and deeper, which is more than could be said of the water that fed them. Western farmers were being subsidized to grow crops that Eastern farmers were being paid not to grow.

If the West had more rivers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers might have bankrupted the United States of America.

As competition for dam building grew between the two federal dam building agencies, dam building took on a life of its own. (It's not clear why two agencies were allowed to perform the work.) Hundreds of dams went up, and slowly likely sites for dams dwindled. Possible uses for dams—water supply, irrigation, flood control, hydroelectricity—became satisfied.

Yet the dam building went on, not for any particular reason except—dam building itself. It became a bureaucratic perpetual motion machine. Internal federal paperwork later disclosed showed the worthlessness and lack of necessity of dams built.

Worse, dams became part of doing business in Congress—"a kind of currency," water historian Marc Reisner wrote in 1986. Congress had literally become unable to function without water projects to trade.

Many of these dam projects, because of the massive surfaces of the reservoirs, wasted through evaporation the water they were supposed to conserve.

"Excessive reservoir storage increases consumptive losses in the form of evaporation and seepage," author John Weisheit wrote. "Over-developing the watershed with numerous diversions and reservoirs also decreases the quality of the water by loading the river water with salt and heavy metals."

We hear about the evaporation that results from lawn watering but not the evaporation that results from huge storage reservoirs built to keep a failing program alive. In 1962, the Interior Department analyzed and approved four huge water projects—Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, Curecanti and Navajo—by intentionally excluding from its calculations the terrific wastage of water in evaporation from the surface of their reservoirs.

And to keep getting more welfare for their constituents, the successors of the lawmakers who denied that the West was arid asked for the sympathy of their colleagues on the grounds that the Western farmers were developing land that was—arid.

Former U.S. commissioner of reclamation Dan Beard/2015: "I mean it costs us \$100 to deliver an acre foot of water and we charge the farmers \$2."

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter tried to get the program under control by cutting off money for 19 water projects. Congress erupted in an uproar, with Carter's fellow Democrats leading the charge, though Republicans were still heard from. U.S. Sen. Paul Laxalt of Nevada—who, in his inaugural address as governor, had warned against people "perfectly capable of taking care of themselves surrendering this basic responsibility to the government"—found nothing wrong with the welfare-laden water projects and accused Carter of waking up each day, looking in the mirror, and asking what he could do to the West.

But enough Democrats stood by Carter to make a veto fight of it—and then Carter caved in.

But however weak his leadership, it was Carter who was on the side of history. Once he pulled the curtain back and the public discovered there was only a voice there, dam building never had its same sacrosanct standing again, and the environmental movement's growing influence together with wildly rising construction costs eventually put an end to the era of dam building. There would still be occasional dams built, but the frenzied annual monsoon of water projects that Congress once disgorged was facing a sharp decline—and some already existing dams would start coming down.

But the anti-scientific techniques that have kept water wastage in the West alive for more than a century have now been turned to use in promoting the continuing deterioration of climate.

A 2013 study from University of Nevada, Reno hydrologist Thomas Myers, published in the Journal of the American Water Resources Association indicates that just one artificial federal lake loses up to 380,000 acre-feet of water each year. Its name? Lake Powell.

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Developer Willing to Donate Funds, Again, to Virginia Lake Water Quality Project

NOVEMBER 9, 2015 BY [BOB CONRAD](#) [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

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Photo: Chris Vega

A local developer is putting forward money, once again, to [improve the quality of Virginia Lake's water](#).

J. Carter Witt of Silverwing Development, developer of the Edgewater apartments and condos near Virginia Lake, told ThisisReno that he intends to contribute to the water quality project that he has stood behind for more than a decade.

And there are no strings attached, he said.

Last week at Reno City Council's meeting, city council members had harsh words for Witt when it came to their attention that he had pulled his donation of \$116,000 for the project allegedly because of a proposed labor ordinance that would increase licensing requirements for plumbers and electricians.

"I'm a little frustrated that there's this attitude of a quid pro quo," Witt said last week. "I did not come up with this labor ordinance nor was it even suggested at the time we entered into the initial donation agreement. If the labor ordinance is passed in its current form, I'm going to lose money on this project, so we cannot consider entering into a new donation agreement with those results — that is simply common sense."

Witt said the ordinance would put Reno's housing industry out of business and said that the City of Reno defaulted on the donation agreement because construction on the project did not begin by the agreed-upon date of June 30, 2015.

City Councilmember Naomi Duerr disagreed and said that Witt was the one who defaulted on the agreement.

"When he failed to make his contribution June 1 — basically, the contract was terminated (according to the contract's terms)," she said. "Either party can say, no, 'I'm going to waive that condition' but you would do that in writing."



John Flansberg. Image: City of Reno.

City of Reno Public Works Director John Flansberg characterized the original donation agreement at last week’s council meeting like this:

“We had a contract agreement that came to council previously; however, part of the terms of that was ... that (the city would) be ... under agreement for this project before June 30. Because we didn’t have that initiated until September — and remember, we did a prolonged public comment as well — because the developer felt that we did not meet the condition of that agreement, they were no longer obligated, per se, for this project.”

Documents given to ThisisReno show that the donor was to pay the donation by June 1, 2015 — or 10 days after that if the donor announced in a newspaper that bids are being accepted on the project — or the agreement would be nullified.

That didn’t happen, nor did construction begin by June 30.



Naomi Duerr speaks at Reno City Hall in June about the water quality project at Virginia Lake. Photo by Emmett Esnard.

What is unclear is why the City Council had not previously heard about the defaulted agreement. Duerr said that it came to her attention the **day of a press conference, October 27, when she announced the beginning of the project being funded by a \$100,000 grant from the Truckee River Fund.**

Witt sent a letter September 8, 2015 to Andy Bass, the city's director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, responding, he said, to a letter from Bass sent September 1, 2015 in which Bass requested the donation funds.

In it, Witt wrote:

“As you know, the stated donation was predicated upon:

1. The City appropriating \$150,070.73 in the FY14/15 and the same in FY15/16
2. Construction to be commenced on or before June 20, 2015” (The date in the agreement shows June 30, 2015.)

To my knowledge, neither of these conditions were met.”

“Apparently the letter did not get circulated to anybody,” Witt said. He was surprised to hear about comments by council members at last week's meeting.

Duerr said that the city did budget funds, but Witt not sending his donation by June 1 is what nullified the contract.

“The funds were budgeted before June 30,” she said. “It said that if either condition wasn't met, the contract would automatically terminate.”

A local developer is putting forward money, again, to improve the quality of Virginia Lake's water.[CLICK TO TWEET](#)

Nevertheless, Witt said on Saturday that he will still donate the money for the project, no strings attached.

“We are on board with the donation,” he said. “We will write a check within 10 days of receiving a new agreement.”

Duerr said the donation would have to be approved by the City Council, and some council members may be reticent about accepting the donation.

“I know I would certainly be open to hearing what he has to say,” she said. “I think he has a professional interest and a community-minded interest in ... the lake.”

Tell the Board Submission: Randy W.

-----Original Message-----

From: Marlene Olsen

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2015 7:56 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Rebate programs for removing grass

Hello Randy:

Thanks for your inquiry. TMWA does not have a grass removal rebate program. There is no funding source at this time, except to have customers fund it through a rate increase. We will keep researching the viability of this program as we know there is a lot of interest.

Marlene Olsen

GoodStanding Outreach

Principal Strategist

Direct- [775-434-0308](tel:775-434-0308)

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Randy Walker [mailto:[REDACTED]]

> Sent: Wednesday, October 21, 2015 4:35 PM

> To: tmwboard

> Cc: Randy Walker

> Subject: Rebate programs for removing grass

>

> Hello TMWA:

>

> Please let me know if there are any rebate programs for removing grass to reduce water consumption.

>

> Thank You!

>

>

>

> RANDY [REDACTED]

>

> D|C|G DICKSON COMMERCIAL GROUP

>

> [REDACTED]

>

> [REDACTED]

> [REDACTED]

> [REDACTED]

> [REDACTED]

> [REDACTED]