

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

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TO: Board of Directors
Santa Barbara County Water Agency

FROM: Phillip M. Demery, Director
Public Works Department

STAFF CONTACT: Thomas Fayram, Deputy Public Works Director
Rory Lang, PW Program Specialist, Ext. 3545

SUBJECT: **Santa Barbara County Regional Water Shortage/Drought Planning Efforts**

Recommendation(s):

That the Board of Directors:

- A. Receive and file the Santa Barbara County Regional Water Shortage/Drought Plan (Attachment A); and
- B. Direct staff to hold a public workshop on drought planning and response.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:

The recommendations align with Goal No. 5: Maintain and Enhance the Quality of Life for all Residents.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

Historical rainfall records demonstrate that our area is subject to multi-year dry periods. Accordingly, local water purveyors have developed sufficient supplies to meet demand during anticipated droughts (based on historic record) such as experienced in 1945-51 and 1986-91. However, it is important that water purveyors regularly update their water supply plans, due to factors such as improving water efficiency technology, population growth and allocation of existing supplies for environmental protection. Santa Barbara County has received less than average rainfall for two of the last three years. If this dry period continues into the next year, the volume of key surface water supplies may be reduced to levels at which some purveyors will begin increasing their use of ground water and/or state water according to their previously adopted water supply plans.

In an effort to provide assistance to local water purveyors with this issue, the Santa Barbara County Water Agency (Water Agency), with the local water purveyors and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, coordinated the development of this Santa Barbara County Regional Water Shortage/Drought Plan (hereafter referred to as County Drought Plan). Water Agency staff utilized the experience gained during the 1986-1991 drought to prepare this regional plan for the county. The intent of the plan is to prepare for droughts that may occur

in the immediate future by addressing changes in water demand due to population increases, newly developed water supplies, and on-going conservation efforts.

Local water purveyors will be affected differently by the drought depending on their particular supply sources. Therefore, individual purveyors may ask their customers to respond to a prolonged drought in different ways. But a drought is a regional phenomenon so some responses are appropriate at a regional level. For example, a regional approach will help ensure that water users countywide will receive clear and consistent information about the drought.

To assure that the County Drought Plan complements the purveyors' plans, the Water Agency created a Water Shortage/Drought Preparedness Planning Technical Advisory Committee with staff of the Water Agency and the local water purveyors. This group provided input into the development of the County Drought Plan and the actions to be implemented by the Water Agency in conjunction with the individual efforts of the water purveyors.

The Regional Plan (Attachment A) describes specific actions to be undertaken by staff and identified timing and coordination with local water purveyors to maximize effectiveness. The elements of the County Drought Plan include:

- Development of a coordinated advertising campaign and public information materials
- Acceleration of low-flow fixture rebate programs
- Complete an inventory of potential surplus water available for exchange/sale to districts that may wish to augment their existing supplies

In addition, the Water Agency will continue to work with medium and small local water purveyors to complete water shortage plans using the USBR Water Shortage/Drought Planning Handbook developed by the Water Agency in 2003 (http://www.usbr.gov/mp/watershare/documents/Contingency-Drought_Planning.pdf).

Staff also requests that your Board direct staff to hold a public workshop on drought planning and response. A public workshop would allow local purveyors and the public a forum for discussing issues that water users may face during a drought. Topics to be covered in the public workshop include: information about the current water supply situation; potential alternatives to augment local supplies; and demand management methods. The public workshop will also allow local purveyors to address some of the recommendations in the 1992 report entitled *SOUTH COAST WATER AGENCIES DROUGHT RESPONSE REPORT: City of Santa Barbara, Goleta Water District, and Montecito Water District*, which was written at the conclusion of the 1986-1991 drought. The recommendations from that report were based on the experiences of the water districts on the South Coast of Santa Barbara County during the prolonged drought of 1986-91 and are listed below.

- ❖ Prepare a comprehensive drought contingency plan including water supply and demand scenarios during multiple dry years so that you fully understand the district supplies and what steps will be taken to increase supplies or reduce demand when shortages occur.
- ❖ Plan ahead by setting aside water supplies (drought buffer) and funding reserves to offset temporary revenue shortfalls during periods with lower water sales.
- ❖ Implement water conservation pricing structure at all times; implement drought pricing structure in early stages of drought to encourage maximum efficiency and minimize wasteful use.

- ❖ Coordinate drought response programs among purveyors in the region for consistency, equity and to minimize confusion among water users regarding which programs are in effect in their area.
- ❖ Establish programs that are equitable (do not favor customers in higher income brackets) and do not penalize customers that been conserving all along (i.e., by creating an allocation program that reduces customer's allotment to a percentage of past use).
- ❖ Maintain credibility with customers by conducting an honest, open and intensive public information campaign throughout the drought. Keep customers informed about water situation, the impact of their conservation efforts and the ongoing need to conserve. Use many mediums to keep public informed such as bill inserts, radio/TV advertising, newspaper articles and advertising, presentations to local service clubs and organizations, neighborhood workshops, newsletters and other means typically used by local purveyors to educate customers.
- ❖ Offer options for customers regarding how they save water during early stages of drought. For example, provide an allocation and let them choose how they will use the water. One customer may want to keep their landscape thriving (with efficient irrigation practices, of course) and choose not wash their vehicles, while another customer may want to let their lawn die and still wash their vehicles. Save the severe restrictions (i.e. no lawn watering) for later stages when higher levels of conservation are necessary.
- ❖ Create a citizens' committee to obtain feedback from customers and to keep the community informed about the purveyor's decisions, particularly regarding transitions between stages of action.
- ❖ Establish a reasonable rationing program and enforce it equitably. Customers will notice if water purveyors do not enforce the restrictions or prohibitions consistently.

To see the complete report, please visit www.sbwater.org/DroughtPlanning.htm.

Mandates and Service Levels:

On-going water use efficiency programs managed by the Water Agency also support the goals of water shortage/drought preparedness planning. As a contractor with the USBR and State of California, regional water efficiency plans are the responsibility of the County. (Individual water purveyors have responsibilities for developing water efficiency and shortage plans for their individual service areas.)

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

The development of a County Drought Plan is funded through a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Drought preparedness planning is part of the water conservation program work plan and is included in the Adopted 2004-05 Budget under the Water Agency Cost Center of the Water Resources Division of the Public Works Department as shown on page D-326 in the budget book.