

PRESENTATION TO STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

By: Jan Abel, President, Cachuma Conservation Release Board

Background and Experience: I have been a Montecito resident for 38 years. I am currently President of the Board of the Montecito Water District, which along with the Goleta Water District, City of Santa Barbara, and Carpinteria Valley Water District, comprise the Cachuma Conservation Release Board (CCRB). I also am the President of the Cachuma Conservation Release Board, and a Board Member and past President of the Cachuma Operation and Maintenance Board, which includes all of the Cachuma Project Member Units - consisting of the members of CCRB plus the Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District Improvement District No. 1.

In addition to my local water agency positions, I also serve as a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA). As well as serving as past chair, I was also recently reelected to a third term as the vice-chair ACWA's Region 5, serving the coastal region of the State from the San Francisco Bay area to the Ventura County line.

Through my extensive involvement with ACWA, including my over eight years of service on the ACWA Board, I have become very familiar with the challenges and needs faced by water agencies throughout our state, and in particular the needs to balance water demands and environmental stewardship in this semi-arid region.

Drought Experience: I have served on the Board of the Montecito Water District since 1991, joining that Board during a particularly challenging period at the height of drought and when our community was facing a number of both expensive and divisive choices concerning our water supply future. Many of my comments come from my Montecito experience, but they hold similarly true for all the Member Units. All of the CCRB member agencies were in declared water shortage emergencies at that time, and as you may recall, the situation in the Santa Barbara community was so dire that national news stories reported the fact that people were actually spray painting their dead lawns green. Water supply from the Cachuma project that year reached such a low point that an emergency barge and pump were floated in the Lake to get the last bit of water out of the "dead pool," and the City of Santa Barbara drilled alluvial wells in the silt of Gibraltar Lake in a desperate measure to extract the last bit of remaining water supply. The Goleta Water District, Montecito Water District, and City of Santa Barbara also cooperated and shared in the \$45,000,000 cost - a particularly phenomenal sum in 1991 dollars - to develop an emergency desalination facility, and established a multi-agency wheeling arrangement to bring in state water project exchange water through a series of actual and paper water transfers via the Metropolitan Water District and Casitas Municipal Water District to the south.

The Montecito Water District had at that time been in a water shortage emergency situation since 1973, with a moratorium on new service connections and a long-term water allocation program. Among my first responsibilities as a new Montecito Water District Board Member was to sit on the Appeals Committee for people with hardship requests from the

allocation of water provided to them by the District under its rationing program. Those appeals were often heart-wrenching, but were usually denied as we simply did not have the water.

I raise these experiences so that you will understand that the long-term effects of water shortage and its impacts on a community are real issues which the Santa Barbara area has faced in recent years. The result of the water shortage to our community was devastating, with the estimates of losses in landscape value alone in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and a deep implanting of conservation ethics, practices, and pricing in the hopes that such disaster can be avoided in the future.

Long Term Supply Planning: In response to the extremities of the drought in 1991, the Santa Barbara community not only incurred the costs of a temporary desalination facility, but also agreed to pay the approximately \$500,000,000 to build the coastal branch extension of the State Water Project to Lake Cachuma. It was well understood at that time that State Water Project water was to be a supplemental supply only, and that its value was primarily as insurance in periods of drought and to overcome the long-standing need for moratoriums and rationing, and that it did not represent new water to allow substantial new growth and development. Santa Barbara has always recognized that the community has a very limited carrying capacity, and growth has been very slow with a great deal of attention placed on planned growth. In particular, the need to limit development so as not to overrun available water supplies has been a long-standing mantra for the area. For the Montecito Water District, this meant that in conjunction with the breaking of the drought in 1992, and the prospect of State Water Project deliveries, the District still worked closely with the County of Santa Barbara on a Community Plan Update which closely linked potential development with availability of resources, and only after the adoption of that Community Plan Update did the District end its water shortage emergency.

Planned and balanced environmental stewardship: As a Montecito Water District Board Member, and as the District's representative to its Cachuma related joint powers agencies, I was also involved in the mid-1990s in re-negotiation of the Cachuma Project Water Service contract with the United States Bureau of Reclamation, including review of the comprehensive Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Statement prepared for that contract renewal. While the expense of that process was difficult to explain to my constituents, I am proud that we were able to reach consensus resulting in that contract, which provided for a permanent funding source for environmental stewardship, environmental restoration projects, and other protected resources actions related to the Cachuma Project.

I was also involved in the State Water Resources Control Board hearings in 1991 and 1994, and have actively supported the development of the Santa Ynez River Technical Advisory Committee MOU process and its focused efforts to provide for balanced restoration and recovery for a steelhead fishery in the Santa Ynez River. I have also been involved with and have made many trips to Sacramento and Washington, D.C. to seek funding for the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Initiative, which has turned into a successful federal/state/local partnership to support "on the ground" recovery efforts in a way that sets aside the historic battles between fishery advocates and resource agencies to, instead, accomplish "the most bang for the buck" with balanced environmental stewardship. Finally, I was particularly proud to be an active member of the negotiation team between elected officials of the Cachuma Project Member Units, and

officials representing the Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District and City of Lompoc to develop the historic Santa Ynez River Water Rights Agreement. This Agreement has reached a consensus-based settlement of conflicting water quality and water quantity claims and demands, which have plagued our communities and caused endless legal battles since the 1920s. We are particularly hopeful that you will embrace this settlement, and so end those decades of bitter, acrimonious and expensive water wars.

Costs to the Public: Finally, I would like to come back to the issue of expense, which is one we elected Board members for the Cachuma Member Units must always consider for the over 200,000 people in the Santa Barbara area who rely on the Cachuma Project for their primary source of water supply. Because we live in an area that is naturally water short, subject to periodic and sustained drought, with a high local environmental ethic, but also with the reasonable expectation that water will be available for that existing population and our limited planned growth, we also live with the reality that our water supplies are extremely expensive. This is exacerbated by the fact that our community is to an extent isolated and not integrated with larger water systems such as the urban water systems of the greater southern California area or the Bay area, or the agricultural water systems of the Central Valley, and so we do not benefit from those economies of scale. We also find that we are generally required and expected to solve our own local water supply problems with locally developed resources, including funding.

Contrary to popular belief, not everyone in Santa Barbara is a millionaire, but we do all have extremely high water bills. The average residential customer within the Montecito Water District pays \$136.80 per month for water (for 33 units of water with a 1 inch meter), and our commercial water rates are 40% higher than those residential rates. This is a result of our extremely high incremental water rates for the supplemental sources of supply we have been forced to develop to make up for losses in our other sources of supply, such as from siltation of Lake Cachuma and the on-going releases which we make for downstream water demands and to address the requirements of steelhead as imposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Again, we have developed access to the State Water Project, but at an extremely high price and for a supply which we still must very carefully manage in order to avoid a return to drought shortage emergencies in those periodic cycles which we know will be facing us in the future.

On behalf of those over 200,000 people, I ask you to very carefully consider the balance which has already been developed by the Cachuma Member Units and other interested agencies in the water rights settlement agreement and the fish management plan, and confirm that we are doing the best job we can under very difficult circumstances. We do not have other sources readily available, and we are already planning to tap all economically feasible supplies to meet the needs we know we will face in the inevitable next drought.