



Briefing on the Status of Water Transfers and Issues in California

Background

A water transfer is a temporary or long-term change in the point of diversion, place of use, or purpose of use due to a transfer, sale, lease or exchange of water or water rights (Water Code § 1725). Water transfers can take place between neighboring water districts or across the state. Transferred water must be “real” water as opposed to the rights for water that would have otherwise been unused.

Transfer water can be made available from:

- Reservoir storage that would have been carried over to the next year
- Pumping groundwater instead of using delivered surface water
- Transferring previously banked groundwater
- Reducing the existing consumptive use through crop idling or crop shifting
- Water use efficiency measures that prevent the recovered water from becoming unusable, such as lining a canal or switching from flood to drip irrigation (CWP Update 2013, Public Review Draft)

Since the 1990s, the water transfer market in California has markedly expanded. Total transfers (short and long term) statewide were approximately 1.4 million acre-feet (PPIC) with 2013 cross-Delta transfers estimated at approximately 250,000 acre-feet (SWRCB, DWR).

With a potential third dry year looming, there is heightened awareness regarding the role and scope of water transfers. At the Water Commission’s joint meeting with the California Board of Food and Agriculture on September 10, panelists noted that water transfers can be an effective way of addressing water shortages and adding flexibility to the system, especially during dry years. Several panelists also discussed the need to streamline the approval process.

At this meeting, Gary Bardini, DWR Deputy Director for Integrated Water Management, will discuss DWR’s activities related to water transfers.

Ellen Hanak, Senior Fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), will discuss the broader context for water transfers. Since the early 2000s, the PPIC has tracked water markets in their report *California’s Water Market, By the Numbers*, updated in 2012. The report includes an overview of the policy context for the water market, an analysis of recent trends, and recommendations.

Agenda Item: 6
Meeting Date: November 20, 2013
Page 2

Attachments

[California's Water Market, By the Numbers, Update 2012](#)

Contact

Rachel Ballanti
Assistant Executive Officer
California Water Commission
(916) 653-7937