

# SMALL WATER SYSTEMS WORKSHOP

3/3/2014

Summary and Recommendations

*A workshop addressing the effects of California's  
Drought on Small Water Systems in Urban, Rural, and  
Disadvantaged Communities*

# Small Water Systems Workshop

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 3, the California Water Commission held a workshop in San Diego to address the effects of California's current drought on small water systems in small, rural, and disadvantaged communities in Southern California. While the drought is a statewide phenomenon, it has hit smaller water systems particularly hard. The Commission gathered experts from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, small and rural water systems, and disadvantaged communities (DAC) to discuss the many challenges facing these systems and options for addressing these challenges.

Jeanine Jones, Deputy Drought Manager for the Department of Water Resources (DWR), provided an overview of drought conditions and impacts on small water systems. In the last three years, California precipitation has been far below average and while there have been several recent notable storms they have not been sufficient to end the drought. This has had led to a drop in groundwater levels in some areas; small systems that rely on groundwater are particularly vulnerable to these changes because they are often in remote locations and have difficulty obtaining alternate supplies. Additionally, many small systems do not have the capacity to participate in Integrated Regional Water Management Plans (IRWMP) and are not required to participate in Urban Water Management Plans (UWMP), both of which would require agencies to develop shortage contingency plans.



Dr. Anne Steinemann, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego and Research Scientist for National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), University of Colorado, described the NIDIS Drought Pilot Programs for California. One of the program goals is to develop useful drought indicators, or standardized ways to measure drought. The pilot programs are ongoing; they work with small systems to determine what they and their users need, and how to provide for those needs. NIDIS is working to link up-to-date, localized drought information to water management decisions to reduce drought vulnerability.

Krista Reger, Storm Water Protection Specialist and Trainer for the California Rural Water Association (CRWA), discussed CRWA's work with small systems and drought impacts to those systems. She encouraged state and local agencies to improve communication with small and rural water systems, with more emphasis on the drought's impacts on water quality. Traditional conservation techniques such as watering restrictions and rebates are often not available to small and rural systems, due to lack of enforcement or funding for programs. She also highlighted the barrier that Proposition 218 poses to small systems receiving grant funds; it is difficult for small systems to meet the revenue thresholds that are often built into funding opportunities.

Lisa Yamashita-Lopez, who serves on the board of the California Association of Mutual Water Companies (CAMWC), discussed the issues facing mutual water companies. CAMWC believes a comprehensive approach is needed to address the challenges faced by mutual water companies. Her suggestions included a statewide survey to assess the needs of small and large mutual water systems, limiting unnecessary regulation, and investment in infrastructure.

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion on the challenges facing disadvantaged communities. The participants were Colin Bailey, Executive Director, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water and Co-Chair of the EJ/DAC Caucus for the California Water Plan; Maria Elena Kennedy, Co-Chair of the EJ/DAC Caucus for the California Water Plan, and liaison representing DACs on the Water Plan public advisory committee; Sergio Carranza, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation; and Guadalupe Rosales, Executive Coordinator of La Union Hace La Fuerza. The panel discussed the importance of making sure that DACs are represented in a meaningful way; DWR and the legislature need to find ways to improve engagement. Mr. Carranza discussed his work to provide outreach to Polanco (mobile home) parks and technical assistance to maintain water quality. In most rural communities, consolidation with larger water systems is impossible; there should be more flexible, alternative approaches to providing quality drinking water to Polanco parks. Ms. Rosales discussed the poor conditions in many mobile home parks, including drinking water containing dangerous levels of arsenic, foul smelling water, and leaky septic systems. She stated that resources for infrastructure should be targeted to truly provide the benefits needed in these communities and asked state agencies including the Commission to take a stronger position to help the residents of these communities. The panel expressed concerns about the ability of small systems to access funds from Round 3 of IRWM grant funding, and encouraged a meaningful outreach and engagement process to ensure that these resources make it to the communities that need them most.



## AGENDA



**California Water Commission**  
**Workshop on Small Water Systems in Southern California**  
Monday, March 3, 2014  
Caltrans District 11 Office Complex  
4050 Taylor Street, Garcia Room  
San Diego, California 92110  
1:00 p.m. to approx. 4:30 p.m.

The California Water Commission will host a public workshop focusing on the challenges facing small water systems in rural, urban, and disadvantaged communities. Many state agencies are working diligently on drought response actions this year, and the Commission is particularly interested in addressing the disproportionate impact of the drought on some small communities. This workshop is intended to provide information to the members of the Commission and the public, and may inform future actions by the Commission. A quorum of members may be present at this workshop.

1. Welcome by California Water Commission Members
2. Overview of California Drought Conditions and Department of Water Resources Activities
3. Briefing on the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) Drought Pilot
4. Public Health Agency Perspective
5. Discussion with California Rural Water Association
6. Discussion with California Association of Mutual Water Companies
7. Discussion of Challenges Facing Disadvantaged Communities
8. Panel Discussion with Small System Operators
9. Public Comment and Discussion of Next Steps

Further information regarding this workshop will be available at [www.cwc.ca.gov](http://www.cwc.ca.gov).

## EVENT PARTICIPANTS

### Members of the Commission

- Joe Byrne, Chair
- Danny Curtin
- Kim Delfino
- Luther Hintz
- David Orth
- Adán Ortega



### Speakers

- Jeanine Jones, Deputy Drought Manager, Department of Water Resources
- Dr. Anne Steinemann, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego and Research Scientist for NIDIS, University of Colorado
- Krista Reger, Storm Water Protection Specialist and Trainer, California Rural Water Association
- Lisa Yamashita-Lopez, Board Member, California Association of Mutual Water Companies
- Colin Bailey, Executive Director, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water and Co-Chair of the EJ/DAC Caucus for the California Water Plan
- Maria Elena Kennedy, Co-Chair of the EJ/DAC Caucus for the California Water Plan, and liaison representing DACs on the Water Plan public advisory committee
- Sergio Carranza, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation
- Guadalupe Rosales, Executive Coordinator, La Union Hace La Fuerza

## Participants and Represented Organizations

- Victoria Baca, Mayor Pro Tem of Moreno Valley
- Office of Senator Marty Block
- California Office of Emergency Services – Southern Region
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation
- San Diego Water Authority
- Pine Valley Mutual Water Company



## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

*During the workshop, participants made a range of recommendations to improve small water systems including targeted outreach, additional funding, and technical assistance. A summary of those recommendations and suggestions is included below:*

- Take actions to improve capacity and assure that small communities have access to the expertise needed to operate their systems effectively.
- Provide funding for infrastructure, additional wells, and groundwater monitoring to small water systems.
- Provide more technical and grant preparation assistance to small and disadvantaged water system owners and operators to increase participation and competitiveness in grant programs.
- Improve communication and information-sharing with small water system operators and users, including communication with non-English speaking communities and those who do not have Internet access. Partner with non-profit agencies who have established communication infrastructure.
- Develop strategies to address the barriers that prevent small systems from participating with Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Planning.
- Develop strategies to address the barriers that prevent small systems from receiving competitive grants such as revenue requirements, Proposition 218, etc.
- Develop a needs assessment for the most effective use of public funds overall – including DACs – and make that information public.
- Water system investments should be prioritized within the context of other infrastructure investments (e.g. better and safer water pipes should be installed before roads are repaved).
- DWR should provide outreach and solicit meaningful participation from small systems and disadvantaged communities in Round 3 of the IRWM grant process.

- Consider cost-effective systems (e.g. under the sink filters) as affordable alternatives to large projects for locations that cannot connect to conventional systems.
- Develop a report on lessons learned from DAC pilot projects.
- Agencies must develop standards for implementing the “human right to water” in future in programs, projects, and funding opportunities.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Meeting Minutes