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There is no water conservation conundrum

Why conserve?

Here at Castaic Lake Water Agency, we believe the answer to that question is simple: We should conserve because it's good stewardship. It's the responsible way to manage a vital resource, and it's in the best interests of our community, our state and the environment.

Yet, proving the adage that no good deed goes unpunished, "rumblings of discontent" have been voiced about water conservation efforts, based on the argument that some people — including, ironically, so-called environmentalists — don't feel they should have to conserve water if some of that water may be used by future residents who will occupy new homes.

They're calling it a "water conservation conundrum," and their argument can be boiled down to something like this: "We shouldn't conserve water because then someone else might use it." Huh? Water conservation isn't a conundrum. It's common sense.

Taking the "conundrum" argument to the extreme, should we water our lawns 24-7, take hour-long showers and run dishwashers with only three plates in them so that other folks would not have a reliable water supply? Of course not. And by the way, isn't conservation something real environmentalists do as a matter of routine?

These same selfish "rumblings of discontent" go on to suggest water conservation isn't working anyway, citing a recent Signal article reporting water use in the Santa Clarita Valley is up 13 percent. Unfortunately, the newspaper article was inaccurate. The article was based on a report showing a 13-percent increase in water revenue, not usage. Further, the increase cited in the report was not for the entire Santa Clarita Valley, but just for CLWA's Santa Clarita Water Division, which is one of four water retailers serving the SCV.

R.J. Kelly

Castaic Lake Water Agency

In order to keep pace with increases in ongoing service costs such as those for labor, materials, and compliance with safety and environmental regulations, SCWD enacted a rate increase in January that resulted in higher levels of revenue. Unfortunately, the newspaper article incorrectly assumed that since revenue was up, usage was also up, which is not the case.

Actually, water usage in the area served by Santa Clarita Water Division was down more than 11 percent in the first six months of 2008 compared to 2007. In fact, water usage by all SCV residents served by the four local water retailers was down about 7.6 percent.

So, contrary to the "rumblings," conservation indeed appears to be working. And, without reservation, we view that as a positive thing.

We're not conflicted about it at all. Every conservation success story not only helps our community weather the dry years caused by the current drought and other external factors, but also increases our flexibility and ability to plan for our community's future water needs.

The less each one of us uses now, the more we can hold in storage to extend our ability to withstand future dry years without resorting to severe measures.

Here at CLWA, we have the conversation every day about the best ways to manage and more efficiently use this valuable resource. Some folks might spend a few minutes (or seconds) chatting about it at the water cooler (drink all you want, by the way), but for water professionals, it's their raison d'être; the reason they come to work every day.

The conversation is, of course, happening at the state level, too. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who issued an executive order declaring a statewide drought in June, is advocating a 20-percent-person reduction in statewide water use by 2020.

That is admittedly a lofty goal, but you'd be surprised how much water can be saved with a few simple changes in how you use water.

In fact, during the worst part of the drought of 1987-92, here in the Santa Clarita Valley we achieved a similar level of reduction advocated by the governor solely through common-sense practices that spared residents from water rationing or other significant hardship.

Those are the sorts of measures we're advocating now. They aren't draconian, expensive and they won't lower our standard of living; they are simply part of an overall effort to manage our water supply wisely.

It's water professionals' jobs to not only plan for water supply availability in good years, but in bad years, too. That's why we've been working so hard to store water for use in dry years, and to identify and acquire additional sources of water to enhance the SCV's water supply portfolio consisting of local groundwater, imported water supplies and recycled water.

Further, as we look years into the future, we have to plan to serve the community not just as it appears today, but as it is likely to appear in the future. Since water agencies don't regulate communities' residential growth rates — or, for

that matter, birth rates or immigration rates — we base our planning on anticipated growth as reported to us by local land use agencies (i.e., the city of Santa Clarita and Los Angeles County planning departments).

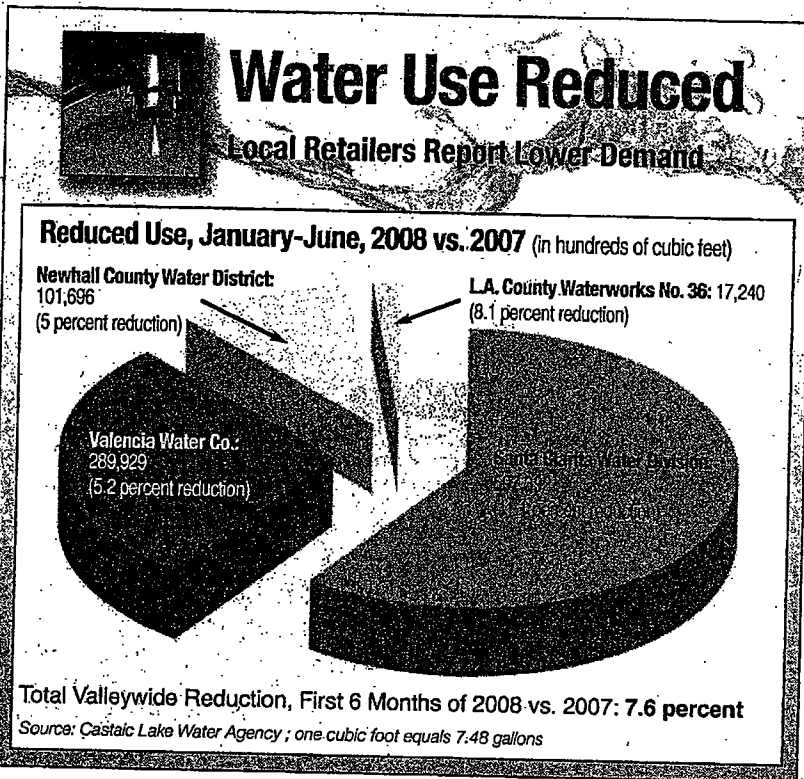
That doesn't mean we stand idly by and allow new development to be approved without regard to water consumption. To the contrary, we are constantly advocating that developers create water-wise projects. We're also working to support ordinances and regulations that will ensure future development that is more water-efficient and projects that use drought-friendly landscaping and irrigation techniques wherever possible.

In regards to growth in the Santa Clarita Valley, we are involved in an important cooperative planning process by the city of Santa Clarita and Los Angeles County.

The two entities are working together on "One Valley, One Vision," a new general plan for the SCV that will outline everything from roads to new development to public services, and more.

Citizens who are interested in the planning for growth in the SCV would be well-served to participate in the One Valley, One Vision process. The city and county are holding a joint environmental impact report meeting at 6 p.m. tonight at Santa Clarita City Hall, 23920 W. Valencia Boulevard.

This process provides you a golden opportunity to not just hear what is be-



Environmental Impact Meeting

- When: Tonight at 6 p.m.
- Where: Santa Clarita City Hall, 23920 W. Valencia Boulevard.

Yet, the “rumblings of discontent” persist, coming primarily from those who view water as a tool to prevent new homes from being built.

The questions have been posed:

- Why are we conserving?
- How will we conserve?
- Who exactly is it that we are conserving for?

The answers are simple:

■ Why conserve: We are conserving because it’s good resource management. We’re obligated to use all of our resources wisely — not just water, but all natural resources. As water suppliers, CLWA and the retailers would be crazy to advocate the senseless squandering of an ever-increasingly valuable resource.

■ How we’ll conserve: There are many common-sense ways to use water more efficiently that cause little if any inconvenience to water customers. A recent Signal commentary by CLWA General Manager Dan Masnada outlined some of them, and we also offer easy-to-use conservation tips on our Web site, www.clwa.org.

■ Who it’s for: We are conserving for ourselves and our children or, in other words, those of us who are here today and those of us who will be here tomorrow. Our community should conserve together and reap the benefits together. We believe all Californians have a right to a reasonable, dependable water supply. We believe we have the supply management tools in place to ensure they will have it, and ongoing conservation is simply one of those tools.

The water professionals at CLWA and the four local water retailers embrace the challenge of securing our community’s water supply, and they place a high value on not just conserving water, but also on efficiently managing the SCV’s water supply portfolio in a manner that is environmentally responsible and will best serve the community’s residents — all of them, now and in the future.

Water conservation is anything but a conundrum. It’s just the right thing to do.

R. J. Kelly is the Vice President of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board of Directors. His column reflects the Agency’s views, and not necessarily those of The Signal.

ing proposed, but for the planners to hear what you think.

In short, this is the appropriate venue in which to ask questions like, “How much will this valley grow, and what is being done to ensure that it grows responsibly?”

Water supply is one of many factors City and County planners are taking into consideration as they develop their plan, and CLWA and the local water retailers are closely coordinating with the City and County planners to ensure they have all the relevant and up-to-date information they need about the SCV’s long-term water supply outlook.

That is, after all, our role. As water suppliers, we don’t regulate growth. Rather, we are responsible for securing and delivering water to the community to the best of our ability. As a result, CLWA and the retailers are constantly reviewing and updating our own water supply planning efforts to adjust for changing circumstances. We don’t just plan year-by-year — we also look well into the future and take into account long-term water supply availability, including how to manage the invariable fluctuations that occur due to wet years, dry years and all of the years in between.

In fact, our current conservation efforts are much more about promoting a permanent ethic of using water wisely than they are solely about dealing with the short-term impacts of the current drought.

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