

WATER

POLICY: ENSURE A SUFFICIENT SUPPLY OF WATER, AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR COASTAL WATERS, BAYS, RESERVOIRS, STREAMS AND GROUNDWATER

Introduction

The San Diego region's economic wellbeing and quality of life depend heavily upon importing a reliable supply of water and maintaining clean coastal waters, bays, reservoirs, streams, and groundwater. More than 90 percent of the region's water supply is imported by the San Diego County Water Authority (CWA) from the Metropolitan Water District. This water comes from the Colorado River and northern California, and is distributed to the CWA's member agencies, which supply water to 98 percent of the people who live and work in San Diego County.

Because of our dependence on imported water, the availability of a sufficient supply of water to serve the residents, businesses, institutions and agricultural uses of the region is very important to our quality of life. This fact has become more apparent as the drought has led to the adoption of regulations and restrictions on the use and delivery of water.

After steadily rising over the past 20 years, water use per person has leveled off in the past few years. In the future, the amount of water used per person should continue to remain steady as the development occurring in warm inland areas is offset by long-term conservation measures.

Water quality issues are also important to the region's quality of life. State and federal government agencies are responsible for ensuring that the region's coastal waters, reservoirs, underground aquifers, bays and estuaries, and year-round streams are clean and safe for recreational and other uses. Groundwater supplies should be protected and enhanced, and production of reclaimed water which can be used for irrigation purposes or environmental enhancement (e.g., wetlands restoration) should be increased.

Quality of Life Standards and Objectives

The water standards and objectives can be divided into two categories, supply and quality. The standards and objectives for supply are set locally, primarily by the County Water Authority, based in part on decisions made by the Metropolitan Water District and other agencies such as the wastewater treatment agencies which produce reclaimed water. Water quality standards are set by the federal and state governments.

Water Supply

The supply of water depends on three components: water resources, infrastructure (pipelines, pumps and reservoirs) and demand management. Because of periodic drought and our dependence on imported water, we must be concerned with both the short-term and long-range aspects of water supply. Both are addressed in the following standards and objectives.

1. A safe and reliable supply of water should be provided to serve the residents, businesses, institutions and agricultural uses in the region.
2. Annual per capita increases in water use should be stabilized and, if possible, reduced through the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Urban Water Conservation in California (i.e., Best Management Practices), and other means. (Per capita water use calculations exclude agriculture.) (Approximately .22 acre feet of water is used annually per person.)
3. Local and regional programs and projects should be pursued to achieve a goal of producing 100,000 acre feet of water per year by 2010 within the County Water Authority service area in five-year increments as follows: 30,000 acre feet by 1995, 50,000 acre feet by 2000, 75,000 acre feet by 2005 and 100,000 acre feet by 2010.
4. Retail water agencies dependent upon the County Water Authority should be able to operate without water service from the CWA's aqueducts for up to 10 consecutive days to allow for CWA aqueduct maintenance and short-term operational outages.
5. To mitigate for the potential loss of imported water supplies due to an earthquake, emergency water storage facilities should be provided south of major faultlines sufficient to meet a minimum of 75 percent of normal demands for the duration of expected aqueduct outages.
6. Where groundwater is the source of water, sufficient availability should be assured before additional development is approved. Groundwater supplies should not be overdrafted in municipal or unincorporated areas.

Water Quality

Water quality is regulated by federal and state agencies. Inland and coastal surface waters such as reservoirs, bays, streams and the ocean, and groundwater are required to meet certain water quality standards, as is water reclaimed (from the wastewater treatment process) for irrigation purposes, or discharged into streams or other bodies of water.

Although the Regional Water Quality Control Board, in cooperation with the County and state health departments, is responsible for making sure these standards and objectives are met, surface and ground water quality is not regularly monitored by the Board (or any other agency) due to a lack of funding. Problems are, however, known to exist. For example, recent studies indicate the existence of water quality problems in San Diego's bays, estuaries and the coastal waters of the Pacific Ocean. We need a regular monitoring program to help determine the actions that should be taken to solve these problems.

Recommended Actions

To achieve the water supply standards and objectives, the following actions will need to be taken by the County Water Authority, its member agencies, and users, such as residents, businesses, institutions, and agriculture.

1. The County Water Authority should prepare, maintain and implement a Water Resources Plan and a Capital Improvement Program to provide a safe and reliable water supply for the region. The Water Resources Plan should be reviewed by the local agencies, SANDAG and the public prior to incorporation into the Regional Growth Management Strategy. Components of the plans should include but not be limited to:
 - a. The construction of delivery, treatment and storage facilities, balancing costs, environmental and economic needs;
 - b. Management of demand through Best Management Practices and other measures contained in the Conservation and Demand Management element of the Water Resources Plan;
 - c. Support continued Metropolitan Water District policy of providing its service area with adequate supplies of water;
 - d. Development of local supplies such as reclamation, groundwater basin rehabilitation and desalination, as are determined to be necessary in consideration of cost, environmental impact, reliability and other policy considerations; and
 - e. Reviewing and seeking appropriate changes to state and federal law and policies as they relate to the region's water supply; e.g., legislation which would allow voluntary transfers of water between agriculture and urban areas.