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May 20, 2009

To: Governor's 20x2020 Agency Team on Water Conservation
Via e-mail: 2020comments@waterboards.ca.gov

Re: Governor's Water Conservation Statewide Implementation Plan

On behalf of the thirty member counties of the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) I am pleased to submit the following comments for your consideration on the final draft statewide implementation plan for urban water conservation (20x2020 Plan) dated April 30, 2009. The 20x2020 Plan is intended to achieve a 20 percent reduction in per capita urban potable water use supplied in municipal distribution systems statewide by 2020.

Small and/or Disadvantaged Communities

The 20x2020 Plan does not include any recognition of the special needs of small and/or disadvantaged communities and the small water systems serving these communities.

Small communities face specific challenges related to the provision of basic services – drinking water and wastewater. Due to their small rate base these small, and especially small and rural communities, generally face higher per capita as well as higher operations and maintenance (O&M) costs, which results in higher water and sewer rates. Disadvantaged small communities face the additional burden of lower household incomes. This combination of higher per capita costs with low Median Household Income (MHI) means that residents of disadvantaged small communities often pay an even more substantial percentage of their income for drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment service.

RCRC urges that the 20x2020 Plan specifically include recommendations to address the special needs of small and/or disadvantaged communities served by small water systems to ensure that implementation of the 20x2020 Plan will not impose undue hardships on these communities.

Establishing a Baseline and Targets

The 20x2020 Plan states that the analyses provided in the 20x2020 Plan should be treated as initial estimates as the data available for the analysis were not complete and the accuracy levels varied significantly among water suppliers. That being the case, RCRC questions the recommendation that legislation should establish regional targets,

and deadlines for compliance as well as consequences for failure to comply. This recommendation should be qualified.

RCRC questions the establishment of the baseline and targets utilizing gallons per capita per day (GPCD) by geographic regions. There are often significant differences in areas within the identified regions which raises a variety of questions relating to implementation.

Outdoor Water Use

As the data shows that the largest potential for water savings is outdoor water use, an estimated 50% of total urban potable water use, RCRC suggests that the 20x2020 Plan focus its greatest attention of this aspect of water use in the state, with consideration for variations in regional climate, etc.

Under Recommendation 2, Reduce Landscape Irrigation Demand, RCRC suggests that 2 (c) Require water-efficient landscapes at state-owned properties be renumbered 2(a) – the state should lead by example.

BMPs

RCRC does not support the statement that water suppliers and others be required to implement certain conservation measures, regardless of cost-effectiveness, to meet a maximum coverage goal. The state should not mandate actions that are not locally cost-effective. Such a requirement, if enacted, would be particularly burdensome on small water systems serving small and/or disadvantaged communities. Instead of mandating actions that are not locally cost-effective, the State should provide incentives (i.e. grants) to encourage implementation on the local level.

Since many small water systems serving small and/or disadvantaged communities lack the resources and in-house expertise necessary to apply for grants and loans RCRC suggests that special provision be made to provide technical assistance to these small water systems.

Water Meters

The 20x2020 Plan recommends that the state accelerate meter installation via state legislation from 2025 to 2020, and improve the incidence of metering in smaller water systems and rural areas.

RCRC does not support the recommendation for legislation that would impose additional conservation requirements for suppliers that are not fully metered. Due to their low population density, many small waters systems serving small and/or disadvantaged communities do not have the economies of scale necessary to build and maintain water systems to meet existing stringent state and federal requirements. Imposing additional costly conservation requirements on small water systems serving small and/or disadvantaged communities would only serve to add to their financial burdens.

Water Rates

RCRC does not support mandating conservation rate structures as recommended. Pricing and water rates should be determined by local entities and should not be regulated at the State level.

Public Goods Charge

RCRC does not support the recommended imposition of a public goods charge on water collected via water bills. Water agencies are responsible for developing diversified water supplies to ensure water supply reliability for their customers. The imposition of a state charge will negatively impact the ability of local agencies to raise funds to support these local efforts.

Statewide Public Information Campaign

RCRC supports an ongoing statewide water conservation public information and outreach campaign. This effort will be vital in order to reach the end user upon whose actions much of the hoped for water conservation depends.

Recycled Water

RCRC supports an increase in the use of recycled water and other non-traditional sources of water. RCRC suggests that it would be appropriate for the 20x2020 Plan to also include a discussion of implementation barriers.

Water Rights

The 20x2020 Plan does not include any mention of water rights. The 20x2020 Plan should specifically provide assurances that implementation of water conservation programs will not impair in any way the water rights of the entities implementing these programs.

Comprehensive Solution

RCRC urges that the 20x2020 Plan include a statement in recognition of the fact that water conservation is just one of a variety of actions that must be taken to address the State's water needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, RCRC appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the 20x2020 Plan. Please feel free to contact me at (916) 447-4806 or kmannion@rcrcnet.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Kathy Mannion
Legislative Advocate