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Date: 5/21/2009 10:27 PM
Subject: Comments on draft 20x2020 water conservation plan

I tried to read through the April 30, 2009, draft of the Water Conservation Plan and have some questions and problems with the report. To begin, it is not clear how the 192 gpdc statewide baseline number was arrived at. The best number DWR has for a near normal year would be the 8.9 million AF for WY2000 in Bulletin 160-05. When one divides that by the population of 34 million, we get 234 gpdc. The 8.7 MAF mentioned on Page x is not much different, although one can't tell where it is from. I don't really believe statewide usage has dropped that much since year 2000, by 42 gpdc.

The next item of concern is the claim for 1.74 MAF. If you are going to use that kind of applied number, you should also estimate what the net savings would be, which would probably be about 1 MAF, assuming about a half inside and half outside mix of savings. This estimate, which DWR or Board staff could develop, would be the net potential for export supply from the Delta or reduction in demand thereon, after accounting for reuse of return flow now, especially in interior basins. The net figure would make it much more comparable with other sources of new water yield.

I am also concerned by the focus on eliminating grass and greenery. In the past plentiful water supply encourage a green Sacramento with plenty of shade trees. The oasis so created here and in other Valley cities made this place much more livable on hot summer days. The green lawns and landscapes probably took about 3 degrees F off summer afternoon heat and still do. It is not reasonable to expect water use rates here to be as low as coastal cities where the fog zone reduces summer temperatures and water use. It is the evaporation and transpiration of water in the summer that does the cooling.

Each degree is important. I have made an estimate that my summer air conditioning load goes up about 10 percent per degree in a typical summer day with afternoon temperatures in the mid 90s. SMUD may have better figures. A one degree rise in temperature also increases the evapotranspiration demand about 2 percent for vegetation remaining. So, the staff ought to crank this in if proposing measures to reduce outside water consumption.

There seems to be an assumption that it is good to charge folks with higher water usage, which tend to relate to larger yards, penalty rates for water, far beyond the cost of providing the service. This is a class envy distinction, penalizing folks who are fortunate to be able to live more pleasantly. It would seem much fairer, if adjustable rates are used, to base the outside usage computation on the size of lots. Grass lawns are hard to beat as for children to play on. And there are neighborhoods where the so-called drought landscaping wouldn't last long, whereas a lawn still looks fairly good as long as watered some.

A more basic concern is that there doesn't seem to be much recognition of the extra costs being proposed especially for those in areas tributary to the Delta where water and water supply energy costs are relatively low. A major part of the report's savings are expected to come out of Central Valley regions, where the net yields are smallest--just to match a numerical goal. What kind of bill increases would this mean? Every time we have a drought and people cut back on water use, the agencies raise rates; would this be any different? Since most water agency costs are largely fixed, that is what I think would happen here too. We should advise folks to prepare for that and give them some idea what this plan might cost them as homeowners. Some measures may not be worthwhile in some of the regions.

Sincerely,
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