

Orange County Congressional Delegation Urged to Support Requests for Local Water Projects

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Representatives from Irvine Ranch Water District, Mesa Consolidated Water District, San Juan Capistrano, and the County of Orange recently joined the Municipal Water District of Orange County in calling upon the Orange County Congressional Delegation to support federal funding requests for local water supply, water management, and flood control projects. The collective call for support came during the annual Orange County Water Issues Congressional Briefing in Washington, D.C., presented by Municipal Water District of Orange County.

The annual briefing provides an opportunity for the participating water and wastewater agencies, cities, and the County to share information with the Congressional delegation on current water conditions and challenges, as well as provide updates on those projects which seek to enhance the reliability of local water supplies, infrastructure, the protection of public health and safety, and the continued investment in the county environment and economy.

Each of the agencies had time at the briefing to make presentations and discuss their projects and their federal funding requests for the upcoming FY 2011 federal budget year. We were honored to have had in attendance Congressmen Ken Calvert and Ed Royce, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, and staff representatives for Congressmen John Campbell, Gary Miller, and Dana Rohrabacher. The event helped ensure that the Orange County Congressional Delegation knows what is happening at home and what is needed from Washington, D.C. to assist us in securing a more reliable water future.

The following provides a summary the projects and federal funding requests that the agencies presented to the Congressional Delegation at the briefing.

Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) is seeking a federal authorization for its planned Syphon Reservoir Recycled Water Storage Project. Syphon Reservoir, located in the northern portion of Irvine, is a sixty-year-old facility currently used to store irrigation water supplies. The Syphon Reservoir Recycled Water Storage Project would have two components. The first would be the conversion of Syphon Reservoir to a seasonal storage facility for IRWD's recycled water system. This would include upgrading the facility to current standards to create a contemporary recycled water facility. The second would be capacity augmentation to increase storage capability from the current 500 acre feet to potentially up to 5,000 acre feet. By providing additional storage, this project will allow IRWD to recycle 100% of the District's wastewater. Converting the Syphon Reservoir to a contemporary seasonal recycled water storage facility would cost approximately \$7.5 - \$10 million. Increasing the reservoir's current capacity would cost approximately \$40-50 million.

Additionally, the district is pursuing a proposal that would authorize the use of tax credit bonds (i.e., Clean Renewable Water Supply bonds or "CREWS") to finance certain kinds of innovative water supply facilities such as water recycling, desalination, and groundwater contamination clean-up projects. These CREWS bonds would be issued by public agencies in exactly the same way as those agencies can presently issue conventional tax-exempt municipal bonds. The

proceeds from the sale of the bonds would result in an interest-free loan to the issuing agency. Instead of the issuing agency having to make interest payments to the holders of the bonds, the federal government would provide the bondholders with a tax credit equal to what the interest payments would have been. Under the proposal, the agency would save over \$62 million in interest payments on a \$100 million water supply project, which is the type of subsidy necessary to offset the upfront capital expenditure.

Mesa Consolidated Water District (MCWD) is seeking a \$1 million federal appropriation for the upgrade and expansion of its Colored Water Treatment Facility located in Costa Mesa. The 5.8 million gallon per day (MGD) water treatment facility uses ozone and biofiltration to clean colored water found deep in the Orange County groundwater basin. Natural organic material from a decaying ancient redwood forest gives the water an amber tint and sulfur smell. The facility currently meets the daily domestic water needs of approximately 52,000 residents in the MCWD service area.

Federal funding will allow MCWD to upgrade the facility's treatment technology with a more advanced membrane system that can remove higher color levels while greatly reducing the plant's energy use. The facility's production capacity would also be expanded from 5.8 MGD to 8.4 MGD to provide added supply reliability and reduce the District's dependence on imported water. The estimated cost of the upgrade and expansion is approximately \$15 million and can be completed in 24 months.

Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC) is seeking a \$1.3 million federal appropriation for the South Orange Coastal Ocean Desalination project which is presently in the pilot plant phase. MWDOC is preparing to initiate approximately two years of test pumping of the subsurface intake well that was installed under the ocean floor at Doheny Beach nearly four years ago. During this time, MWDOC will measure the water quality, test treatment options, and begin projecting costs for the full-scale ocean desalination plant. Due to the high quality of water being created via the natural filtration through the sands and gravel beneath the ocean floor, the treatment processes and energy use should be lower than traditional ocean desalination plants. The information obtained from the test pumping and subsequent analysis will help with the development of design specifications for the full-scale ocean desalination plant, which could begin construction in late 2014.

The South Orange Coastal Ocean Desalination Project is one of the most closely watched ocean desalination projects in California because its use of subsurface slant well technology is the most environmentally sensitive approach being tested for full scale implementation. As a result, the project's approach has garnered environmental support from the Surfrider Foundation, Orange County Coastkeeper, Project Save Our Surf, and the California Coastal Commission.

MWDOC is also seeking a \$500,000 federal appropriation to assist in the continued countywide implementation of the Smart Irrigation Controller Program. The program was launched in 2004 to begin introducing a new type of irrigation system controller to Orange County that would help reduce outdoor water use and improve downstream water quality through urban runoff reduction. Whereas conventional landscape irrigation system controllers are typically programmed to meet peak summer irrigation needs, they are rarely adjusted by the water user as weather conditions and seasons change. "Smart" irrigation controllers, however, adjust automatically to deliver the

appropriate amount water needed to achieve and maintain healthy landscapes, based on soil, slope, and changing weather conditions. The program, which is available to residential and commercial water users, is on target to install its 6,000th controller by the end of 2011.

San Juan Capistrano is seeking appropriations totaling \$9 million for two major projects that will provide the city with long-term, local water reliability benefits – the San Juan Capistrano Ground Water Recovery Plant Expansion and Regional Domestic Distribution Facility, and the San Juan Capistrano Recycled Water System.

The city's first request is a \$3 million appropriation for its San Juan Capistrano Ground Water Recovery Plant Expansion and Regional Domestic Distribution Facility. The project would expand the current capacity of the city's existing treatment facility from 5.6 million to 7.2 million gallons per day (MGD). The plant would also have the ability to function as a regional distribution facility for neighboring cities and water agencies in the event of a local or region-wide natural disaster or emergency. A number of equipment upgrades and enhancements would be made to generate and distribute additional power, maximize water production and efficiency, and provide flexibility and water pumping portability.

Also being requested by the city is a \$6 million appropriation to initiate the San Juan Capistrano Recycled Water System. The system would serve 1,000 acre feet of recycled water annually to the major irrigation consumers in the service area, which represents approximately 12 percent of the city's annual water demand. The project would also enable the city to participate in a regional water recycling program that would capture and efficiently reuse locally generated wastewater. When combined with the development of additional local water supply, the city's dependence on imported water from Northern California and the Colorado River will be greatly reduced.

The County of Orange is seeking federal appropriations totaling approximately \$91.2 million for four projects located throughout the county: 1) the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project; 2) the Aliso Creek Stabilization Project; 3) the Westminster-East Garden Grove Watershed Study; and 4) the San Juan Creek Watershed Study.

The largest of the County's requests is \$73.35 million for the Santa Ana Mainstem Project. The project is a partnership between the County of Orange Flood Control District, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the flood control districts of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Funding would allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue with the construction of the project, which is now approximately 90 percent complete. It is designed to provide flood protection for more than 3.5 million people, prevent more than \$15 billion in potential flood damages to property, and prevent flooding for more than 110,000 acres in Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties.

The County is also requesting \$18 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to complete the design and initiate construction of the Aliso Creek Stabilization Project. This multi-objective construction project would provide stream bank stabilization, ecosystem restoration, utility infrastructure protection, and water quality benefits. Rapid urbanization of the Aliso Creek watershed has led to a variety of erosion and water quality problems. As such, the project includes grade control measures to minimize erosion potential from storm flows and other design

elements that will facilitate fish passage, enhanced habitat and vegetation, and stable floodplain areas. Existing utility infrastructure will be protected within the creek banks, and a water quality treatment plant will be built near the mouth of the creek.

Additionally, the County is requesting \$279,000 toward the completion of the Westminster – East Garden Grove watershed feasibility study which is focusing on flood control, ecosystem restoration, and water quality solutions for the Westminster-East Garden Grove Watershed. Residences and businesses in 11 Orange County cities within the 81 square mile watershed could benefit from potential projects coming out of the study, including relief from flood threats and flood insurance requirements. There is also \$305,500 being requested by the County to continue with a San Juan Creek watershed feasibility study, which is focused on flood control and ecosystem restoration needs for the San Juan Creek Watershed.