

From: Tony St. Amant [tsainta@hotmail.com]
Sent: Monday, October 14, 2013 7:47 AM
To: Oppenheimer, Eric@Waterboards
Subject: Groundwater Workplan Concept Paper

Dear Mr. Oppenheimer,

Thank you for your groundwater work plan concept paper. Thank you for trying to insert a rational structure into the random political chaos that tries to pass for California water policy. I support your vision statement without reservation. Although I do not represent any of the institutions that you would expect to respond to your call for comments, I have been following water issues in the Northern Sacramento Valley (NSV) for two decades and I think I understand them and how they fit into statewide water policy.

I would like to offer a few general comments that I hope you would consider as your work plan evolves:

Water basins subject to critical overdraft. Breaking out “water basins subject to critical overdraft” for separate treatment could reinforce the policy process’s dangerous preoccupation with crisis management rather than long-term sustainable basin management. The water basins currently subject to critical overdraft have reached that point because there was no effective management in the decades prior to their current crises. So the groundwater basins not yet subject to critical overdraft need the same attention as those currently in crisis to ensure they are not allowed to reach the same point. It would not take many years of mismanagement in the NSV to move it well down the road toward critical overdraft. *Now* is the time to recognize that reality, fund the needed research, and manage the risk.

Differing regional valuations of IRWM. There is a fundamental reality related to IRWM that I think may not be understood by the water establishment in Sacramento. There are profound differences in the valuation of IRWM between the areas south of the Delta that hope to stabilize or increase water imports and the areas north of the Delta that have deeply conflicting feelings about the pressure to satisfy south-of-Delta water appetites.

South of the Delta there is a common bond of unity—water scarcity—which is a positive force toward integrating regional water management. It is clear to all involved that holding out from the regional policy process puts at risk access to needed water. The requirement to voluntarily subordinate some measure of autonomy to the regional effort is done with the prospect of a valuable payback—critically needed water. The only major conflict is about how to allocate benefits and the only significant risk is the risk of being left out of the benefit allocation.

The political and organizational dynamics of the NSV bear no similarity.

Major considerations in the NSV are economic gains for a tiny minority, groundwater sustainability, and environmental risk. An estimated less-than-two percent of NSV residents are members of agricultural water districts that could benefit economically from selling surface water south and backfilling their needs with groundwater. The remaining population is divided among unaffiliated groundwater-dependent orchardists, other ground-water dependent agriculturists, other rural consumers, and urban groundwater users supplied by municipal or commercial purveyors.

Integrated management disconnects within IRWM. The voluntary nature of IRWM does not apply effective pressure on the diverse NSV water interests to merge their efforts with a regional perspective. Agricultural water districts strongly resist any threat to their autonomy that would

potentially restrict their profit from water sales; unaffiliated groundwater-dependent agriculturalists, other rural consumers, and environmentalists are fearful of a massive groundwater drawdown that will cross administrative jurisdictional boundaries to compensate for surface water sales; and the majority of the population—urban groundwater consumers who think water originates at their faucets—are largely uninvolved in the discussions because the problem hasn't yet reached crisis urgency. Historically, the majority of State attention and dialogue has been skewed heavily toward the few relatively unrepresentative organizations that have shown interest in selling surface water south.

The draft IRWMP for the NSV provides some insight into the complexity of the equation. Table 1-12 lists over 100 local entities with statutory authority over water within the six counties comprising the NSV IRWMP area. Included in these 100+ entities are six county boards of supervisors which typically have no direct operational or planning authority over the other organizations. But among the entities, more than a dozen agricultural water districts have thus far shown interest in selling surface water allocations south and backfilling their self-induced shortfalls by increased groundwater use. None of them are required to process their transfers through the IRWM organization and none have shown any interest in doing so even though their increased groundwater consumption could affect aquifer levels beyond their jurisdictional boundaries and even across county boundaries. It would be the height of political naiveté to expect some 100+ water organizations to voluntarily subordinate themselves to a regional entity without explicit benefits for their constituents.

The California Water Plan (2009) captures the crux of the problem on page 8-28 of Volume 2: "Failure to integrate surface water and groundwater management across jurisdictions makes it difficult to manage water for multiple benefits and provide for sustainable use including the ability to identify and protect or mitigate potential impacts on third parties, ensure protection of legal rights of water users, establish rights to use vacant aquifer space and banked water, protect the environment, recognize and protect groundwater recharge and discharge areas, and safeguard natural resources under the public trust doctrine." It should be clear that the applicability of this caution north of the Delta, where there is pressure for unprecedented groundwater extraction, is significantly different than south of the Delta, which is simply looking for increased imports.

What will it take? North State IRWM that is truly integrated, regional, and managerial will come to pass only if the State can come up with a package of incentives, funding, and consequences that will convince the diverse interests in the NSV that it is in their own self-interests to coalesce into a fully integrated management organization.

If afforded the opportunity, I would look forward to participating in any regional conversations about the groundwater work plan. While I don't formally represent any organization, I know I can represent the concerns of a large portion of non-institutional groundwater users in the Northern Sacramento Valley. And this is not my first foray into the policy process. I have interacted as a public participant in the NSV IRWMP process, interacted with DWR Northern Region on numerous issues over the years, currently participate in the CA Water Plan 2013 update process, currently participate in DWR-sponsored IRWM Strategic Plan Workshops, and I share credit for getting a water element into Butte County's general plan over the opposition of the Board of Supervisors' general plan subcommittee.

Sincerely,

Tony St. Amant
Chico