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ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT
ORANGE COUNTY'S GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY

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August 16, 2023

Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

and

Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

SUBJECT: JUNE 5, 2023, GRAND JURY REPORT "HISTORIC RAIN, YET DROUGHT REMAINS"

Dear Judge Hernandez:

As required by the Grand Jury the Orange County Water District (District or OCWD) has reviewed the June 5, 2023, report titled "Historic Rain, Yet Drought Remains" and is formally responding to specific Findings and Recommendations.

OCWD applauds and supports the Grand Juries' efforts to investigate and report on water supply and reliability issues. Unfortunately, too many residents and businesses do not appreciate or understand the complicated issues the water community must daily manage and address to ensure sufficient water supplies are always available. This report will help inform the community of those issues and some of the choices that lay ahead.

In general, the Grand Jury report calls for the development of new additional local water supplies. OCWD strongly concurs with the Grand Jury's recommendation and has worked for decades to create local water supplies and reduce the area's reliance on imported water from Northern California and the Colorado River.

OCWD is a worldwide leader in the reclamation and reuse of wastewater to create additional local water supplies. The Groundwater Replenishment System purifies 100% of the reclaimable wastewater received by the Orange County Sanitation District. The project creates 130,000 acre-feet per year of water for the local community which is approximately 1/3 of the total water demands within the OCWD service territory.

OCWD works closely with the United States Corp of Engineers in the operation of Prado Dam and has invested 100s of millions of dollars in land and new facilities to allow the capture and recharge into the groundwater basin of Santa Ana River stormwater supplies during the winter period.

OCWD is leading an effort through the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) in implementing a cloud seeding program to increase rainfall within the Santa Ana River Watershed. This program could increase rainfall by up to 15% which would generate additional local water supplies.

These projects and others allow the cities and retail water agencies within OCWD's service territory to pump 85% of their necessary water supplies from the local groundwater basin. These agencies only need to import 15% of their water needs from the Colorado River and Northern California.

The District is required by law to respond to Findings 1-12 and to Recommendations 2 and 4. The original Findings and Recommendations are provided below along with the District's response in **bold** type.

FINDINGS

- F1 Future water supplies are impacted by climate change and current supplies will not meet future demands.

OCWD does not concur with the comment “current supplies will not meet future demands”. There are too many variables and factors impacting future supplies and demands that prevent making such a definitive statement. Additionally, a comment such as this should differentiate between water agencies within OCWD with access to the local groundwater basin and those outside of OCWD who are primarily dependent upon imported water supplies.

Within the OCWD service territory, local groundwater supplies currently provide 85% of water needs. Only 15% of water needs must be met by imported water supplies. Thus, the retail water agencies within the District's service territory are impacted significantly less from potential future reductions in imported water supplies and have much better water reliability than agencies outside of OCWD.

At this point in time, local and imported water supplies are in good condition. The Metropolitan Water District expects to have 3.3 million acre-feet of imported water stored in various reservoirs at the end of this calendar year which is a record. Additionally, the groundwater basin is effectively full.

- F2 Climatologists predict future extended periods of low moisture with occasional wet years.

OCWD monitors climate predictions but has no expertise on this subject. OCWD is working to maximize the amount of Santa Ana River storm water that can be stored behind Prado Dam when winter storms occur in the local watershed. This work includes using the latest technologies to predict when, where and the magnitude of winter storms dropping rainfall on our region.

- F3 Climate change is inevitable and is exacerbated by human behavior.

OCWD agrees the planet's climate is constantly changing. OCWD does not have the expertise to comment on the impact of human behavior on the climate.

- F4 South Orange County relies primarily on the importation of water.

OCWD concurs but recognizes South Orange County agencies are investing in new local water supplies to reduce their dependence upon imported water.

- F5 Local water suppliers recognize that enhanced stormwater capture and storage, wastewater recycling, and infrastructure improvements will not be sufficient to address the long-term forecast of drought and its effects on supply.

OCWD does not concur with this comment with respect to its service territory for the same reasons provided in Finding #1.

- F6 There is significant water infrastructure planning, but inadequate implementation.

OCWD does not concur with this comment with respect to the OCWD service territory. OCWD has planned and implemented numerous projects to maximize the utility and annual yield of the groundwater basin.

- F7 The review and approval process for major water capital projects is cumbersome and overly restrictive.

OCWD generally concurs with this statement and would support regulatory and CEQA reform measures to quicken the permitting process for infrastructure projects.

- F8 Failing to find solutions to water shortages will have a significant impact on the Orange County economy.

OCWD concurs with this finding if such were to occur.

F9 Continued development in Orange County creates additional water supply needs.

OCWD does not concur with this statement. Since 1995, total water demands within the OCWD service territory have declined by 20% while the population has increased by over 150,000 people.

F10 Conservation and efficient use of water is essential.

OCWD concurs with this finding.

F11 Increased outreach and public education are necessary.

OCWD concurs with this finding.

F12 Desalination has proven to be technologically and environmentally feasible and is slowly being embraced as a drought-resistant source of water.

OCWD agrees that ocean desalination can play an important role in securing future water supply reliability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 The County of Orange Board of Supervisors should take a leadership role by the end of the calendar year 2023 to explore the establishment of a "Climate Resiliency District" or Joint Powers Authority to fund and expedite implementation of a drought-resistant source of water. F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F12

OCWD generally supports the intent of this recommendation – to develop additional drought resistant water supplies. OCWD does not believe a Climate Resiliency District or Joint Powers Authority is necessary to achieve this recommendation. With the development of the Groundwater Replenishment System, OCWD has shown it has the technical capability and financial strength to develop and construct large water supply projects.

R2 Orange County water agencies should expedite the planning, development, and construction of desalination plants over the next five years to ensure a sustainable and reliable drought-resistant source of water. F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F11, F12

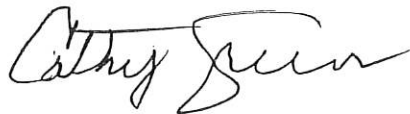
OCWD generally supports the development of desalination plants depending upon the water supply circumstances, needs, and resources of individual water agencies and cities. OCWD also suggests the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is better positioned and resourced to develop desalination plants in the region.

- R4 Orange County water agencies should update their public communication strategies, by calendar year end 2023, to inform the public of lifestyle changes if additional water sources are not developed. F10, F11, F12

OCWD questions if lifestyle changes will be necessary within its service area if additional water sources are not developed. OCWD will actively monitor climate change, the availability of imported water supplies, and other issues to determine if additional water supplies are needed in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Grand Jury report. We hope our answers add to the general understanding of the water supply issue in Orange County. The District would like to invite members of the Grand Jury to tour its facilities and discuss water issues with the General Manager, Mike Markus, who can be contacted at (714) 378-3305 or at MMarkus@ocwd.com.

Sincerely,



Cathy Green
Orange County Water District Board President