

GOVERNMENT

Nevada to Build Lower CO Reservoir

Buried in a tax bill passed late last year, Congress directed the federal government to build “without delay” a reservoir near the Mexican border to capture some of the flow from the Colorado River that otherwise goes into Mexico, reported the *Las Vegas Sun*. The \$84 million reservoir, to be funded by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) under an agreement with the other Colorado River Basin states, will intercept unused irrigation water diverted from Lake Mead to Southern California fields. Usually the farmers use the water. But because it takes three days for the water to reach them, if rain falls after the water has been released from Lake Mead, the farmers may not need it and the water may pass on into Mexico. Nevada’s reservoir is designed to capture that unused water, according to the report.

The reservoir will provide a near-term safety net for SNWA to meet its rapidly growing water demand. The terms of the agreement guarantee SNWA as much as 40,000 acre-feet per year for seven

years, said the *Sun*, increasing the current 300,000 acre-feet-per-year allocation to the state by about 13 percent. By the time the arrangement ends, SNWA plans to have the rights and infrastructure in place to transfer water from rural northern Nevada to supply the Las Vegas area.

According to the *Sun*, “the reservoir deal is important not only for the water it could provide but also for the clout it will give the region in water allocation talks by making permanent improvements to the Colorado River system.”

The “without delay” language may help the project to move forward without lengthy environmental battles, said the *Sun*; the wording was also used for a congressional mandate in the same bill to move forward with the lining of the All-American Canal, which continues to be delayed by lawsuits.

Environmentalists, who have long sought protection for the Colorado River Delta ecosystem, expressed concern over the reservoir plan. The *Sun* reported that Jennifer Pitt of Environmental Defense said that while she is not opposed to more efficient use of the Colorado River System, the new reservoir will

mean even less water flows to the delta to support wildlife there.

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Feds: CA Has No Compelling Interest to Conserve

In an essay originally printed in the *Sacramento Bee*, Pacific Institute President Peter Gleick criticized the Bush administration for thwarting California’s efforts to improve energy and water efficiency in the absence of any serious federal actions. “Our state, the federal government would have us know, does not have a compelling interest in conserving water or energy,” Gleick wrote.

At issue is a water efficiency standard for residential washing machines that was passed by the 2002 California legislature and signed by Gov. Gray Davis. A federal waiver is required before states can pass their own such standard, and the Schwarzenegger administration filed for one in 2005. According to Gleick, the U.S. Department of Energy “sat on this waiver request for more than a year, only to deny it on Dec. 28—three days before California’s rules were to take effect and at a time when people were unlikely to notice.”

Gleick wrote that the standard would have saved more than 33 billion gallons of water per year in the state and energy consumption equivalent to that used by 85,000 homes.

DOE’s explanation for denying the new standard? “California failed to prove that it has ‘unusual and compelling water interests,’” according to Gleick.

DOE also cited hardship for washing machine manufacturers as a reason for the denial, but Gleick reasoned that manufacturers already are making more efficient machines, and they still could sell the less-efficient ones in other states.

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continued on page 14

HydroFacts

Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson during the 1980s:	6.91 inches
Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson during in the 1990s:	6.16 inches
Average monsoon precipitation in Tucson, 2000-2006:	5.44 inches

source: National Weather Service

Percent of U.S. Forest Service budget devoted to fire suppression in 1991:	14
Percent devoted to fire suppression in 2006:	42
Percent projected for fire suppression in 2008:	48

source: U. S. Forest Service

Rivers transporting the most sediment per year:	
Amazon, 8 countries in South America:	1.20 billion tons
Ganges-Brahmaputra, India and Bangladesh:	1.04 billion tons
Yangtze, China	0.48 billion tons

source: UNESCO

Estimated number of exempt (unmetered) domestic wells in:	
Arizona:	95,000
New Mexico:	140,000
Colorado:	200,000
Nevada:	not counted

sources: AZ Dept. of Water Resources, NM Office of the State Engr., Colo. St. Univ. Coop. Ext.

New Dams for CA: Yeas and Nays

In January, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed a \$4.5 billion bond to build new water storage and conveyance systems in the state. The bond would be used to construct two new dams that would provide up to three million additional acre-feet of water storage and up to 500,000 acre-feet of annual supply. In addition, new groundwater storage would produce another 500,000 acre-feet annually. The bond issue would be on the ballot in 2008.

Schwarzenegger said the dams are needed to combat climate change effects, which will result in less snowpack and runoff into existing reservoirs. Republican lawmakers, who last year refused to back the governor's legislation to curb greenhouse-gas emissions, are now embracing the climate-change argument in support of

the new facilities, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. They see it as a means to accommodate growth in the state.

Others think there are better ways to prepare for the impacts of climate change and increase water supplies. Jay Lund, of the University of California at Davis's department of civil and environmental engineering, told the *Chronicle* that improving the capacity of the existing conveyance system would make more sense. Democrats and environmentalists came out strongly against the dams arguing high costs, poor locations, long construction times, and environmental impacts. Furthermore, reported the *Chronicle*, Democratic lawmakers claim that feasibility studies for the two dams will not be completed until after the 2008 election.

However, Lester Snow, director of the California Department of Water Resources, said that the department already has costs and sufficient environmental information that will be made available "by the time the Legislature starts holding hearings on it," according to the newspaper.

Visit gov.ca.gov and www.sfgate.com.

AZ Water Consumption: 10 to 226 GPCD

In a presentation to the Benson, Arizona-area Community Watershed Alliance, Arizona Department of Water Resources manager Tom Whitmer compared water consumption rates in cities and towns across the state, reported the *Benson News-Sun*. Payson wins the water conservation award with a use of 87 gallons per capita per day (gpcd) and Phoenix wins the biggest user award at 226 gpcd. Tucson's consumption is 158 gpcd.

Payson, north of Phoenix and at higher elevation, has an extensive water conservation program, Whitmer told the audience. The town requires businesses to transition to waterless urinals,

requires home hot water recirculation pumps, and prohibits a long list of activities: planting grass, installing new swimming pools, daytime watering, having spas at hotels, construction of new motels with more than 44 rooms, and carwashes from being open on certain days, according to the *News-Sun*. The town even rejected a Starbucks until the company developed a plan that met its water-savings requirements.

Flagstaff, said Whitmer, has been very progressive in water conservation, reducing its consumption from 131 gpcd to 116 gpcd in five years, reported the newspaper. Flagstaff pays cash: \$500 for turf removal, \$100 for dual-flush toilets, and \$100 for hot water recirculation pumps.

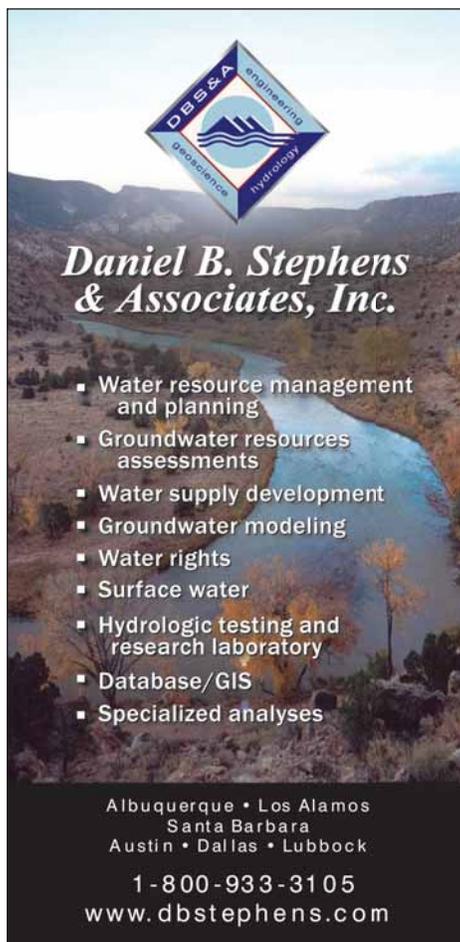
And yet Arizona tribal communities have a much lower rate of use, according the *North Central Arizona Water Supply Study: Report of Findings*, published in 2006 by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. For the western Navajo region in Arizona, the report cites an average use of 53 gpcd, with the amount in water-hauling areas reduced to a mere 10 to 15 gpcd. The Hopi Tribe as a whole ranges from 10 to 35 gpcd, according to a study by the Hopi Tribe cited by the Reclamation report.

Visit www.azwater.gov, www.bensonnews-sun.com, and www.usbr.gov/lc/phoenix/reports/ncawss/NCAWSS-noappendices.pdf

CA Communities Keeping Drugs Out of the Water

With increasing instances of pharmaceuticals being detected in wastewater as well as in groundwater and surface water, two California communities are giving residents an alternative to flushing unused medication or adding it to landfills. The *Vacaville Reporter* announced a recycling program in that city which allows residents to drop medication into a secure collection container—actually a refurbished

continued on page 16



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According to the newspaper report, San Mateo County has a similar program, which began last September after a one-week trial program in 2005 brought in 235 pounds of drugs. The area now has four collection points, all at police or sheriff stations. In four months, nearly 590 pounds of drugs were collected; they cost less than \$1,000 to dispose, according to the *San Jose Mercury News*.

In both programs, said the *Reporter*, medication is supposed to be in its original container with personal information removed; illegal drugs are not accepted. The drugs are incinerated.

Visit www.the-reporter.com and www.mercurynews.com.

Border Aquifer Studies Receive Federal Approval

Aquifers along the U.S.-Mexico border will be better characterized under legislation passed late last year. The United States-Mexico Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to cooperate with border states and other entities to conduct a hydrologic characterization, mapping, and modeling program for priority transboundary aquifers. These were specified as the Hueco Bolson and Mesilla aquifers along the New Mexico border and the Santa Cruz River Valley and San Pedro aquifers along the Arizona border, but additional aquifers underlying Texas or New Mexico may be added.

The bill, S214 sponsored by Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, authorizes the U.S. Geological Survey (through the Secretary of the Interior) to provide grants or enter into agreements with water resources research institutes, participating state entities, and relevant organizations in Mexico to carry out the program.

For fiscal years 2006 through 2016, an appropriation of \$50 million was

authorized. Cooperative agreements were encouraged among such entities as Sandia National Laboratory, state agencies, universities, the Tri-Regional Planning Group, and other relevant organizations, as well as Mexico. Funding to entities in Mexico would be contingent upon a 50 percent match (including in-kind services).

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NIDIS Approved

In December, President Bush signed legislation to establish the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to improve drought monitoring and forecasting capabilities. NIDIS is to provide an effective drought early warning system, coordinate and integrate federal research in support of such a system, and build on existing forecasting and assessment programs and partnerships. For fiscal year 2007, \$11 million was authorized for the program; the amount increases annually by \$1 million through 2012.

The bill that contained NIDIS was developed from a 2004 report by the Western Governors' Association (WGA), "Creating a Drought Early Warning System for the 21st Century: The National Integrated Drought Information System." The system described in the report would provide all water users, including farmers, ranchers, utilities, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationists, wildlife managers, and decision makers at all levels, the ability to assess their drought risk in real time, before the actual onset of drought, and make decisions accordingly, according to a WGA news release.

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Rural Assistance Legislation Passed

Late last year, President Bush signed bipartisan legislation to establish a new loan guarantee and technical

assistance program designed to help rural Western communities meet their critical water supply challenges.

The bill, S895, establishes a loan guarantee program in the Bureau of Reclamation to help Western water users finance long-term maintenance and rehabilitation of existing water systems. The program would allow Reclamation customers to obtain loans guaranteed by the federal government at interest rates potentially far lower than other loan options. The Secretary of Interior is directed to develop the criteria for determining projects eligible for loan guarantees.

The legislation also authorizes \$15 million per year for Reclamation to coordinate and provide guidance and technical assistance in the planning, design, and development of rural water supply projects through 2016. The program would establish criteria to ensure that these projects are cost-effective, contain an appropriate level of local cost share, and promote long-term protection of water supplies.

Visit www.doi.gov.

EPA Requires Monitoring for Unregulated Contaminants

Approximately 4,000 public water systems will monitor drinking water for up to 25 unregulated chemicals to inform the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency about the frequency and levels at which these contaminants are found in drinking water systems across the United States. The information will help determine whether regulations are needed to protect public health. This is the second scheduled review under the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 2).

EPA currently has regulations for more than 90 contaminants. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires EPA to identify up to 30 contaminants for monitoring every five years. The first cycle, UCMR 1, was published in 1999 and covered 25 chemicals and one

microorganism. The new rule requires systems to monitor for contaminants that are not regulated under existing law.

EPA selected the contaminants that will be monitored through a process that included a review of EPA's Contaminant Candidate List, which contains priority contaminants that are researched to make decisions about whether regulations are needed. The contaminants on the list are known or anticipated to occur in public water systems. However, they are unregulated by existing national drinking water regulations. Additional contaminants of concern are selected based on current research about occurrence and various health-risk factors.

Costs for the five-year UCMR 2 will total about \$44.3 million. EPA will conduct and pay for monitoring of water systems serving 10,000 or fewer people at a cost of \$9 million.

Visit www.epa.gov/safewater/ucmr/ucmr2.

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