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Ag Water Team Meets with MWD

Over the last few months the Commission has successfully formed a coalition of agricultural organizations, named the SoCal Ag Water Team (SCAWT), which includes Western Growers Association (WGA), California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC), California Citrus Mutual (CCM), and others. The purpose of the SCAWT is to advocate before the Metropolitan Water District on the benefits of agricultural water users with a goal of developing programs that could support agricultural water customers.

In November, the Commission arranged a meeting with Metropolitan's Chairman Randy Record, General Manager Jeff Kightlinger, and senior Metropolitan staff. The SCAWT participants included representatives from WGA and CCFC, along with Commission Water Committee Chairman Charley Wolk, President Tom Bellamore, and me.

As the record setting drought in California continues, the timing could not be worse to negotiate an agricultural water rate. At this time Metropolitan is preparing for mandatory 10 percent cutbacks for all users in 2015. Those anticipated levels of cuts are primarily dependent upon State Water Project allocations.

The difficulty of convincing Metropolitan to consider the value agriculture provides as a stable, reliable customer – come rain or shine, shortage or surplus – has become all the more challenging. Some reports indicate that nearly 80 percent of California's water goes to agriculture. A 2011 report from The Center for Irri-



gation Technology at California State University, Fresno, concluded, “If the basis for the discussion is water consumptively used by only agricultural and M&I (municipal and industrial) users, then agriculture’s share would be estimated in the range of 80 percent of the total (24.66 MAF / (24.66 MAF + 6.51 MAF)). However, if the percentage is based on dedicated water, which includes environmental uses, then agriculture’s share is more in the range of 40 percent (24.66 MAF / 61.24 MAF).” Even at 40 percent agriculture still uses a significant amount.

Granted, California grows vast amounts of food and fiber that supply the world. But, unfortunately, in California’s current terrible drought conditions, solely because of the volume of water agriculture uses, it also places a bull’s eye directly on us.

As the SCAWT made its presentation to Metropolitan’s leadership, our immediate goal was to find a ray of hope, or maybe better said, a chink in the armor! We believe that occurred when Metropolitan agreed to invite us to participate in upcoming discussions on their previous replenishment program.

The current one-size-fits-all rate structure within Metropolitan is a paradigm that will have to be overcome if we are to be successful. The fact that Metropolitan has indicated to us their willingness to meet on the replenishment discussion and include the SCAWT in that meeting is a positive first step and provides some hope. The Commission will continue to lead the effort through the SCAWT, and keep you apprised as new developments occur. 🍌