

Housing Construction Meets Ultimate Enemy: Water

Coffin Corner
By David Coffin

It's time for the LADWP to suspend issuing "Will Serve" letters to developers that promise to provide water for new housing projects. Continuing to issue these letters serves to demonstrate that our water utility does not have its current users best interests in mind.

The Department of Water Resources has announced its initial allocation of 15 percent for water delivery to State Water Project (SWP) contractors in 2009 ... a month early. The unusual early arrival of the contractors notice added to the sense of urgency of California's water supply.

"This further dramatizes the urgent need for additional investments in water storage and conveyance infrastructure to assure an adequate and reliable water supply," said DWR Director Lester Snow. "The uncertainty of precipitation patterns due to global warming and deteriorating conditions in the Delta, California's main water hub, demand immediate action to enhance our ecosystem and keep our economy productive in the 21st century. The Governor has sounded the wakeup call, and the clock is ticking."

The allocation is the second lowest in the history of the SWP. It reflects the low carryover storage levels in the state's major reservoirs, ongoing drought conditions and court ordered restrictions on water deliveries from the Delta.

The MWD's initial allocation from the state will be cut water supplies from 1,911,500 acre feet (AF) to only 286,725 AF. That's an 85% cut in supplies to all MWD customers including LADWP. The MWD then divides up the supplies allocated to them and distributes it to its various customers throughout the Southland.

Looking at this in another context, LADWP received more water last year from MWD than what MWD is going to get this year for the 26 cities and water agencies it serves in southern California. While all of this does not include supplies from the Colorado River Aqueduct, it too is being consumed faster than the river can supply it.

Reading Lester Snow's comments above I can't help get the feeling that they don't get it or that they are political appointees parroting what their bosses want them to say. We cannot even fill the lakes we have (Diamond, Folsom, etc.) so what's with the comment that "additional investments in water storage" are needed? Furthermore, he goes on to say there needs to be additional investments in a "conveyance infrastructure" yet there is not enough water to fill those pipes such as "Inland feeder" and convey it somewhere.

Our city and state leadership both need to come to grips with the problem and recognize that their policies have contributed significantly to the problem.

Regardless of desktop assessments that tell the city it needs need ten's of thousands of new housing units, the reality is that there are not enough water resources to fulfill that fantasy. Ignoring the practical limits of supply, cities have built-out so significantly that they have finally reached the point where consumption exceeds supplies.

The problem is their fantasy that we as a region continue to build new housing to meet projected population growth which is expected to grow to 26 million in Southern California by 2035, and 30 million by 2050.

The City of Los Angeles has been contributing to the problem by its insistence to build 13,000 housing units per year. Other counties have been doing the same. One city planning official was heard saying "if a city doesn't grow, it dies." This philosophy is absurd.

Now we've come to this. Not even the Villaraigosa's recently rolled out "Securing L.A.'s Water Supply" plan will be able to overcome a water supply that may drop to below 500,000 AF levels. Recycled or not!

This reminds me of the famous phrase "If you build it, he will come." Both the State and local Government agencies seem to have adopted a similar twist to that "If you build it, they will come." However if you don't build it they will look for greener locations elsewhere.

If Judge Wanger can order Delta pumps shut off to protect the Delta Smelt, then the LADWP can withhold "Will Serve" letters to new housing projects to protect residents in the City of Los Angeles.

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CityWatch
Vol 6 Issue 90
Pub: Nov 8, 2008