

Water Conservation Group Urges Action Due to Lowering Levels

While Torrance is preparing to form at least one and possibly two new municipal improvement districts to provide adequate water supply and distribution to south-west and north Torrance, the West Basin Ground-Water Conservation Group's Ways and Means Committee has submitted a report dealing with the lowering of water levels in this area and suggesting means for overcoming the problems of supply.

Handed to the West Basin Ground-Water Conservation Group by the committee, headed by O. A. Gerlich, as chairman, and Ben Haggott, as secretary, the committee proposed, among other remedies, a lawsuit to adjudicate the rights of ground-water in this area and to require that those needing more water than the suit determines use outside sources, such as Metropolitan Water District supply, with the unnecessary additional cost to be shared by the other users.

The report finds: The over-production of ground-water from West Coast Basin has resulted in (1) a sharp lowering of water levels, (2) a reversal of hydraulic gradient from oceanward to landward, and (3) start of salt water intrusion with imminent danger to the Basin as holder of fresh water. Some water consumers in the area who do not have access to imported water supplies are already in a hazardous position.

The problem is complex, not only from a physical viewpoint, but also because of wide variety of interests involved. Consumers represent almost every type of political, economic, legal and occupational entity. Complexity also arises purely from magnitude of problem because area

affected includes at least 83,200 acres, approximately 300,000 population and hundreds of millions of dollars of property valuation. Complexity and magnitude, however, merely increase urgency for need for large scale cooperative action. Such action must be directed toward effective solution: First, by determination of amount of withdrawal which will permit no further damage to the basin and positive curtailment of production to such amount with its equitable apportionment among producers; Second, obtaining most potable, economical and dependable source of water supply to meet deficiency resulting from curtailed ground-water production. These two objectives should be pursued concurrently.

A group of municipal water producers and users in the West Basin, warned by the Flood Control District of Los Angeles County, realized the seriousness of the situation and, partially financed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, has been successful in bringing this problem to scientific study by the United States Department of the Interior, Geological Survey and further, by continually called public meetings, caused the formation of your group and this Committee.

Water levels have receded to more than 20 feet below sea level over most of the area. They are 45 feet below sea level east of the City of Hawthorne and within a mile of the Inglewood-Newport Fault line, and approximately 67 feet below sea level west of Dominguez Gap. This has produced a downward hydraulic gradient, from the ocean inland, of five feet or more per mile. This gradient favors a landward movement of

ocean water. Contamination of ground water supplies of the coastal areas from Redondo Beach north to El Segundo by saline intrusion has been in process for some years and now extends inland for varying distances up to a mile or more.

The present annual withdrawal of ground-water from the Basin is about 69,476 acre feet and is close to twice the estimated replenishment. The present annual overdraft is of the magnitude of 29,500 to 37,700 acre feet.

These accumulated conditions point conclusively to the ultimate failure of the ground-water supply throughout the entire area in the not too distant future, unless remedial measures are started without delay.

With the already large centers of population in the area plus the considerable number of large industrial units also located therein, and the tremendous present and potential property values involved, it is manifestly necessary to save and conserve the ground-water in the Basin, and to effect a stabilized water supply.

All sources of water available for importation into the Basin, and of sufficient capacity to meet present and future demands, are much more costly than the water now being produced from the Basin.

The intensive study recently made by the Committee forces it to appreciate, in full measure, the far-reaching social and economic importance of the problem facing West Basin water producers and users. The Committee, therefore, submits the following final general notes and recommendations with the earnest hope that the constructive action implied therein may be promptly initiated.

The logical approach to a solution of this broad and complex problem lies in four elemental steps, which so far as possible, should be pursued concurrently.

1. Evolving practical means of administering and financing items 2, 3, and 4 "next" below.
2. Educational publicity.
3. Control of draft on ground waters.
4. Supplemental water supply.

The concern felt by many of the principal producers and users of ground water from the West Basin over the possible enforcement of drastic curtailment of draft without a satisfactory plan for its replacement, can be readily appreciated.

Recognizing this and in order to foster united action, it is recommended that the supplemental water supplies suggested be promptly examined in technical detail with respect to their adequacy, quality, availability and cost. This will require concentrated study of each individual source. The accumulated information will lead to definite recommendations. These recommendations of a source or sources of supplemental supply should be promptly accompanied by further recommendations as to the type of legal or political entity necessary to make the source or sources available.

Final approval for any comprehensive plan for supplemental water supply rests with the electorate within the area affected. Widespread authentic educational publicity should therefore be given to the existing conditions and plans for their correction. The Committee makes the following specific recommendations.

1. That your group be reorganized into a non-profit corporate organization so formed that it may effectively function to protect the water resources of the West Basin. The new corporate organization to be fully representative of the producers and users, on some equitable basis, using areas, production, population, use, assessed values and such other factors as may reasonably apply. The new cor-

porate organization to be headed by a paid executive, who will, if necessary, devote full time to duties involved, and who will be fully qualified with both a knowledge of the problem and adequate experience in public relations. This new corporate organization to have powers to assess its members, in fair proportion, for the necessary funds required to finance the various activities essential to its effective operation. The existing San Gabriel Valley Protective Association, for example, has carried out effectively somewhat similar duties during the past twenty years.

2. That the new corporate organization have a permanent Board of Directors and an executive committee who would be empowered to act for the principal members of the association in:

Carrying out administrative duties. Appointing consultants, both engineering and legal who would promptly:

- a. Make a comprehensive survey and report upon the, or such of, various proposed sources of supplemental supply for the West Basin as the directors may indicate.
- b. Formulate detailed plans for the control of the draft upon the ground waters of the West Basin.
- c. Assemble data which will be useful in accomplishing permanent control of the ground waters of the West Basin.

(3) Evaluating the various reports given under (2) above and activating immediately those plans selected for the effective conservation of the West Basin ground waters and supply of supplemental water.

The Committee believes that the major portion of the activities of the corporate organization under (2) last above should come within the first year and estimates that all necessary technical reports should be completed within that period and further estimates that costs for engineering and legal fees for the first year, will be in the order of \$50,000 which, distributed proportionately amongst the interests affected will not be excessively costly to any individual interest. The above sum is considered sufficient only for the surveys and reports outlined under (2) a, b, and c, above and is not to be confused with the estimated legal cost, (\$100,000).

Sincere cooperation here, however, as in many other instances can serve to materially reduce the costs involved.

The Committee is unanimously of the opinion that there has been, since 1903, a steady lowering of the ground-water plane in the West Basin and that there is sufficient evidence that the overdraft is increasing at an alarming rate. There should be no delay in finding a solution to the problem, inasmuch as it is obvious that adequate curtailment cannot be achieved unless a supplemental source of water supply is made available.

From the evidence and testimony adduced before the Committee, it is estimated that as of the date of this report there are over 1,800 water wells in the West Basin which are producing ground-water therefrom, or which are capable of such production.

The Committee estimates that the title to said total number of wells resides in over 1,000 separate ownerships, consisting of various corporations, companies, partnerships, municipal and public utilities, districts and agencies, and individuals.

It is estimated that approximately 88 per cent of the total current production of ground-water from the Basin is pro-



LOCAL MAN ON TRANSPORT . . . The ship's yeomen for the U.S.S. APL 11, known as the "New Yorker," are filing reports in their office aboard the craft. At left is William M. Nelson, 32, yeoman, 2/c, U.S.N.R., of 20717 S. Vermont st., Torrance. With him is J. A. McLaughlin, Jr., yeoman, 3/c, U.S.N.R., New Orleans, La. (Official U. S. Navy photo.)

duced by the following producers operating therein, to-wit: City of El Segundo; City of Hawthorne; City of Inglewood; City of Manhattan Beach; Torrance Municipal Water District; County Water District No. 13; Airways Water Company; California Water Service Company; Dominguez Water Corporation; Palos Verdes Water Company; Southern California Water Company; Moneta Mutual Water Company; Columbia Steel Company; General Chemical Company; Johns-Manville Products Corporation; Stauffer Chemical Company; General Petroleum Company; Richfield Oil Corporation; Shell Oil Company, Incorporated; Standard Oil Company of California; The Texas Company; Union Oil Company of California.

The remaining estimated 12 per cent of the total amount of water currently produced from the Basin, is produced by a large number of small producers.

The foregoing estimates indicate in some measure the complex problems which are presented in connection with:

The actual determination of all actual producers from the Basin.

The determination of the actual respective rights of such respective producers.

The allocation to each production right owner, to his, her or its proportionate part of the (varying) safe yield of the Basin.

The restraining of any such producer or production right owner from producing more than his, her or its allocated proportion of such (varying) safe yield.

The adjustment, as among legitimate producers and production right owners, of items and accounts arising out of mutual assignments of production rights, involving costs incident to the importation of water into the basin, and the effects of the use of imported water, as compared to Basin water in the operations and

uses of various consumers. Controlling of drilling, construction or placing or production, of any additional wells in the Basin for the purpose of extracting ground-waters therefrom.

Requiring all producers from the Basin to supply the excess needs for water over and above their respective allocated amounts of Basin ground-waters from sources outside the Basin. While the problem presented, as indicated above, appears to be staggering, and will be still further complicated by the existence of many other factors which will incidentally arise, nevertheless, the Committee is of the firm opinion that by intelligent, cooperative and determined effort, the problems can be eventually solved with fairness to all concerned, and with reasonable assurance that the natural resources represented by the ground-water of the West Basin will be preserved to the extent of its highest and best use.

The following three methods of approaching the problem have been suggested to the Committee. The first two of such methods, while possibly offering an ultimate solution, are so definitely dependent upon primary and continued voluntary and mutual cooperation of all concerned, as to offer at this time (short of actual experience) mere palliatives, or stop-gap methods, effecting a possible degree of conservation pending final authoritative determination.

FIRST METHOD

A mutual agreement to be executed by substantially all of the major producers above named, and such other producers as might join therein, in which the parties signatory (without estoppel as to any of their legal rights) would agree upon the relative amounts of water which they might safely produce from the West Basin, and would also agree for the period covered by the agreement,

to limit their respective productions from the Basin to such stated amounts, and to arrange on their own respective parts to supply their excess requirements from imported water obtained through their own respective methods. The agreement would, of course, have to provide for its own execution and enforcement.

SECOND METHOD

A mutual agreement to be executed by substantially all of the major producers above named and such other producers as might join therein, and in which the parties signatory (without estoppel as to any of their legal rights) would agree upon the relative amounts of water which they might respectively safely produce from the West Basin. Under this plan the agreement would contemplate that those parties signatory thereto who have sources of supply outside of the West Basin, or who serve territory which is included within the City of Los Angeles (having its Mono Basin Aqueduct sources of supply) or the Metropolitan Water District, (having its Colorado River source of supply)

would, for the term covered by the agreement, obtain all, or substantially all, so far as reasonably possible, of their requirements, from either such independent outside source of supply, or from the Metropolitan Water District, as the case may be, and allocate their respective amounts of West Basin ground-waters to other producers signatory to said agreement, in such proportions and upon such payments, terms and conditions as might be mutually agreed (Continued on Page 3-C)

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