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**Office of the
City Manager**

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Staff Report

ITEM NO. SS-1

To: Lemoore City Council
From: Ron Hoggard, Interim City Manager 
Date: May 8, 2015 **Meeting Date:** May 19, 2015
Subject: Drought, Water Conservation, and Water Rate Study Discussion

Discussion:

The current widespread drought has had a significant impact on surface water storage, ground water well life and productivity, hydroelectric power production capacity and, in real terms, the whole San Joaquin Valley economy. Looking forward, the type of agricultural plantings and traditional watering options are being challenged and reviewed.

Cities, through the Governor's Executive Order, are tasked to reduce water usage by an average of 25%. Many Valley towns are hit harder. Lemoore is currently looking at a 32% reduction from the 2013 level. That translates to an additional 23% water production reduction on top of the 9% reduction achieved in 2014.

As the groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley has been impacted by prolonged drought, so too are the grounds, well casings, bowls, and pumping depths. These changes can cause water quality issues, additional treatment considerations, storage, and shorter productive well life concerns that have to be addressed. Commercial and domestic (non-landscaping) water reductions reduce the amount of used water that goes on and is used for agricultural uses. This in turn causes more water to be pumped by agriculture and/or requires more land to be taken out of production.

While there can be some reduction in costs associated with pumping less water, the factors causing the need to conserve water require the outlay of large amounts of capital to counter the effects receding water tables, changes in water quality, and ground subsidence. These include costly repairs to wells, dropping bowls, changes in water treatment, additional storage to hold and/or blend water, more frequent need to replace wells.

In light of these and perhaps other factors, it is incumbent upon the City of Lemoore to examine its water rates going forward, just as many other communities are doing to stabilize this enterprise fund. When we look at the budget in two weeks the City Council can see, firsthand, that the water fund revenues are down in the current year, and if the City meets the reduction requirements placed on it by the Governor, then the fund will be deeply impacted.

When the water rates were last studied in 2007, it was contemplated that they would be reviewed in five years (2012). While this type of review may not be popular with all persons in the community, providing adequate supply and quality of water is a core function of our community. For this purpose I have included a water rate study proposal from Quad Knopf. The cost of the first phase of the study is \$15,000 and should take approximately 90 days to complete. Any adjustment in rates that might arise out of the study would take the better part of the year to put in place.

Additionally, I have included the updated April 28, 2015 “Fact Sheet” from the State Water Resources Control Board.

Budget Impact:

This information does not have a budget impact. A cost would be incurred if the City Council were to approve a \$15,000 Water Study (Phase I).

Recommendation:

This is a study session item provided for discussion. The water study item will be brought back during the regular session for approval.



Fact Sheet

Proposed Emergency Regulations to Achieve 25% Urban Conservation

Frequently Asked Questions

On April 1, 2015, the Governor issued an Executive Order that directed the State Water Board to implement mandatory water reductions in cities and towns across California to reduce potable urban water usage by 25 percent statewide. This amounts to approximately 1.3 million acre-feet of water over the next nine months, or nearly as much water as is currently in Lake Oroville. The State Water Board is committed to expedited development of the requirements to implement the Governor's directive.

I. Executive Order

a. What is the schedule for the State Water Board's development and adoption of emergency regulations requiring a statewide 25% potable urban water use reduction (provisions 2, 5, 6 and 7)?

The State Water Board is expediting the development and adoption of emergency regulations to implement the new restrictions and prohibitions contained in the Governor's April 1, 2015 Executive Order as follows:

Governor issues Drought Executive Order	April 1, 2015
Notice announcing release of draft regulatory framework and request for public comment	April 7, 2015
Notice announcing release of draft regulations for informal public comment	April 18, 2015
Emergency rulemaking formal notice	April 28, 2015
Board hearing and adoption	May 5-6, 2015
OAL approval	May 15 (estimated)

The latest Fact Sheet and Proposed Regulation, released on April 28, 2015, can be found at http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/emergency_mandatory_regulations.shtml under the "Emergency Regulation Supporting Documents (4/28/2015)" header.



b. Will Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs), regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), be subject to the same requirements as public water suppliers?

The State Water Board has jurisdiction to issue regulations that are binding on both public water suppliers and private water suppliers (IOUs) regulated by the CPUC. However, the CPUC has adopted special drought rules¹ for the IOUs that will need to be modified and activated for the IOUs to meet the reduction mandates set by the Board. The CPUC has a meeting scheduled for May 7 when it might adopt the Board's regulation as its rule for the IOUs.

c. Do the mandatory conservation requirements affect areas irrigated with non-potable recycled water?

The Governor's Executive Order only applies to potable water use. Areas irrigated with non-potable recycled water will not be affected.

d. If I am a homeowner with a private well, will I be required to reduce my water use by 25%?

The 25% conservation requirement will be met primarily through standards imposed on water suppliers. Private well owners that do not receive water service are, like all Californians, subject to the individual prohibitions contained in the existing emergency regulations and Executive Orders. The prohibitions that apply to everyone include:

- Using potable water to wash sidewalks and driveways;
- Allowing runoff when irrigating with potable water;
- Using hoses with no shutoff nozzles to wash cars;
- Using potable water in decorative water features that do not recirculate the water;
- Irrigating outdoors during and within 48 hours following measureable rainfall;
- Irrigation with potable water of ornamental turf on public street medians;
- Irrigation with potable water outside of newly constructed homes and buildings that is not delivered by drip or microspray systems; and

¹ See: http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/NR/rdonlyres/DF07FD1A-2FA6-411D-A03C-8A1DADA9B941/0/Standard_Practice_U40W_2014_wo.pdf for a description of the CPUC drought rules.

- Restaurants serving water to their customers unless the customer requests it.

Additionally, hotels and motels must offer their guests the option to not have their linens and towels laundered daily, and prominently display this option in each guest room.

e. If a commercial or industrial business is using a private well, will it be required to cut water use?

Commercial, industrial and institutional (CII) properties with an independent water supply (not served by a water supplier) are required under the proposed emergency regulation to either limit outdoor irrigation to two days per week or achieve a 25% reduction in water use. Often, these properties have large landscapes that would otherwise not be addressed by this regulation.

f. How is a “median” defined?

The Executive Order prohibits “irrigation with potable water outside of ornamental turf on public street medians.” The Executive Order does not include a specific definition of a median, but a median is commonly considered to be a strip of land between street lanes. In some cases, discretion and reasonable judgment will need to be exercised in determining whether certain areas are considered medians and subject to a regulation adopted by the Board. Urban water suppliers and municipalities are urged to stop irrigating other non-functional ornamental turf, such as strips bordering street lanes. In addition, we are focused only on ornamental turf and encourage the irrigation and preservation of trees.

g. How will the ban on new sprinklers – other than drip or microspray – be implemented?

The Executive Order prohibits irrigation with potable water “outside of newly constructed homes and buildings” unless drip or microspray irrigation is used. This prohibition does not extend to new athletic fields and parks but is instead directed at ornamental landscapes associated with newly constructed homes and buildings. The Business Standards Commission is expected to consider the adoption of emergency regulations to implement this prohibition that would take effect on or before June 1, 2015; eliminating confusion about what standards builders have to comply with regarding this prohibition. It is not the intent of this prohibition to require replacement of irrigation systems that are already in place based on issued building permits and contracts for sale.

h. How does the State Water Board plan to implement Provision 8 of the Executive Order which calls for direction to develop rate structures and other mechanisms to reduce water use?

Provision 8 directs the Board to work with water agencies and state agencies to identify mechanisms that will encourage the adoption of rate structures and other pricing mechanisms to maximize conservation. Regulations or legislation may or may not be needed to implement this provision. The Board does not have a set date for taking action on this provision, but is moving quickly to identify the most promising mechanisms and find feasible implementation pathways. Discussions are now underway with water agencies and other experts about the financial, technical, political, and legal challenges associated with changing rates, surcharges, and other fees. The Board intends to work with all parties, including the Legislature, to make rates and pricing an important element of short-term and longer-term conservation strategies.

i. How will the State determine what constitutes an underserved community for funding landscape rebates?

Contact the Department of Water Resources for questions regarding actions directed to the Department in the Executive Order.

j. Will local government jurisdictions (e.g. cities and counties) be required to report on their water use and conservation efforts?

The 25% potable urban water use reduction requirement and associated reporting applies to water suppliers, not subdivisions of local government.

II. Proposed Regulatory Framework

a. Will communities be rewarded if they are already using less water?

Yes, communities with lower per capita water use will benefit from a lower future required reduction in water use. Communities with higher water use will be required to do more.

b. Will credit be given for investments in recycled water and desalination?

No credits are given for new sources of potable water supply during the drought emergency. Given the immediate need to extend our water resources, all attention is focused on reducing the use of potable water supplies, regardless of their source. Every drop of potable water saved today improves California's ability to weather a possible fifth year of dry conditions. Recycled water that is used to recharge potable groundwater aquifers (called Indirect Potable

Reuse) and desalinated water are sources of supply that must also be protected and extended. Investments in Indirect Potable Reuse technology and desalination are a key part of diversifying local supply options and critical for a water resilient future. We will meet with water suppliers to discuss whether credits are an appropriate tool for future permanent or extended emergency conservation regulations to come.

c. If I live in a hot climate, will I have enough water to maintain my landscaping?

In this fourth year of devastating drought conditions, many Californians will have to make real lifestyle changes in order to conserve water for what could be an extended drought. We cannot predict what the next rainy season will bring. To preserve water to meet basic indoor needs such as toilet flushing, showers, clothes washing, food preparation and cleanup, outdoor water use will have to be substantially reduced. Residents in hotter climates use more water. This water use is in large part to support outdoor ornamental landscapes. Residents in warmer regions of the State are encouraged to convert to a drought tolerant landscape when cooler weather and rains arrive in the fall if they can; however, summertime watering will need to be greatly reduced in order to reduce statewide potable urban water usage by 25%. Keeping trees alive and letting ornamental turf go golden is strongly encouraged. On average 50% of residential water use in California is used for outdoor landscaping, particularly ornamental turf, in some places it is far more. For tips on how to conserve, visit www.saveourwater.com.

d. What reporting is required once the mandatory conservation requirements go into effect?

The **Proposed** Emergency Regulation includes new reporting requirements for water suppliers to assess the contributions of the CII sector towards reducing water use. This CII sector-specific reporting requirement is in addition to the monthly reporting required in the existing Emergency Conservation Regulation. Under the existing regulations, urban water suppliers must report on:

- Monthly potable water production;
- Residential gallons per capita per day (R-GPCD); and
- Compliance and enforcement efforts.

The Proposed Emergency Regulation also includes a one-time report for water suppliers serving 15-2999 water connections (currently not required to report). This report will include:

- Potable water production from June-November 2013 and June-November 2015; or
- The number of days per week outdoor irrigation is allowed and other restrictions implemented to achieve a 25% potable water use reduction.

e. What is Residential Gallons Per Capita per Day (R-GPCD) and how is it calculated?

R-GPCD is the number of gallons of water per person per day used by the residential customers a supplier serves. R-GPCD is calculated using the following equation:

$$[(\text{TMP} * \text{PRU}) / \text{TPS}] / \text{number of days in the month}$$

Where: TMP is the Total Monthly Potable Water Production

PRU is the Percent Residential Use

TPS is the Total Population Served

f. Who will enforce the required reductions in water use?

The State Water Board is primarily responsible for enforcing the required reduction in water use. The Proposed Emergency Regulation includes two additional enforcement tools that could be used alone, or in combination with other tools, to address the following compliance problems:

- Failure of water suppliers to file reports as required by the regulation;
- Failure to implement prohibitions and restrictions as described in the Governor's Executive Orders and the emergency regulation; and
- Failure of water suppliers to meet the assigned water use reduction target.

Violations of prohibited and restricted activities are considered infractions and are punishable by fines of up to \$500 for each day in which the violation occurs. Any peace officer or employee of a public agency charged with enforcing laws and authorized to do so by ordinance may issue a citation to the violator. In many areas, local water suppliers have additional compliance and enforcement authorities that will continue to be used to address water waste.

g. Over what period of time will the State consider compliance with the required reduction?

To determine if urban water suppliers (those with over 3,000 service connections or that deliver more than 3,000 acre-feet of water in a year) are meeting required use reductions, water production data, as reported by each individual water supplier for the months of June 2015 through February 2016, will be compared to the same period(s) in 2013. Given the severity of the current drought, compliance will be assessed both on a monthly and a cumulative basis under the Proposed Emergency Regulation.

h. Will businesses and industry be required to reduce the amount of water needed for manufacturing and other purposes?

There are no specific percentage reductions assigned to any sector of a water supplier's service area. Under the Proposed Emergency Regulation, each affected water supplier will be required to reduce its total potable water production by a specified percentage. Water suppliers will determine locally the actions that they will take to ensure that their commercial, industrial and institutional sectors are contributing to meeting these requirements and in what amounts. For many commercial, industrial, and institutional water users, we envision that the majority of their water savings would be achieved through a reduction in outdoor water use and improved efficiency.

i. Will hospitals and health care facilities be required to reduce their water use?

Similar to the question above, there is no specific percentage reduction assigned to any sector of a water supplier's service area. Under the Proposed Emergency Regulation, each affected water supplier will be required to reduce their total potable water production by a specified percentage. Water suppliers will determine locally the actions that they will take to ensure that they are meeting these requirements. Regardless, institutions, such as hospitals, should evaluate whether a reduction in outdoor irrigation use could produce significant water savings.

j. If a water supplier lowers its water production below the 3,000 AF urban water supplier threshold through conservation, are they then subject to the small water supplier requirements?

Urban water suppliers whose Total Potable Water Production falls below 3,000 acre feet as a result of implementation of actions to reduce water use are not re-designated as small water supplier for purposes of achieving the conservation standard at this time.

k. How should a water supplier address new connections that increase Total Potable Water Production during the timeframe of the regulation?

With the limitation on the duration of the emergency regulation to 270 days, water suppliers should account for increased water use due to future building activity in their identification and implementation of conservation actions to achieve the conservation standard for their service area. For example, some agencies have used an offset system, where new buildings retrofit older buildings to achieve water savings equal to or greater than the use they propose to add.

l. How will increases in Total Potable Water Production, in response to firefighting activities, be considered for purposes of compliance assessment?

Water suppliers that are significantly off-track in meeting their conservation standard will be directed to submit information on their conservation actions, rates and pricing and enforcement efforts to determine the actions needed to come into compliance. The State Water Board will assess this information, including factors beyond the water supplier's control, as it considers next steps.

m. How will the regulation affect urban water suppliers that provide water to agricultural areas?

Urban water suppliers delivering more than 20 percent of their total potable water production to commercial agriculture may be allowed to modify the amount of water subject to their conservation standard. These suppliers must provide written certification to the Board to be able to subtract the water supplied to commercial agriculture from their total potable water production for baseline conservation purposes. The supplier must submit to the Department of Water Resources an Agricultural Water Management Plan for that water supplied for commercial agricultural purposes.

n. Does the regulation affect private or public swimming pools?

The Proposed Emergency Regulation does not prohibit the filling of private or public swimming pools. However, water suppliers will decide how to meet their conservation standard, which could include limitations on the filling of swimming pools.

o. Are Home Owners Associations (HOAs) subject to the new regulation?

Under the Proposed Emergency Regulation, each urban water supplier will be required to reduce their total potable water production by a specified percentage. Water suppliers will determine locally the actions they will take to ensure that they are meeting these requirements. HOAs will be subject to the requirements of their local water supplier. In addition, HOAs are, like all Californians, subject to the individual prohibitions contained in the existing emergency regulations and Executive Orders.

The prohibitions that apply to everyone include:

- Using potable water to wash sidewalks and driveways;
- Allowing runoff when irrigating with potable water;

- Using hoses with no shutoff nozzles to wash cars;
- Using potable water in decorative water features that do not recirculate the water;
- Irrigating outdoors during and within 48 hours following measureable rainfall;
- Irrigation with potable water of ornamental turf on public street medians;
- Irrigation with potable water outside of newly constructed homes and buildings that is not delivered by drip or microspray systems; and
- Restaurants serving water to their customers unless the customer requests it.

p. Why do urban water suppliers have different conservation standards?

The Governor's April 1, 2015 Executive Order directed the Board to implement mandatory water reductions in urban areas to reduce potable urban water usage by 25 percent statewide. He also directed that this regulation take into account the different levels of conservation already achieved by communities based upon their relative per capita water usage. Many communities have been conserving for years. Some of these communities have achieved remarkable results with residential water use now hovering around the statewide target for indoor water use, while others are using many times more. Everyone must do more, but the greatest opportunities to meet the statewide 25 percent reduction in potable water use now exists in those areas with higher water use. Often, but not always, these water suppliers are located in areas where the majority of the water use is directed at outdoor irrigation due to lot size and other factors.

The Proposed Emergency Regulation assigns each of the 411 urban water suppliers to a tier of water reduction based upon three months of summer R-GPCD data (July 2014- September 2014). There are nine tiers that range from 4% to 36% conservation. Collectively, the 411 water suppliers should achieve a 25% reduction in potable water use statewide. This equates to approximately 1.3 million acre-feet of water over the next nine months, or nearly as much water as is currently in Lake Oروville.

(This Frequently Asked Questions document was updated April 28, 2015.)



Quad Knopf

May 5, 2015

Ron Hoggard, City Manager
City of Lemoore
119 Fox Street
Lemoore, CA 93245

Subject: **Water rate study, proposal for**

Dear Ron:

We are pleased to provide to you the attached proposal for your and the City Council's consideration.

Such a rate study, already appropriate since the City last adjusted water rates in 2007, is now even more essential in view of the drought-related State inundate to reduce water usage.

Quad Knopf is qualified to undertake the study. The firm's staff has experience in completing such studies (see typical studies list, attached). The staff is familiar with the City's water system and enjoys an ongoing working relationship with key study-related City personnel – the City's Finance Director, interim Public Works Director and Water Superintendent.

An essential initial component of the rate study process is, as a first step, an analysis of projected water system capital improvement needs and the Council-desired financing program therefore, anticipated operating costs, and existing finds and projected revenues. This portion of the study, as well as the rate study proper, will be based on American Water Works Association (AWWA) guidelines and take into account Proposition 218 constraints, the California regulatory climate and all portions of water system-related Court decisions.

Because of the uncertainties still inherent in the required implementation of the state drought water, it is proposed that study authorization be in two steps: one, an initial authorization for not to exceed \$15,000 in time-and-materials costs to evaluate water use regulation impacts, gather and assess existing water cost and funding data, and scope study needs, and two, a second authorization based on the estimated cost for study completion and assistance in rate adoption.

It is projected, barring any significant change in currently proposed drought regulations, that the total study can be completed in draft form for City review in approximately 90 days from contact authorization. It should, however, be anticipated that staff and Council review, and changes based on that review, public notification and support procedures, Proposition 218 compliance,

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and rate ordinance adoption will result in eight to nine months before any rate revisions will be in effect.

We look forward to working with the City staff and City Council on this project so critical to continuing to provide Lemoore's citizens with an adequate, safe, and healthy water supply.

Sincerely,



Joel R. Joyner, PE, PLS
City Engineer



Steve Brandt, AICP, LEED AP
City Planning Consultant

cc: Cheryl Silva, Finance Director
Frank Rivera, Public Works Director
Richard Pereira, Water Superintendent

HAT/vlw/wbe

**Typical Water Rate Studies
Prepared by Quad Knopf**

Hilmar County Water District

Delhi County Water District

Merquin County Water District

Planada County Water District

Le Grand Community Services District

Winton Sanitary District

South Dos Palos County Water District

City of Huron

City of Farmersville (in progress)

Proposal to the City of Lemoore for a Water Rate Study

Quad Knopf will complete such a study, and assist in preparing a rate adoption ordinance, assist with Proposition 218 procedures and provide such additional professional services essential to the timely adoption by the City of updated and revised water rates.

The services to be provided shall be billed on a time-and-materials basis in accord with the attached fee schedule. They shall be undertaken on the following bases:

Task 1:

- a. Evaluate State drought regulation impacts on the City's existing rate structure.
- b. Review projected water system capital improvements budgeting and make recommendations.
- c. Assess City staff-projected operating costs for five years.
- d. Tabulate and review City staff estimates of existing water system fund balances and projected income.
- e. Scope study needs; submit an interim written report.

Task 2:

- a. Obtain City approval of projected capital improvements and funding methodology.
- b. Based on 1 (c) and 2 (a) develop a complete cost-of-services analyses for a five year period.
- c. Tabulate and summarize non-rate revenues for five years.
- d. Develop, and fully substantiate rate recommendations.
- e. Submit a draft rate study to the City for review.
- f. Make corrections; submit final report for Council and public review, including a draft rate revision ordinance.
- g. Assist City staff and City Council with Proposition 218 procedures and rate ordinance adoption.

It is estimated that Task 1 will be completed within 40 days after contract authorization and at a time and materials cost of not to exceed 15,000 without prior City approval.

It is estimated that Task 2 (1) through Task 2 (e) will be completed within 60 days after the completion of Task 1 and upon the authorization of such services and their cost by Work Order.

It is proposed that a contract incorporating these terms be authorized.

- a. Authorize the work to be completed in Task 1.
- b. Authorize Task 2 work only to be undertaken and completed when a Work Order including a cost estimate for services is provided to and agreed by the City.

All the services to be provided in accord with this proposal will be provided by Quad Knopf personnel familiar with the City of Lemoore's water system or having experience in rate study projects.

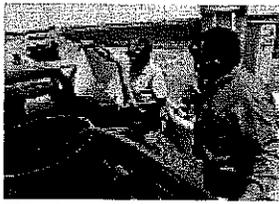
FresnoBee.com

Fresno City Hall: Get your no-cost, guilt-free water

By George Hostetter

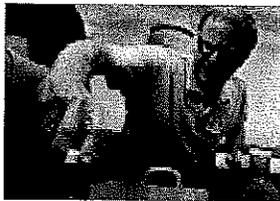
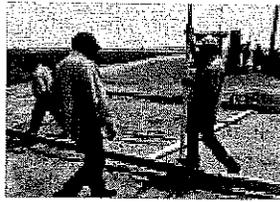
The Fresno Bee May 9, 2015

Fresno Bee reporter George Hostetter demonstrates how the city of Fresno's Regional Wastewater Reclamation Facility on Jensen Avenue will soon begin dispensing water to those who will come get it. THEFRESNOBEE



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Page 2 of 8



<http://www.fresnobee.com/2015/>

- Related Stories:
- Green waste: Another drought casualty

I watered a piece of my front lawn last Thursday with city of Fresno water.

I live near Bullard High School. Someone passing my house might have assumed I was breaking just about every landscape-irrigation rule known to the city's water police. For starters, Thursday is a non-watering day for everyone.

In fact, I had City Hall's blessing.

I was using recycled water from the sewer farm west of town. And City Hall didn't charge me a cent.

Pretty soon a lot of Fresnans may be following my example — again, with City Hall's OK.

My tale is how I came to get the free water, and how my fellow Fresnans can do the same. First, some background.

Strictly speaking, I wasn't using recycled water. Recycled water in the eyes of regulators is the stuff from a sewer farm that gets several levels of treatment plus a dose of disinfection.

I was using extracted water. That's the stuff that has been treated, allowed to percolate into the aquifer, then pumped to the surface.

To me, it's all sewage recycled into something useful. For simplicity, "recycled" is the term I'll use.

This started when I met with Thomas Esqueda (Fresno's public utilities director) and Mark Standriff (the city's communications director) to discuss a story on green waste.

My thinking: We're in a terrible drought; the city must meet tough recycling mandates. Residential landscape irrigation restrictions will only get more severe as the long, hot summer drags on. Green-waste collections figure to plummet as people stop watering their greenery; the result could be big trouble with Sacramento's recycling gurus who don't want too high a percentage of a city's garbage going to landfills.

I asked Esqueda at the end of the chat: "Say, Tommy, how is that recycled-water thing at the sewer farm coming along?"

City officials had talked for months about finding a quick way to get recycled water from sewer farm to voluntary customers, thus taking pressure off the city's potable (drinkable) water system. The immediate challenge: An extensive "purple pipe" system is several years away.

"Might be ready by June," Esqueda said of the quick fix.

"What'll you charge the homeowners?"

"Free," Esqueda said.

"Free water?"

"Free water."

One thing led to another, and the next day I was standing with Steve Hogg, the sewer farm's boss, at his headquarters west of town. I was there to get a load of free water. It was in the interest of science — what will Fresnans with the same idea go through this summer?

Over the years Martin McIntyre, Patrick Wiemiller and Esqueda as Fresno public utilities directors spent many an hour telling me about the importance of water infrastructure to Fresno's fate. I didn't appreciate their wisdom until I tried to get a load of water from the sewer farm to my front yard.

First up, I had to find a way to haul the water.

Water is heavy. As the saying goes, a pint's a pound the world around. That means one gallon is eight pounds, give or take a bit. I have a 1985 Toyota pickup with lots of miles. I wanted to haul enough water to make the trip worth the effort. But I didn't want to crush my pickup.

I figured I could safely haul 50 gallons — a 400-pound load, not counting the containers. But I didn't have much in the way of containers at home.

I went to the Walmart near Pinedale on Tuesday night and bought four five-gallon plastic bottles at \$6.94 (plus tax) each. I would have bought a few more, but that's all I found on the shelf. The bottles had screw-on caps.

I went home and looked for more containers.

My 19-month-old grandson has a plastic box on our patio for his outdoor toys. The box has a lid. I tossed the toys in a corner. I now had a 17-gallon container that could be sealed.

Next I grabbed my 12-gallon plastic shower bucket. I stand in the bucket while taking my morning shower, then use the "gray" water on the backyard bushes. Works like a charm. The shower bucket's only downside was lack of a lid. But I was running out of options. I would use the shower bucket.

I found a few one-gallon plastic milk jugs (with cap) in our recyclable bin. They put me over my 50-gallon goal. For good measure, I decided to take a battered 64-gallon trash can.

The prospect of free water in the middle of a drought had made me greedy.

I headed to the sewer farm with all this stuff. I had added a 20-pound dumbbell to the trash can to give it ballast on the trip home.

I met Bee photographer Eric Paul Zamora and Hogg at sewer farm headquarters. Hogg told us, "Follow me."

The fill station was about a mile west of Hogg's office. Our path was rough and dusty. We stopped at a pipe with a coiled hose.

There it was — water revolution in the making. I'm guessing that pipe and hose will forever change Fresno's attitude toward its recycled liquid gold.

A turn of the handle and I suddenly had a stream of water delivering about 10 gallons of cool, clear water per minute.

It was all mine, as much as I wanted, for free.

Things moved swiftly. My grandson's toy box was first to fill. I hadn't put much water in the trash can when I saw a small leak. Nix the trash can. The shower bucket and the five-gallon-plastic bottles were topped off quickly. I filled the smaller plastic bottles from the shower bucket while the five-gallon bottles were filling, then refilled the shower bucket.

Hogg turned the shut-off valve just as the water in the last five-gallon bottle reached the top. Except for the leak in the trash can, I didn't waste a drop.

(I returned better prepared a few days later. It took me just 15 minutes to enter the site, load 110 gallons and leave. This service will work.)

I'm a native Valley boy, born (1950) and raised in Lindsay (a town suffering from water-insecurity if ever there was one). My father was born (1911) in Lindsay. Rainfall totals were a staple of dinnertime conversation from November through April in my home while growing up. I mention this only to note it astounds me that so many Fresnans aren't obsessed 24/7 (even in flood years) with water and rainfall numbers.

That may soon change.

I close with 10 thoughts:

- Hogg's fill station is still weeks away from going live. Eventually, there will be a place for residential customers and another for commercial customers. There will be more than one hose for residential customers, though how many remains uncertain.
- The water for residential customers will be free. Commercial customers will pay, the amount still to be determined. Residential consumers get water only if they are city of Fresno water customers.
- Hogg says the water has been in the aquifer for at least six months. He doesn't advise drinking it, but says it's safe. I was up to my elbows in the stuff. I feel great as I write this.
- I understand how someone might do the cost-benefit analysis on my effort. I burned at least a gallon of gas and about an hour to get 50 gallons of water. I had to haul 400 pounds of water to the side of my house, then find a way to use a portion of it on my lawn. Some would say I went on a fool's errand.
- My reply: I simply need to improve my personal water-hauling infrastructure (just as the city is improving its water-delivery infrastructure). Maybe I need to invest in 15 or 20 five-gallon water bottles. Maybe the way to go is two or three 50-gallon containers and something at home to hold the water. I'll give it some thought.
- I also understand the egalitarian angle. Why should some people get free city water (those with a pickup, or spare money to buy containers, or the good health and initiative to do all the work) and others not so fortunate or energetic get none? Fair question.

Perfect equality, though, shouldn't be the organizing principle here. City Hall is pursuing two goals with the fill stations.

First, Hogg said the sewer farm's aquifer is getting overloaded. He wants to get rid of some water. Customers with their pickups full of empty water bottles are doing a good deed.

Second, Gov. Jerry Brown is putting heat on cities to dramatically reduce their use of potable water. Again, anything that saves drinkable water for the highest and best use (humans) is a good deed.

- I thought of District 2 City Council Member Steve Brandau as I filled my containers. The subject of recycled sewer water occasionally pops up in council meetings. Some people say it would be discriminatory for City Hall to encourage their neighborhoods to use the stuff. The critics call it "toilet water." Brandau always says: "Send it to northwest Fresno. We'll take all you've got."

- I also thought of Woodward Park. Brandau and District 6 Council Member Lee Brand often worry about all the trees in Woodward Park dying in the drought.

Rather than wait for City Hall to come up with a plan, might there be a way to organize residents with the same concern to haul recycled water in a thoughtful, systematic way to the distressed trees?

I plan on letting my lawn die while saving my trees. Seems odd that free city water will save the Hostetters' trees while trees in city parks die by the hundreds.

- The sewer farm is about five square miles in size. That's about the size of Selma. The sewer farm every year gets a staggering amount of sewage and produces a stunning amount of recycled water. Fresno, caught in the worst drought in recorded history, is blessed with a deep underground lake the size of Selma located just a few miles west of town. It's all ours, guilt free, if only we'll go and get it.

- Here's our future: July — Fresno — 100-plus degrees nearly every day — August more of the same — water sanctions galore. My prediction: Events will spur a lot of Fresnoans to figure out how to get that free water.

And, since it's non-potable water, landscape-irrigation sanctions don't apply once that water gets home.

Thank you, City Hall.

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