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Water Leaders call for greater collaboration in resource management

Albert Einstein once defined insanity as doing things the same way and expecting different results. Today, over 300 water leaders from throughout the region met at the National Orange Show Events Center for the Santa Ana River Watershed 2012 *Implementing the Vision* Conference to talk about doing things differently. They explored how new collaborative ways of doing business could provide a sustainable water supply for both people and the environment while reducing costs. The annual Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) Conference has become a place for water resource managers to network, compare notes and develop new project ideas. The conference is used as a forum to discuss and further develop ideas developed as part of the regional One Water One Watershed (OWOW) planning process.

San Bernardino Mayor Pat Morris noted in his opening remarks that “our current financial constraints will cause us to further collaborate across boundaries because no one has the resources to go it alone.” These current financial constraints will drive us to more integrated water solutions where agencies with seemingly different goals find ways to pool resources to generate solutions benefiting all involved. The result will be a more efficient watershed with a clear understanding that water must be managed in a manner more suited to the 21st century.

George Aguilar, SAWPA Commission and San Bernardino Valley Water District Board member, summed up the discussion by requesting that we begin development of regional infrastructure and programs. He noted, “We need to focus on what is very efficient and reliable. This means that in addition to all we have done in the past and will continue to do, we must look close to home and make every drop count. I don’t care if it’s stormwater, groundwater, or wastewater. Every drop must count.”

The water managers were especially focused on using water resources in a more efficient manner to ensure future reliability. They also called for more aggressive capture of stormwater, viewing wastewater as a resource to be used to the maximum extent possible, and exploring how working closely with land use managers can result in more water supply and reduced pollution control costs for municipalities.

SAWPA General Manager Celeste Cantu urged everyone to view water management holistically and to work with their neighbors to more effectively manage the water that passes through our watershed. “The promise of our collaborative OWOW planning process is an adequate, reliable water supply for all uses despite our current challenges. It will require that we manage each drop as it passes from where it first falls on our mountains to when it leaves our watershed at the Pacific Ocean. Every drop must be put to work for the environment and for our residents.”

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