California's Water Crisis: A Public Education Program

CalWaterCrisis.org

CALIFORNIA'S WATER: A CRISIS WE CAN'T IGNORE

AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

With its robust economy and penchant for technical innovation, California leads the nation – and arguably much of the world – in production of food, fiber and new technology. But the water supply and delivery system that contributed to California's emergence as an economic powerhouse is aging. Though investments have been made at the local and regional level, improvements in our statewide infrastructure have not kept pace with the state's growing population and changing water needs.

New Population Estimates Raise Challenges for Water System
State officials recently projected that California's population will reach 50 million by 2032 and 60 million by 2050. These projections raise new challenges for our state's water supply system. Californians expect their water to be clean, safe and delivered in a way that is least harmful to the environment. Local water agencies have invested in water recycling, conservation, groundwater storage and other strategies to stretch supplies, but improvements in our statewide infrastructure have lagged behind. In many respects, California is attempting to meet 21st century needs for water with facilities built in the Cold War era.

Past Generations Invested in California's Future
Modern day California exists because of the vision and financial investment of past generations. Although 75% of precipitation falls north of Sacramento, more than 75% of the demand for water is south of the capital city. California's elaborate network of water storage and delivery systems allows the state to meet it diverse water needs year-round by storing and moving water when and where it is needed.

Two of the most important systems are the State Water Project (SWP) and the federal Central Valley Project (CVP). The projects funnel water from Northern California through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to more than 25 million people and 2.5 million acres of farmland.

The SWP was constructed in the 1960s and early 1970s by the Department of Water Resources. Construction of the CVP began in 1935 and various facilities were added in subsequent decades. Except for the construction of the SWP's Coastal Aqueduct in the 1990s, no significant improvements have been made to either system in nearly 30 years.

Other key projects, including the All-American Canal, the Los Angeles Aqueduct, the Colorado River Aqueduct and San Francisco's Hetch Hetchy Project, were largely built in the early 20th century.

Aging Levees Threaten Statewide System
As the main switching yard for the SWP and the CVP, the Delta is a key link in California's statewide water delivery system. But aging levees that protect the Delta's freshwater from floods and daily tides are deteriorating and at risk of a major failure that could cripple water deliveries for an extended period. Many of the levees were built in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and have not been adequately maintained.

Experts say the Delta's fragile levees are increasingly at risk of failure, jeopardizing the state's water system as well as Delta communities, farms, highways and other infrastructure.

For more information, please visit www.calwatercrisis.org.