

Media News Release



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Water leaders visit American River watershed

On Monday, May 21, the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association headed a tour of the lower American River watershed for 49 local, state and federal water leaders who are directly involved in water planning and policy. The intent was to provide them with a first-hand look at one of the major tributaries to the Delta.

With the focus on problems in the Delta, water planners have been looking at the northern California watersheds to provide more flows to supplement fresh water for endangered and threatened fish and to help stabilize deliveries to central and southern California. The tour is part of a broad educational effort to focus attention on the need to protect the sources of California's waters. "If we don't take care of the waters from their source, there will be no water for us, for the Delta or the rest of California," said Bill George, president of Mountain Counties Water Resources Association and president of El Dorado Irrigation District.

Leaving from downtown Sacramento, John Woodling, Regional Water Authority executive director, discussed the regions lower American River water management activities and water conservation and efficiency programs.

The first stop was the Nimbus Fish Hatchery, below the Nimbus Dam in Rancho Cordova. Nimbus Dam reregulates Folsom Dam releases to create a steady flow downstream.

Chris Bowles, PhD, PE, president of CBEC Eco Engineering, described a project that was recently completed by the State Department of Fish and Game to improve the river habitat for Chinook salmon and Steelhead trout.

Tom Gohring, Water Forum executive director, said the stakeholders in the Water Forum are in agreement on two co-equal goals: 1) to provide a safe and reliable water supply for the region's economic growth to the year 2030; 2) preserve the fishery, recreation and aesthetic values of the lower American River.

At Beals Point on Folsom Lake, Folsom Mayor Kerri Howell welcomed the group. Folsom Lake is the first responder to supply fresh water to the Delta in cases where Delta water quality may be impaired. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that water released from Folsom Dam takes eight hours to reach the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers and another 18 hours to reach Rio Vista in the Delta. Besides providing flood control, municipal and agricultural water, the lake contributes cold water for fish survival in the Lower American River. Folsom Lake is one of the most popular recreation sites in the state.

A six-gate spillway is being constructed at Folsom Dam. The \$1 billion project will give 200-year flood protection for the Sacramento region when it is finished in 2017.

The Folsom Dam powerplant supplies 425,862 megawatt hours of electricity to the Sacramento area on an annual basis.

Steven Sorey, SMUD Manager of Energy Trading and Contracts, Power Supply and Grid Operations, emphasized the importance of a reliable water supply for hydropower generation in the region.

At lunch in Auburn, Jennifer Montgomery, Placer County Board of Supervisors chair, and Josh Huntsinger, Placer County Agricultural Commissioner, spoke about the significance of high quality, reliable water supplies for a healthy local economy, and sustainable local agriculture. At the Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) American River Pump Station on the north fork of the American River, PCWA Director of Strategic Affairs Einar Maisch described the local challenges of building facilities for a reliable water supply, including financial, environmental and engineering. The intake facility draws water out of the American River canyon to supply water customers in western Placer County.

The tour concluded at the confluence of the north and middle forks on Highway 49. The rivers and scenic 1,000 foot deep canyon separates Placer and El Dorado counties at this location. PCWA's consulting geologist Marie Davis, a former Georgetown Divide Public Utility District General Manager, joined with PCWA's Resource Administrator Andy Fecko to talk about resource management in the upper American River watershed. Particularly, they described a multi-year sediment management project below Ralston Reservoir on Indian Bar.

Following the tour, Delta Stewardship Councilmember Don Nottoli, who is chair of the Delta Protection Commission and also represents the western Delta as chair of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, remarked that he appreciated the chance to see different reaches of the watershed up close. He said his "takeaway" was an appreciation of the stewardship that local communities are committed to—the farmers, homeowners, businesses and schools—especially their conservation strategies and local agriculture.

The tour was co-hosted by the Water Forum, Placer County Water Agency, and Tully & Young Comprehensive Water Planning.

For more information, visit www.mountaincountieswater.com

Or: John Kingsbury – johnkingsbury.mcwra@gmail.com

Mountain Counties Water Resources Association was formed in the 1950s. The current membership consists of 57 districts, agencies, cities, counties, professional consultants and regional agricultural interests in 15 counties stretching from southern Lassen to northern Fresno.



Photo: "Water Leaders visit American River watershed"

Photo courtesy of Dave Carter

State and federal water leaders visited “The Confluence,” where the north and middle forks of the American River join upstream of Folsom Lake under the Foresthill Bridge.