

Borrego Water District
CORRECTED MINUTES
Borrego Water District 2014 Town Hall Meeting
Wednesday, March 27, 2014, 4:00 PM
Borrego Springs Performing Arts Center
590 Palm Canyon Drive
Borrego Springs, CA 92004

Attendance:

Directors Present: President Hart, Vice-President Lyle Brecht, Secretary/Treasurer
Marshal Brecht, Delahay, Estep

Staff: Jerry Rolwing, General Manager
Greg Holloway, Operations Manager
Kim Pitman, Administration Manager
Jeanne Fredericks, Customer Service Representative
Wendy Quinn, Recording Secretary

Public: Rebecca Falk, Desert Way Realty Claudia Faunt, USGS
Linda Haddock, BSCOC Dennis Bostad
Greg Krzys, USBR Joan Kirk
Richard Gray Jack Laughlin
Marie Caffay Don Goodwin
Joe Tatusko Suzanne Lawrence
Bill Burton Darby Burton
Jim Rickard Doris Laughlin
Jeannie Beck, *Borrego Sun* Ralph Singer, ABF
Claudia Fortiner Carl Martinez
Dennis Jensen Ray Shindler
Gil Lombard John Peterson
Tom Walker Susie Walker
Larry Fine Judy Johnson Martinez

1) **Greetings & Introductions. Beth Hart, President of the Board.** Fred Jee welcomed the attendees and introduced President Hart. President Hart announced that this is the thirteenth annual Town Hall Meeting to update the community on groundwater issues.

2) **Borrego Valley Groundwater Basin Study draft report. Claudia Faunt, PhD, Hydrologist, US Geological Survey [USGS].** Dr. Faunt summarized the USGS Groundwater Basin Study draft report, which shows that pumping exceeds recharge, and the situation will worsen with increased development. She explained that there were two sources used in the recharge, the primary being natural recharge (precipitation) and the secondary irrigation runoff.

Dr. Faunt presented slides depicting the declining water level in Borrego Valley, and explained the upper, middle and lower aquifers. We now obtain most of our water from the upper aquifer. The three levels vary in permeability and chemistry. While the middle and lower aquifers may be useable, the necessary treatment is apt to be costly.

The study included predictive simulations: Do nothing, three varying growth scenarios, and total agricultural reduction to reach sustainability. If we do nothing, in 50 years the upper aquifer will be almost completely drained. As the middle and lower

aquifers are tapped, subsidence may become an issue and TDS and nitrates will increase. The water will not run out, but it will become more expensive.

3) Reclamation Basin Study draft report. Greg Krzys, Southern California Area Office, U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation [Reclamation]. Mr. Krzys outlined the Reclamation Basin Study, which began in 2010 and has researched water characteristics and future supply and demand. They assessed existing operations and infrastructure and made recommendations for improvement.

Mr. Krzys explained that regional issues include water supply, demand and storage. Local issues include climate and water supply. Reclamation was investigated from economic and engineering standpoints. The final report should be available by the end of April and will include specific findings.

Mr. Krzys predicted that precipitation will decline and development will increase in this area, but no major changes are expected in the next ten to twenty years. Structural and nonstructural mitigation measures were investigated, including capturing flood water, importation and desalination. The Borrego Water Coalition is working to manage our water supply from within. Mr. Krzys explained that the study focused on importation from Imperial Irrigation District or Coachella Valley, and the necessary structural components. At this point in time it is not feasible unless a water source could be identified for \$78 an acre-foot or less.

4) 2014 Groundwater Management Plan update process. Jerry Rolwing, General Manager, Borrego Water District [BWD]. Mr. Rolwing opened by asking, “Where do we go from here?” At this point we probably cannot import. Under the State’s AB 3030, BWD has a Groundwater Management Plan, or a roadmap for the future. Its plans and objectives seek to address the groundwater overdraft. Community participation is required for grant eligibility. Mr. Rolwing explained that BWD’s existing Groundwater Management Plan was adopted in 2002, and included goals and objectives but no timeline or budget. Now that two major studies are nearing completion and the overdraft is continuing, the Plan needs updating. The Borrego Water Coalition has helped with stakeholder support. To retain local control, it is important that the Borrego community reach agreement and develop its own Plan.

5) Borrego Water Coalition plans: who/what & type? Kathy Dice, State Park Superintendent, Anza Borrego Desert State Park. This presentation was cancelled due to Ms. Dice’s unfortunate illness.

6) Financial report, Lyle Brecht, Vice President of the Board, BWD. Director Lyle Brecht presented a chart showing BWD’s cash and cash equivalents from 2007 through 2014. Another chart compared BWD’s water rates to other districts’, showing we are in the approximate middle of the range. Director Lyle Brecht explained that BWD has reduced staffing and operations and maintenance costs as well as deferring repairs and replacements. This has generated cash flow and we should be ready to approach the bond markets by 2016 or 2017. He pointed out that if the financial issues are not resolved, they could impact the State Park, the local economy, growth, recreation and water costs.

Director Lyle Brecht explained that the Board is trying to organize users in the Valley and encourage cooperation. Water law attorneys have advised against

adjudication. The Borrego Water Coalition was developed to create a plan to manage our basin and recommend financial solutions to do so. If the community can come together and develop a local plan it is hoped that Sacramento will not assume control of Borrego's groundwater. The Coalition will hold a public meeting on May 8 to update the residents on the status of its efforts.

7) Moderated, written questions from the audience for specific presenters. Question: Is anything being done about the dust from fallowed farmlands? Answer: President Hart replied that the District requires mulching or other dust mitigation. Some dust has been coming from Coyote Canyon due to the lack of rainfall.

Question: Should a groundwater quality program be instituted, and if so, how? Answer: Mr. Rolwing explained that such a program is in progress, and the District has applied for a grant to fund it. A required groundwater monitoring program is already in place but needs to be enhanced. This will be part of the revised Groundwater Management Plan.

Question: If the aquifer is to be saved, what is the future of agriculture in the Valley? Answer: Mr. Rolwing replied that the Borrego Water Coalition is addressing this issue, and the agricultural industry is participating. They will need to cut back on water usage, but so will everyone else.

Question: The predicted climate change of two percent seems small, but in fact is it a problem? Answer: Mr. Krzys explained that it would impact precipitation in the Borrego Valley.

Question: Rainfall does not contribute much to our recharge, but if we experience global warming, wouldn't that have more impact? Answer: Mr. Krzys raised the question of whether rain could be captured during wet years, and pointed out that most of the places where flood control structures could be located are within the State Park. Dr. Faunt added that flash flood waters might recharge the system, but simulations would be required to analyze it.

Question: Since commercial interests account for 78 percent of local water use, what is their incentive to reduce use in the short term? Answer: President Hart pointed out that in the last couple of years, there has been pressure from Sacramento to conserve water, and many agricultural users are voluntarily taking measures to reduce the overdraft and avoid adjudication.

Question: Is there an economic study regarding future increases in water costs, and if so, what are the findings? Answer: Director Lyle Brecht replied that DWR has funded the services of an economist, and he will present a report to the Borrego Water Coalition at its next meeting.

Question: Since Imperial Irrigation District gets its water from the Colorado River, which has twice the TDS level of Borrego's, does it make sense to import it and then pay to treat it? Answer: Mr. Krzys noted that Reclamation was looking at this issue in their study.

Question: How does the fallowing process work? Who pays for it? Or does someone purchase the land, and if so, who? Answer: President Hart replied that information on this subject is available on the BWD website. There are private landowners who are willing to exchange agricultural use for water credits. Some credits meet both County and BWD requirements, and these are the most valuable; some meet

only BWD requirements. There is an MOU between the County and BWD detailing the arrangement.

Question: Fallowing looks like the only option to save our aquifer. Could the fallowed areas be converted to park land? Answer: President Hart pointed out that tax credits could be available for this, and ABF is trying to raise money to pursue it.

8) Comments from the audience. An attendee who had worked in water resources since 1981 thanked Mr. Krzys and the residents who participated in the Town Hall Meeting.

There being no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m.