

BORREGO WATER DISTRICT
TOWNHALL, MARCH 25, 2015
CONCLUDING STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT BETH HART

SO HOW DOES THE NEW LEGISLATION AFFECT BORREGO AND DO WE HAVE A FUTURE?

When I describe Borrego to my friends up north who wonder why we choose to move to the desert after years as web footed Seattlites and salt water sailors, I tell them it's like going back in time to the 1950's when people looked out for one another, had fun together and shared resources working cooperatively on community projects to build a better future. It feels safe and wholesome and while diverse, the community is energized by generosity and a shared sense of commitment to its various members. In my 14+ years here, I've made more really great friends and worked on more worthy projects than the 60 years I spent up north. It's a place where you can be alone or together, outside or inside, in the audience or on the stage. It's a unique community filled with opportunities and it is that unique character that we seek to preserve as we move forward to address the legislative mandate to establish a sustainable water supply.

How do we do that? We do what we usually do in Borrego. We work cooperatively to plan our future and retain as much local control as possible so we can preserve our unique character. That was the foundational purpose that emerged with the formation of the Borrego Water Coalition in 2012 when the major water users in the Basin came together to begin planning to address the overdraft. Their policy recommendations to the District are available on our website and have been the topic of discussion at our recent meetings. The recommendations are a policy framework for the planning process that will be refined and vetted as we move towards drafting a Sustainability Plan. The Coalition will partner with the District to provide input and the District will continue to vet those recommendations with the Community as a whole.

We will also work cooperatively with the County. As most of us know, the County's track record for cooperating with our Community is less than sterling, however, there are 4 basins within County jurisdiction to be managed under the new legislation. Because of our own local efforts, Borrego is ahead of the curve in the planning process. We already have a defensible scientific definition of our overdraft, a Community stakeholder input process, a policy framework for developing a plan and available engineering and hydrologic contractors who are familiar with our Basin. This time, it's in the County's best interest to coordinate and cooperate with the Borrego Community if it's to be successful in meeting its mandate. The District and various County department personnel are currently working on a frame work for that

coordination that seeks to provide as much local control as possible for the Community while addressing the legal mandates for the County.

Finally, we will work cooperatively with the State. The legislation initially used a “carrot and a stick” approach to provide for local implementation of its mandate. Local public agencies are to develop and implement a plan that fits their local situation, but if they don’t act or don’t adequately address the matter, the State will. While initially an unfunded mandate, there are monies in the recently passed Proposition 1 earmarked for planning expenses associated with the new legislation. We will apply for grants and other funding from various governmental agencies to help us pay for the expenses associated with developing a plan, but given the State’s unwillingness to fund Borrego projects in the past, our planning will provide for paying our own way, not relying on outside sources.

If you read the San Diego Union Tribune’s Sunday front page story on water resources, you know we are not alone. The entire west is looking to manage its water supplies and California is now highlighted because of the continuing drought. Borrego’s isolated geographic location and unique single source aquifer actually work to our advantage. It’s very unlikely that larger water organizations will come knocking on our door to claim a share of our water supply. For that, we can be thankful.

So whose plan do we use and what vision do we follow? As thinking people, we understand that bringing an over-drafted groundwater basin back into balance is a difficult and expensive task. Any vision for how to resolve the matter must be shared, not a single view from a single source – but a community vision. The solution may be any combination of factors including market forces, a series of goals with set time targets, various water projects, and efficient and effective methods for fallowing farm land that address resulting air quality issues. It will also include funding, initially to develop a plan and thereafter to implement it. Lyle just presented one idea for funding the development of a plan. Funding sources for implementing the plan are yet to be defined, but our goal is to share expenses equitably.

What is important today is developing a shared vision, designed locally by the Community as a whole - a vision that is reached through a collaborative process that creates an economically sustainable solution so there is more than water in our future - there is the preservation of the unique character of this Community with all its diverse and eclectic elements that enables Borrego to grow while managing our resource.

The time is short, the task cumbersome, but it’s Borrego, a unique piece of real estate populated by an extraordinarily generous and supportive Community. We invite you as members of its diverse community elements to join us as we draft the vision and work our way through the legislative maze. Today, we have begun to move together towards a future that preserves the best of Borrego and takes control of our water future.