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Teaching Our Children About Water

Learning is Fun at Placer Nature Center

Imagine yourself as a drop of water. You fall from the sky, settle into the mountain snowpack and eventually float down a river canyon to the valley below. Maybe you will even create some electrical energy along the way.

This is one of the exercises given to youngsters who tour the Placer Nature Center in Auburn, where watershed education is a key part of the curriculum.

“We want them to understand how water fits into our lives,” says Executive Director Megan Krekorian. “We also want them to understand how people fit into our watershed. We want them to think outside themselves.”

20th Anniversary

Located in a wooded area at the end of Christian Valley Road, the Nature Center celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2011. Since it opened it has hosted some 200,000 visitors, mostly children, but many adults as well.

Developed over the years, mostly by volunteers, the center includes several



Placer Watershed Model

Josena Aiello, right, staff naturalist with the Placer Nature Center, uses a tabletop model of the Placer County watershed to show youngsters how water moves through our environment. Students at the recent tour were, from left, Anna Vlugt, Sean Burns, Ryan Gould and Aiden Burns. For tours, membership and other information, call the Placer Nature Center at (530) 878-6053 or visit www.placernaturecenter.org.

buildings, exhibits and trails that help visitors gain awareness, understanding and appreciation for our natural surroundings.

Water education is among the many subjects that are taught and displayed at the center. Natural ecosystems, history, culture, wildlife and agriculture are also part of the curriculum.

Water education programs are centered in the Watershed Learning Center, a stand-alone building that includes a hands-on model of the Placer County watershed, a floor mural that traces a path from the Sierra to the Delta, and an inter-

active wall exhibit that demonstrates the water cycle.

On the tabletop watershed model, youngsters run their fingertips down rivers from the Sierra crest to Folsom Reservoir, observing how water flows and how it is used to serve our communities.

School field trips for all age groups and family outings make up a good part of the center's clientele. Krekorian said Placer County students make up a majority of the field trips with youngsters from surrounding counties also in attendance.

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General Manager's Report

By David A. Breninger

More Water for the Delta?

North State Works Together to Protect Water Rights

Most Californians would agree that the environmental and water supply issues of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta must be solved. How we go about this is a matter of great concern to PCWA.

We believe that those who overused the Delta and created the problems in the first place should pay for solutions to the Delta's problems. Self-sufficient upstream communities and agencies such as PCWA should not have to give up precious water supplies to the Delta or Southern California or pay to repair the environmental damage done by years of abuse.

The Delta has been overused for decades to meet ever-increasing water needs in Southern California, the southern San Joaquin Valley and parts of the Bay Area. Today, 25 million people depend on a Delta that is failing. Water deliveries through the Delta have become less reliable and the Delta ecosystem is collapsing.

Now, under mandate from the State Legislature, a group called the Delta Stewardship Council is charged with developing and implementing a long-term plan to manage, restore and improve the Delta.

In November, the council released an environmental impact report on the proposed plan. While the EIR addresses environmental benefits to the Delta, it ignores the serious impacts the Delta Plan would have on upstream communities. We are concerned that the Delta Plan calls for a "more natural flow regime" that would require even more Northern California water to flush the Delta and supply our neighbors to the south. For upstream communities this "natural flow regime" means reservoirs will not be allowed to fill, some rivers and streams could dry up by late summer and hydroelectric energy production will drop.

A Threat to Placer's Water, Environment, Economy

PCWA has worked for decades to develop our area-of-origin water rights to meet the needs of our communities. We see the draft Delta Plan as a threat to the water supply, environment and economy of Placer County.

We are not alone in this position. We have joined with dozens of other Northern California water purveyors, cities, counties and business and labor groups in a regional alliance. It is our mutual goal to ensure that north state interests are well represented in the Delta planning process.

The North State Water Alliance agrees that the Delta Plan must 1) recognize and protect area-of-origin water rights, 2) that Sacramento and Northern California stakeholders must be included in the process, and 3) that our region will continue to invest in water supply and water efficiency efforts.

The alliance supports a Delta solution that 1) is based on sound science, 2) requires beneficiaries to fully fund the solutions, and 3) does not shift adverse economic, environmental or societal impacts to our region.

Nature Center

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Megan Krekorian is executive director of the Placer Nature Center.

The not-for-profit center has four part-time employees, including its executive director, and an enthusiastic volunteer board and team of volunteers. The center receives financial support from the County of Placer, PCWA, City of Roseville, Arp Family Foundation and others. It raises support from memberships and user fees.

PCWA is a longtime supporter of water education at the Nature Center. The water agency and federal Bureau of Reclamation provided grant funding in the center's early days and the agency has since made frequent contributions which have resulted in several exhibits and demonstration areas including the watershed model, a pond demonstration and heritage garden.

"Water education is part of our mission," said PCWA Director of Customer Services Matt Young. "Since we do not have an ongoing in-house program, this is an efficient and cost-effective way to accomplish that objective."

Placer Nature Center is now open to the public Thursdays through Saturdays, 9-5, and will be open five days a week in spring and summer. Group and school programs can be scheduled all week.

For information about the center, call (530) 878-6053 or visit its website at www.placernaturecenter.org.

Lower Flows, More Water Held in Storage in Case of Dry Year

Local water managers are limiting water releases and keeping more water in higher elevation reservoirs as a drier than average winter continues in Placer County and across the West.

By mid-January, California's mountain snowpack stood at just 14 percent of the January average, one of the lowest readings ever recorded for this time of year, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

The winter snowpack is the source of water to PCWA customers. Runoff flows into local reservoirs and is routed to water treatment plants, as well as the canal network that supplies Placer County farms and ranches.

Preparing for Possible Dry Year

PCWA General Manager David Breninger said that January is too early in the season to estimate water availability. However, as the possibility of a dry year continues, the PCWA management team has been studying options for dry year operations and planning regular updates at PCWA board meetings.

While winter has been slow in coming, a conservative approach to water releases has preserved existing reservoir storage. On the American River watershed, PCWA storage at French Meadows and Hell Hole reservoirs was reported at 167,000 acre-feet, or about 25,000 acre-feet above the average for this time of year.

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company and Nevada Irrigation District are maintaining above average water storage in their reservoirs on the Yuba-Bear River watershed. These reservoirs supply most PCWA customers.

This dry year is markedly different from last year's near record wet year. Variations in rainfall from year to year are a constant reminder for all of us to use only the water we need.

The Sacramento Regional Water Authority (RWA) offers some timely advice: "Rain or shine we should be good stewards of our water resources to ensure it is available today and for future generations."

Plants Need Less Water Now

During this winter's extended dry weather, PCWA observed higher than average customer water use for outdoor irrigation.

While consumers might be tempted to ramp up irrigation, it should be noted that plants don't need as much water this time of year. Lower temperatures and shorter daylight hours help reduce demand for water. Often little, if any, irrigation is needed during winter.

Water Use Info Online

PCWA customers are invited to visit the PCWA website at www.pcwa.net where a variety of information on water use efficiency may be found. Simply click on the Water Efficiency tab on the home page for water saving information.

Where Does My Water Come From?



The PG&E Drum and PCWA Boardman Canal systems carry water from the Yuba-Bear watershed. Water is also pumped from the American River near Auburn.

Yuba and Bear Rivers

Most PCWA customers are supplied with water from the Yuba and Bear river watersheds. PCWA purchases up to 100,400 acre-feet of Yuba-Bear water each year from the Pacific Gas and Electric Company for Zone 1 and up to 25,000 acre-feet of water each year for Zone 3.

This water flows down the Interstate 80 corridor from Lake Spaulding through PG&E and PCWA canals. It is routed to water treatment plants or into the irrigation water distribution system.

American River

PCWA has rights to 120,000 acre-feet of water that flows from French Meadows and Hell Hole reservoirs down through the Middle Fork American River Project.

Some of this water is pumped from the American River canyon up to the Auburn-Ophir area and distributed to PCWA customers. This source water also flows to Roseville, San Juan Water District and (in wet years) to Sacramento Suburban Water District.

Wells Supply Eastern Placer County

PCWA also supplies groundwater to areas of the Martis Valley in eastern Placer County and can supply limited groundwater to areas in western Placer County, generally west of Highway 65.

Your Elected Board of Directors

PCWA is an independent public agency governed by an elected Board of Directors. Directors represent each of five districts in Placer County and are elected by voters to four-year terms.

Your PCWA Board of Directors:

DISTRICT 1: Gray Allen
DISTRICT 2: Alex Ferreira
DISTRICT 3: Lowell Jarvis
DISTRICT 4: Mike Lee
(2012 Board Chairman)
DISTRICT 5: Ben Mavy
(2012 Board Vice Chairman)

Public Meetings

The Placer County Water Agency Board of Directors meets regularly the first and third Thursdays of each month at 2 p.m. at the Placer County Water Agency Business Center, 144 Ferguson Road, in Auburn. The public is welcome.

www.pcwa.net

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PLACER COUNTY WATER AGENCY

MAILING: P.O. Box 6570
Auburn, CA 95604

Location: 144 Ferguson Road
Auburn, California 95603

(530) 823-4850
(800) 464-0030

General Manager: David A. Breninger
Newsletter Editor: Dave Carter

Building a Better Water System

Gold Run Project Moves Toward Completion

Since 2003, PCWA has been methodically working to replace troublesome sections of the Gold Run Pipeline, which parallels Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks between Dutch Flat and Gold Run.

The challenging fourth phase of the project, replacement of 1550 feet of large diameter pipeline on a steep bluff above I-80, was completed in November and has been nominated for an engineering award.

PCWA Director of Technical Services Brian Martin said the \$1.3 million job included new 36-inch pipeline, a 96-foot-long, 26-foot-high retaining wall, and drainage and access improvements. The large wall is designed to prevent hillside erosion and potential impacts to I-80, he noted. "It allowed us to restore the integrity of the bluff along I-80 while completing a vital water project," Martin said.

Benefits include elimination of pipeline failures leading to increased system reliability, a significant reduction in erosion, protection of railroad access, and improved road access for operation and maintenance.

The American Society of Civil Engineers, Sacramento Region, will consider the project for its annual Outstanding Engineering Award.

Assisting PCWA with the work were Bennett Engineering Services of Roseville, which provided design and construction management; and the project contractor, Syblon Reid, with offices in Folsom.

The overall Gold Run Pipeline is 9500 feet long and is part of the Boardman Canal, which carries water from the mountains to supply PCWA Zone 3 in the foothills between Alta and Meadow Vista. It can also supply Zone 1 further down the hill.

The multiyear upgrade is expected to include six or more phases. Previous phases were completed in 2003, 2006 and 2008. The Phase V project is scheduled to go to bid early this year and be completed by this fall.



The Gold Run project includes a 96-foot-long retaining wall, seen here in construction.

IN BRIEF....

National Award for Breninger. PCWA General Manager David A. Breninger is the recipient of the 2011 President's Award of the National Water Resources Association (NWRA). Breninger is one of four California representatives to the NWRA, which is comprised of water industry leaders from across 17 western states.

New Chlorination at Foothill. The drinking water chlorination system at PCWA's Foothill Water Treatment Plant in Newcastle has been converted to use liquid chlorine, eliminating the storage and use of chlorine gas at the site.

Upgrade at Bowman. A site expansion at the small Bowman Water Treatment Plant above Auburn has provided additional space for solid waste management and more efficient plant operations.

Water Efficiency Rebates. PCWA continues to offer rebates to customers who replace old toilets and washing machines with new water efficient models. For information, call the PCWA Customer Services Center at (530) 823-4850 or see www.pcwa.net.

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