

# Water District pledges fair, truthful action during ongoing water feud

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George Croll, General Manager of the IWW Water District, talks about ongoing water issues with the Rotary Club of China Lake.

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“Despite whatever differences you might hear, the Groundwater Authority, [the Water District], the city, everybody shares the same vision,” said George Croll. Croll is the general manager of the Indian Wells Valley Water District, and he spoke to the Rotary Club of China

Lake about water sustainability. The fight between the IWW Groundwater Authority and the IWW Water District and Searles Valley Minerals has been one of the biggest hot-button topics in the area for years.

Croll began his presentation by comparing the district's efforts to the Rotary Club's four-way test, a pledge of truthfulness and good-faith, fair dealings with others. He said that the Water District strives to be open, truthful, and fair to its customers.

This legal battle is centered on the enforcement of California's water sustainability law, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Under the law, passed in 2014, the consumption of groundwater must be reduced against how much is naturally replenished annually to combat overdrafting and prevent completely running out of local water in the future.

However, the three parties cannot agree on how much annual replenishment occurs, with GA offering the lowest estimate and SVM the highest. SVM's data is publicly available where GA's is not, meaning the two cannot be scientifically compared — in essence, nobody can agree on what exactly the problem is.

Despite not looking at the two other sources of data, Croll said, the GA has decided on a solution to the problem: a \$392 million pipeline running from California City to Ridgecrest along Garlock Road, with the water coming from California's State Water Project.

The State Water Project originates at Lake Oroville and the Feather River watershed in northern California, then moves down the Sacramento River to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. It's pumped from the delta, which has sustainability issues of its own, into an aqueduct that heads south over the mountains to supply the millions of residents of southern California.

From that aqueduct, a branch line comes to California City, and the new pipeline would take water from that running supply up to Ridgecrest and the surrounding area. According to Croll, the cost of this construction will be paid for by Water District customers, likely doubling their water fees.

The Water District has undertaken numerous state-of-the-art studies into the local groundwater, using new technology like electromagnetic scanning and computer modeling, Croll said. They also took previous studies and data into account for their findings. But it's up to the GA to incorporate the District's findings into their data, and so far they have rejected offers to look at and discuss it, he said.

In the meantime, the Water District has worked hard to reduce water consumption. Water use has been reduced 43% since 2007, now at 20,000 acre-feet per year versus the prior 35,000 AFY. The heavy water-consuming agriculture industry is also on its way out, expected to be gone before 2040. In particular, Mojave Pistachios has reached a settlement with the GA and will cease farming within a few years. Combined, these efforts should bring water use below 12,500 AFY within 15 years.

And if the \$392 million pipeline isn't the solution, then what is? Unfortunately, alternatives can be suggested but nothing can be properly researched until a final value of available water is established by the courts. There are possible alternatives; for example, a waste water recycling plant is unlikely to produce potable water for IWV citizens Croll said, but it could produce lower-quality industrial water that SVM could use to reduce its consumption. At the moment, the GA insists that there are no viable options outside of the pipeline.

Until the data is agreed upon, likely after the ongoing legal battle, no actual research and planning into SMGA-compliant solutions is possible.