



Desert Water Agency
1200 Gene Autry Trail
Palm Springs, CA 92264
Contact: Katie Ruark, 760-323-4971 ext. 184

August 21, 2014

DWA to Oppose Groundwater Legislation Unless Amended
Last minute exemptions make bill unacceptable

Palm Springs – The Desert Water Agency (DWA) has moved to an oppose unless amended position on two bills that the Agency spent months helping to shape after political carve outs were added to the legislation. California Senate Bill 1168 and Assembly Bill 1739 were crafted to manage groundwater in the state, a change DWA worked closely with lawmakers to craft. Now, as the deadline for bill amendments approaches rapidly, the bills have changed to include policies that the Agency cannot support, because they would not achieve the goal of been statewide sustainable management for water users. Those changes include:

1. An opportunity for counties that do not want to take on groundwater management to opt out of doing so.
2. A carve out for Native American tribes that would exempt them from groundwater management responsibilities. Additionally, the amendment would remove adjudication of groundwater from state courts while water rights laws emanate from the state.

These two changes would allow counties and tribes to avoid the obligation to manage groundwater resources responsibly, which is contrary to the goals of the legislation. Instead of ensuring that an entire groundwater basin is covered by a groundwater sustainability plan and corresponding management, the amendments would create pockets throughout the state that are left unmanaged and unregulated. If, as a result of unmanaged pockets, a basin does not meet the sustainability goal, the state would take over groundwater management and remove local control even from the portions of the basin that are being responsibly managed by local agencies.

3. Authority for the Department of Water Resources to impose fees for non-compliance, in addition to the cost of compliance, all of which would be passed on to ratepayers in the form of increased. This is contrary to attempts to ensure affordability of drinking water.

“After all the efforts spent to assure this legislation promotes good groundwater management, it is incredibly disappointing to see the shape it has now taken,” said DWA Board President Craig Ewing, who sat on the Association of California Water Agencies’ Task Force on Groundwater Management. “We were encouraged by the direction this bill had taken to this point, but now the bill has such significant loopholes for counties and tribes that it leaves the water agency and our ratepayers with all the responsibility and cost, but without the authority to sustainably manage the basin.”

###

About DWA

Desert Water Agency is a public, non-profit agency and a State Water Contractor, serving a 325- square-mile area, including parts of Cathedral City, outlying county areas, Desert Hot Springs and Palm Springs. An elected five-member board sets policy and represents the ratepayers. For more information, please visit www.dwa.org.