

SOURCE

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA SECTION AWWA

v30 • N1 • Winter 2016

Residents haul recycled water from Dublin San Ramon Services District's Pleasanton Fill Station.

14

**DEVELOPING
DEFENSIBLE
INCLINING
TIER RATES**

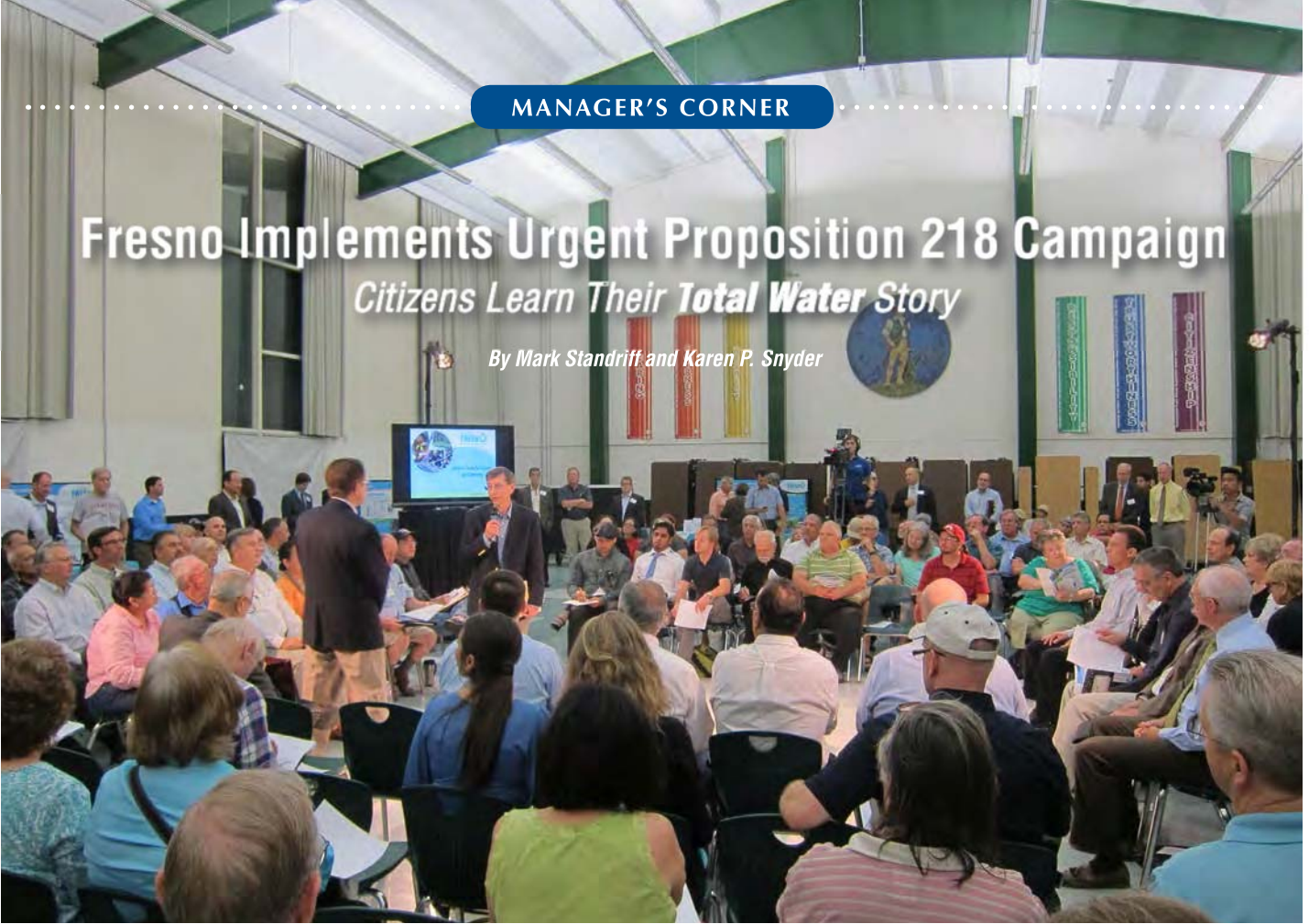
20

- **SNWA Fast-Tracks Low Lake Level Pump Station** 18
- **Groundwater Recharge—MWD Heads in New Direction** 12
- **Inside the Valley Fire: A GM & Mutual Aid Responder Tell Their Stories** 29

Fresno Implements Urgent Proposition 218 Campaign

Citizens Learn Their Total Water Story

By Mark Standriff and Karen P. Snyder



In 2013, after a Proposition 218 review solicited little participation, the Fresno City Council approved a 34 percent residential rate increase over four years for water supply system expansion. When organized and vocal opponents appeared a year later, the council rescinded the rate increase but found itself unable to fund capital improvements already underway and meet operational and debt obligations.

UNTIL RECENTLY, GROUNDWATER has provided nearly 90 percent of the water supply for Fresno's 500,000 residents and businesses. However, decreasing groundwater levels (100 feet over the past 80 years) have increased the cost of pumping (\$9 million annually) and resulted in declining water quality. In the early 1990s, the city began developing the Metropolitan Water Resources Management Plan (Metro Plan) to maximize access to surface water, increase groundwater recharge, and extend conservation efforts. Infrastructure updates included 13 miles of 72-inch transmission pipelines to deliver water from two surface water reservoirs in the Sierra foothills (combined storage 180,000 AF) to a new 80 million gallons a day (MGD) surface treatment plant; another 13 miles of new transmission

lines to deliver water to customers; a new storage facility; and multiple well rehabilitation and replacement projects.

Given the public challenge to the 2013 water rate increase and recognizing that new rates would need to be implemented within months to cover existing obligations, the City Council called for a "robust participatory process" to "connect the dots." The result was a five-month, multi-step public awareness campaign.

Step 1: Develop Participatory Strategy (August 2014). The objective was to provide a public forum to facilitate discussion about the nuances of the city's water situation, followed by discussion of proposed solutions and cost recovery strategies. The approach was founded on four principles: multifaceted communication, open and transparent discussion, easily accessed feedback mechanisms, and demonstration of how public input was incorporated in decision-making.

Step 2: Develop Message (August 2014). Key messages were solidified from technically vetted and consistent information and presented in understandable terms. Without this, there is the potential for miscommunication, which can result in confusion and lack of trust. With its public outreach partners, the city determined key areas of

stakeholder concern, which were developed into key points in the Total Water campaign:

- Ensuring a reliable and sustainable water supply is critical to Fresno's present and future prosperity.
- Investing in our water infrastructure will ensure a safe and reliable water supply 24/7/365.
- Maximizing our existing rights to maintain water will replenish our rapidly depleting groundwater.

Step 3: Establish Multiple Venues for Information Access and Stakeholder Participation (September 29, 2014 - November 10, 2014). A series of four community forums, held every two weeks and spread around the city, provided the foundation for all communication activities. Each forum covered one of the community's key concerns, including: Fresno's Water Supply Issues and Needs (September 29, 2014); Solutions: Fresno's Water Future (October 13, 2014); Paying for Fresno's Water Needs (October 27, 2014); and Summary and Next Steps (November 10, 2014). Radio, television, and print advertising and coffee shop fliers were used to remind residents of online resources related to each forum. Updates were provided to community and civic groups to distribute to their membership.

The forums were designed as a theater-in-the-round to engage residents and make them feel

comfortable. A half-hour open house featured information stations on the forum's topic and provided subject matter experts for one-on-one information exchange among people uncomfortable asking questions in public. The open house was followed by discussion led by Lewis Michaelson of Katz & Associates, Inc. Presentations by city staff members preceded remarks by a rotating panel of third-party experts from universities, non-profit organizations, consulting firms, and local, state and federal agencies, who were encouraged to speak candidly and provide perspectives about the city's plans. The final hour focused on attendee discussions and ideas.

Attendance fluctuated between 100-200 people. The forums were live streamed on community television, significantly extending their reach, and video coverage remained available on the campaign website, *RechargeFresno.com*. Because panelists, presentations, and discussion changed with each meeting, media coverage was strong. "Intercept interview" videos featured man-on-the-street interviews that demonstrated gaps in the average person's knowledge about the challenges of Fresno's water situation. The videos transitioned from interviewee misconceptions about such issues as the cost of water to their (sometimes startled) reactions when the correct information was provided.

Step 4: Develop Informational Materials. Fact sheets, poster displays, and website content were developed for use during the forums and other outreach events. Materials were "layered," providing varying levels of details to meet the demands of various audiences for information on hydrology, water resources, infrastructure and cost concepts. Poster displays, fact sheets, and technical documents were available online, at meetings, in city offices, and at water-related speaking engagements.

Step 5: Develop Participation Mechanisms. The campaign included multiple opportunities for the public to provide input or ask questions, including an information line (844-FRESNO-H2O) and website contact form, which was closely monitored by the city's outreach team. Comment forms were available at forums and speaking engagements, and public input was recorded on poster boards for later consideration. All input was summarized according to topic and made available online every two weeks to ensure access and transparency. Contact information for those who submitted comments or attended forums was maintained in an electronic database for e-mail updates.

Step 6: Implement Media Updates and Brief Elected Officials. Even with the change in media to focusing on specialized audiences, television, print and radio are valuable for disseminating information to the broader community. City staff ensured that new, substantive information was shared with the media during each forum meeting and that discussion remained on point. The City Public Information Office facilitated media access to information and made experts available for radio discussions and live interviews. As the ultimate decision-makers, Fresno's elected officials were provided with all public informational materials and technical staff reports to assure no surprises and provide them with tools to communicate with their constituents.

Step 7: Feedback (November 2015). In a participation campaign it's essential to demonstrate how public input is used and/or couldn't be addressed within the context of a particular situation. During the final forum, the city unveiled recommendations for a revised rate increase, taking care to identify specific ways the public had informed decision-making and would continue to influence next steps. Its commitments included:

- 1) *Conservation resources*—It would better publicize resources for residents to advance conservation and identify and approve additional resources.
- 2) *Better water system maintenance*—It would continue pipeline replacements, and



Improving Water Quality Through Complete Reservoir Mixing

 NSF 61 Certified

Tideflex Variable Orifice Nozzles

Waterflex Outlet Check Valves



Custom Engineered for an Innovative Mixing System

- Extensive CFD Modeled Designs
- Maintenance Free
- No Energy Source Required
- Installed in Any Size and Style Tank
- Common or Separate Inlet and Outlet



CALL TODAY!

www.miscowater.com

PLEASANTON

925.225.1900

FOOTHILL RANCH

949.458.5555

where possible, accelerate the pace to avoid catastrophic failures such as residents had seen on national media.

- 3) *A Water Capacity Fee Study*—Because residents were concerned that water system improvements were aimed at growth and new development would not be paying its fair share, the city authorized a fee study to assess the adequacy of fees and charges and ensure fair distribution of costs.
- 4) *Reducing Rates*—The city identified strategies already underway to reduce program costs and spread these over five years instead of four and committed to pursuing additional funding opportunities including State Revolving Funds.
- 5) *Affordability and Equity*. The staff recommended initial lower monthly costs for the lowest water users and committed to a rate schedule based on use. Costs would be added more slowly than in the previously approved plan, and an assistance program would help those with demonstrated need.

Step 8: Continue Communication (Ongoing). On February 26, 2015, the City Council authorized the Proposition 218 process and subsequently approved the revised rate structure.

A year after the forums ended, the council approved \$158 million to develop and construct the 80 MGD water treatment facility, the cornerstone of the Recharge Fresno infrastructure improvement, scheduled for a 2018 completion, plus additional projects already underway. Because residents need access to information on project status and milestones and the importance of securing Fresno's water future more than ever, outreach and public participation continues to claim a critical seat at the planning table. 💧

GEOSCIENCE
Ground Water Consulting
Since 1978

GEOSCIENCE

GEOSCIENCE Support Services, Inc.
+1 909.451.6650 | www.gssiwater.com

WIFIA, Continued from page 23

making local funds stretch further and accelerating water infrastructure improvements. Because like TIFIA, WIFIA is strictly a loan program, in the long run, it promised to be budget neutral, and in addition, both programs allow leveraging of federal dollars appropriated based on the credit risk of loan recipients.

In TIFIA, every dollar appropriated by Congress results in \$10 being loaned out. The TIFIA program's ability to leverage additional sources of investment, including tax-exempt bonds, has been fundamental to its success: a federal investment of less than \$2 billion has backed more than \$19 billion in low-cost TIFIA loans and spurred \$72 billion in surface transportation improvements nationwide. The water sector is even more creditworthy. The historical default rate of water utilities is 0.04 percent, and almost all of those in default work their way out in a couple of years. Therefore, the potential leverage rate for WIFIA, by some estimates, has been up to 33:1 (\$33 dollars loaned out for a dollar appropriated). The leverage rate will likely be evaluated for each project applying.

The Door Opens

When Congress began deliberations on a long-term surface transportation bill, AWWA and the informal water coalition saw an opportunity. U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works, had shepherded the original WIFIA legislation through the Senate and wasn't happy with the ban on tax-free financing. She led efforts to include the WIFIA correction in the Senate's version of the transportation bill. U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs, R-Ohio, Chair of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, who had championed the WIFIA legislation in the House of Representatives, also wanted the correction. While the House version of the bill did not contain the WIFIA fix (because of concerns that WIFIA might be ruled non-germane to the House text) he kept pushing. When a House-Senate conference convened to produce a compromise bill, Rep. Gibbs let it be known that fixing WIFIA was one of his priorities.

Going into the 2015 Thanksgiving holidays, WIFIA's fate remained in limbo. AWWA grassroots members were diligent in calling, e-mailing and meeting with their members of Congress serving on the conference committee. One eleventh hour wrinkle appeared when a private concern lobbying Capitol Hill argued that WIFIA should be used primarily to support private investment in water systems.

On November 30, 2015, the House-Senate conference produced a single transportation bill that included the WIFIA correction, and on December 15, 2015, the White House press office announced that President Obama would sign the legislation. The House approved the bill 359-65 the afternoon of December 3, 2015, and the Senate approved it by a vote of 83-16. As debate began, Rep. Gibbs went to the floor of the full House to reiterate the need to correct WIFIA.

Now that WIFIA is Fixed

WIFIA was authorized to receive \$20 million in fiscal year 2015, \$25 million in 2016, \$35 million in 2017, \$45 million in 2018, and \$50 million in 2019, but so far Congress has only appropriated \$2.2 million for USEPA to set up the program, and no money has been appropriated for WIFIA to make actual loans. Appropriators maintain they want to be sure that the agency is ready to implement the program, but based on our discussions, the EPA staff appears to be well down the road to implementation. AWWA and others have been talking to Congress about this, but the overall federal budget debate has become partisan and contentious.

AWWA's Water Utility Council (WUC) and government affairs staff have been impressed and gratified with the tremendous support and hard work AWWA members have shown in the WIFIA campaign. AWWA members have full-time jobs and family lives, and consequently, the amount of time and energy they showed in advocating for WIFIA and its correction has been amazing. 💧