

CHAPTER 24

PUBLIC OUTREACH OVERVIEW

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An extensive 18-month public outreach effort was conducted for the PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR. This effort included a series of meetings with residents, business representatives, the local news media, public officials, and the general public. Interest in the project was high due to increased levels of awareness over diminishing water resources in the Antelope Valley.

District No. 20 staff was committed to providing as much information as possible to members of the public. This included the history and organization of the Districts and District No. 20; the wastewater treatment process and additional treatment options; ramifications of wastewater treatment and effluent management in a land-locked area such as the Antelope Valley; actions of the RWQCB-LR in response to nitrate contamination in the underlying groundwater; and water recycling and reuse options.

MAJOR COMMUNITY EVENTS

District No. 20 participated in four of Palmdale's major annual community/civic events in 2004 and 2005. Event Booths were stocked with information packages; enlarged maps and graphics of the local wastewater treatment system were posted; and novelty keepsakes promoting recycling were distributed to the public. District No. 20 staff was present throughout the duration of each event. The staff interacted with the public, responding to questions, and, whenever possible, discussing the potential benefits of increased reuse of recycled water to the local community. The four events where District No. 20 sponsored booths were:

California Poppy Festival – Sponsored by the City of Lancaster, this two-day event held in April 2005 was estimated to have had an attendance of over 20,000 people from the high desert community who came to view the wildflowers at the California Poppy Reserve.

Palmdale Water Awareness Fair – Sponsored by the PWD, the City of Palmdale, and other community businesses, the District hosted a booth at this annual fair

in the third week of May 2004 and again in 2005. Attended by more than 10,000 people, the fair created a heightened public awareness of water and its value as a natural resource.

Antelope Valley Business Showcase Expo – Held in June 2004 in the Poppy Pavilion at the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds, this event featured 145 exhibitors and was estimated to have had an attendance of over 8,000.

STAKEHOLDERS MEETINGS AND PRESENTATIONS

A series of focus meetings with individuals and organizations in the City of Palmdale area was held with a dual-purpose to provide information regarding the need for the PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR and to solicit opinions and recommendations from the community and various stakeholders.

These meetings were organized primarily to seek input from Palmdale residents, business owners, and community representatives. District No. 20 staff presented a PowerPoint slide show, explaining the background, process, and goals of the PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR. In most cases, a tour of the PWRP was included. The goal of each meeting was to understand the priorities and expectations of various interest groups (business, community, homeowners) in Palmdale with respect to the future of the wastewater treatment and recycled water reuse in their community.

Research was conducted with input from Palmdale residents, business representatives, and officials to identify stakeholders who are active in civic and business affairs; community leaders known to have an interest in environmental, water, and agricultural issues; and civic, business, service and homeowner associations and organizations.

Among the organizations contacted during this phase of the outreach effort were:

- Antelope Valley Board of Trade;
- Antelope Valley Chamber of Commerce;
- Antelope Valley East Kern Water Agency;
- Antelope Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce;
- Antelope Valley Joint Legislative Committee of the Greater Antelope Valley Association of Realtors;
- Antelope Valley Press;
- Boeing Company;
- Building Industry Association;
- City of Palmdale;
- Edison Company;
- Greater Antelope Valley Association of Realtors;
- Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance;
- High Desert Broadcasting;
- Lockheed-Martin;
- Los Angeles County Farm Bureau;
- Los Angeles Daily News (Antelope Valley Section);
- Los Angeles World Airports;
- Old Town Homeowners Group;
- Palmdale Chamber of Commerce;
- Palmdale School District Board;
- Palmdale Senior Citizens Advisory Committee;
- Palmdale Water District;
- Rural Town Councils;

- Russ and Amber Amspoker, Columnist;
- United Way of Antelope Valley; and
- USAF Plant 42.

In addition, District No. 20 staff met with the representatives of the following elected officials:

- Supervisor Michael Antonovich;
- Assemblywoman Sharon Runner; and
- Office of State Senator Pete Knight (Deceased).

A fact sheet was prepared and distributed at these meetings. A PowerPoint presentation was given at each meeting and all of the issues involved in the development of the PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR were discussed.

SURVEYS

At the conclusion of each meeting, a survey was administered to obtain feedback on key issues of the project such as cost, conservation, community benefits, protection of habitats, levels of treatment, recycled water uses, and effluent management strategies.

Responses to the survey confirmed widespread general support for increasing the level of treatment at the PWRP, and for maximizing the use of recycled water. For instance, 50 out of 65 respondents favored a level of tertiary treatment or higher in District No. 20's proposed project.

While cost was a significant factor for some respondents, conservation and community benefits rated higher, with more than half of the votes. There was strong support for greater water recycling and conservation, a view which is strongly linked to the continued economic growth of the Antelope Valley.

Several respondents were concerned about the impact of service rate increases on seniors and low-income residents. Others indicated the community would pay the cost to bring the PWRP to full tertiary. Some respondents were concerned that not enough is being done in the area of water conservation. Municipal reuse of recycled water was seen as a significant community benefit. Many encouraged municipal uses of recycled water, even at a considerable cost for the development of a delivery system. Municipal reuse, groundwater recharge, and agricultural reuse were evenly distributed among respondents as the top rated alternatives for future effluent management practices. There was less support for permanent wetlands and evaporation ponds. This would indicate that the community and business leaders interviewed were looking for more practical and sustainable uses for the water.

There is considerable interest in the ongoing situation of nitrate contamination at the EMS and support for the proposed clean-up and abatement measures.

NEWS MEDIA

During this phase of the community outreach program, the local news media (*The Antelope Valley Journal and the Daily News – Antelope Valley Edition*) met with District No. 20 staff, viewed the presentation and toured the PWRP. The reporters were well informed; understood the issues; engaged in dialogue with District No. 20 staff; and wrote extensive, accurate, and well-balanced articles.

PLANT TOURS

PWRP tours were conducted with nearly everyone that participated in the initial meetings. The plant tour included a description of the current treatment process. Other highlights of the tour included a discussion of solids processing and a recently installed state-of-the-art fuel cell that utilizes methane gas extraction for electricity production.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

In accordance with the CEQA, an NOP was issued on September 20, 2004, and copies were sent to federal, state, and local agencies, local community leaders, and interested parties. The purpose of the NOP was to advise responsible agencies of the upcoming planning effort and to invite preliminary comments prior to preparation of the PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR. Of the 83 public institutions that were contacted, the only written response received was from the SCAG. SCAG comments included citing specific SCAG policies that should be addressed by the Final PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR, including the Growth Management, Regional Traffic, Water Quality and Air Quality chapters of its Regional Comprehensive Plan.

An agency scoping meeting was also held on October 7, 2004, at the Larry Chimbole Cultural Center in Palmdale to receive verbal comments. A PowerPoint presentation was presented by District No. 20 staff on details of the proposed project. Attendees included Rex Moen, representing the Office of State Senator Pete Knight (deceased) and Dennis La Moreaux from the Palmdale Water District. Both representatives commented on the importance of beneficial water reuse to the local community.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two additional meetings were held to brief the public and obtain thoughts, opinions and suggestions.

A meeting was held on October 21, 2004, at the American Red Cross in Palmdale for town councils and homeowner associations. A PowerPoint slide show was presented by District No. 20 staff and the meeting was recorded on audiotape. Two representatives from homeowner associations attended the meeting. Their comments and questions regarded a need for more recreational areas, the possibility of permanent wetlands, nitrate contamination, and whether the PWRP uses any sort of renewable energy.

A public workshop was held on November 18, 2004, at the Palmdale Moose Lodge. Prior to the workshop, press releases were sent to the local print, radio, and cable television media outlets. In addition, a series of display advertisements were placed in the local print media (*Daily News – Antelope Valley Section*, *Antelope Valley Press*, *Antelope Valley Journal*, *La Gaceta* (Spanish press), *LA Bay News Observer* (African-American press)), and a postcard notification was mailed to a database of approximately 600 interested parties.

Approximately 22 stakeholders attended the workshop, which began with a PowerPoint slide show presented by District No. 20 staff. Attendees were given an informational sheet explaining the process that would be used during the workshop and separated into small groups.

After the individual groups met, the attendees reconvened for presentations by each group's selected representative. The first group strongly approved the use of recycled water and supported wastewater treatment up to the tertiary level. Group members also felt operational considerations and service costs were the most important screening criteria with respect to selecting a proposed project. The second group favored agricultural reuse, and suggested wetlands and water bodies such as Apollo Park for effluent management options, along with municipal reuse. They also placed a high priority on water conservation, followed by environmental impact consideration with respect to screening criteria for a proposed project. The third and last group favored conserving water and using available resources, with particular concern paid to cost of water and treatment levels.

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

The 45-day public review period began with the release of the Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR and a Notice of Availability (NOA) on April 29, 2005, and lasted until

June 17, 2005. A public hearing was also held on June 2, 2005 in order to provide an opportunity for the public to provide oral comments.

Notice of Availability and Release of the Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR

The Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR was released for public review on April 29, 2005. Full sets of documents or executive summaries were mailed to 89 recipients representing federal, state, and local agencies, community groups, local industry, interested residents, and the local media. Full sets of documents were also made available in the following three public libraries:

- County of Los Angeles – Lancaster Public Library;
- Palmdale City Library – Main Library; and
- County of Los Angeles – Little Rock Library.

In addition, the full Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR was made available on the Districts' website at www.lacsd.org. The NOA was advertised in the Los Angeles Daily News, Antelope Valley Section, and the Antelope Valley Press on May 2, 2005. A news briefing was held on May 2, 2005, which was attended by the Antelope Valley Press, Antelope Valley Journal, Los Angeles Daily News, and Adelphia Cable Television. Subsequently, each of these news organizations ran stories that included information about the proposed project and the date, time, and location of the public hearing.

The NOA was mailed to over 2,100 property owners located within 500 feet of the proposed project. District No. 20 used the Los Angeles County Tax Assessor Role database to determine ownership and mailing information for affected landowners. Approximately nine percent of NOAs were returned unopened from this mailing. All returned notices were researched using other methods to determine the correct mailing address.

Approximately 10 percent of the returned NOAs were resent using new address information obtained from the research.

Additional efforts were also taken to distribute the NOA to homeowners in the area of the proposed project. One of the returned NOAs was identified as a residence within the impacted area. Additional research eventually yielded a different address and a new NOA was subsequently mailed. Furthermore, a local resident volunteered to distribute additional copies of the NOA to local residents to ensure that they were notified.

Public Hearing for the Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR

A public hearing for the Draft PWRP 2025 Plan and EIR was conducted in accordance with CEQA

requirements during the 45-day review period on June 2, 2005, at the Larry Chimbole Cultural Center in the City of Palmdale. Notice of the public hearing was included in the NOA. In addition to news articles that advised residents of the hearing date and time, District No. 20 placed advertisements for this event in local newspapers.

Over 70 people attended the public hearing and 21 speakers provided oral comments on the proposed project.

Response to Comments

All oral and written comments received during the 45-day public review period were catalogued and responses were prepared. These comments and associated responses are provided in Chapters 25, 26, and 27 of this document.