

California Department of Water Resources



June 25, 2001

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California Considers Global Warming Impacts in Water Planning

A public advisory committee for the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is considering the possible long-term impacts of global climate change upon California's water supply and use. Once every five years this group helps the DWR update its long-term statewide water plan. Jonas Minton, Deputy Director of the Department, called the consideration of major climate change unprecedented. The agency has traditionally relied upon historic hydrologic information as a basis for predicting the future.

The California Water Plan Advisory Committee recently heard presentations from Dan Cayan, Ph.D., of Scripps Institute, La Jolla, California; Maury Roos, chief hydrologist for the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), and Peter Gleick, Ph.D., of the Pacific Institute in Oakland. They presented their latest research into climate change and its potential effects on California's future water supplies for the year 2050 and beyond.

Some of the potential long-term issues raised included possible rises in temperatures of 2-3 degrees centigrade, increased levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere, reduced days of frost, diminished snow pack, movement of storm tracks to the north, shorter rainy seasons, flash flooding, rises in sea level, salinity in coastal and delta water supplies, and changes in crops. Gleick called the discussion a "tremendous step forward," and Minton said the process was a "learning curve" amidst uncertainty about what is happening and what actions to take.

While conferees agreed that there are many uncertainties about specific impacts, Minton stated that it was

"prudent" and "reasonable" to make "no regret" decisions for the future. "There can be no quick answers, but we must begin the process of thinking about how climate change might effect California's water future," said Minton.

The California Water Plan Advisory Committee is in the process of gathering and reviewing information in its effort to assist the Department of Water Resources in updating the state's Water Plan by 2003. The committee will schedule several more meetings during 2001, 2002, and throughout 2003.

Further information on this process is available under the DWR Statewide Planning Branch web page at: <http://www.waterplan.water.ca.gov/b160/indexb160.html>.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.

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