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**SANTA MARIA VALLEY
WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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August 21, 2001

Grand Jury Foreperson
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Grand Jury Foreperson:

Following are the responses to the 2000-2001 Grand Jury Report on the "Natural Resources in the Santa Maria Valley" from the board of Directors of the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District:

Finding 2b: The ancient sand dunes in the Santa Maria Valley are presently and potentially the least productive agriculturally zoned lands in the Santa Maria Valley, and thus contribute the least to the revenue base of the County.

The District agrees with this statement. The District supports the preservation of prime agricultural land.

Finding 7: The recharge to the aquifer in the Santa Maria Basin has been diminished due to the continued siltation at Twitchell Reservoir.

The District disagrees with this statement. There has been no diminishment of recharge to the basin as a result of sedimentation in the Twitchell Project to date. When necessary, the Army Corp of Engineers has allowed the District to store excess water in the flood control portion of the reservoir. As a result, the operations of the reservoir for storage and for in-stream recharge have sustained the refunded recharge of groundwater, and prevented water from being lost to the ocean. In the long run, if no changes in operation are made, there will be a reduction in recharge. The District and County are working with federal agencies to reallocate the conservation and flood control storage space to address the lost storage capacity in the conservation pool.

Recommendation 7a: Resolve the conflicts in estimates of discharge to the Santa Maria Valley aquifer as soon as possible.

The recommendation requires further analysis. The District is not aware of conflicts in the estimates of recharge from the project. Joe Scalmanini, the District hydrologist has been tasked with researching this item, based on an analysis of historical records and will report back to the district with his conclusion before the December 27, 2001 deadline.

Recommendation 7b: *If an economical solution to the siltation issues at Twitchell Reservoir cannot be found in the near future, all local authorities should work cooperatively to find another source of recharge to cope with the growing need for water from the Santa Maria aquifer.*

The recommendation has been implemented. The District is committed to both short term and long term solutions to the sedimentation issues at Twitchell. It has completed a sediment management plan and has hired a firm to research and develop grant applications in order to secure funding for this purpose. The County and District received \$500,000 grant for emergency sediment removal around the outlet works and are progressing with that work. Addressing sedimentation issues has also emerged as a central issue in the current groundwater litigation and may result in additional resources for solutions from those entities that benefit from the project but have so far not financially supported it.

The District has discussed various projects that would enhance recharge of surface waters as part of an AB3030 groundwater management plan. Until litigation issues are resolved, the likelihood of moving forward on such projects is not likely. There are ongoing discussions with various mining entities and the District regarding the potential reclamation of in-channel and terrace-mining excavations into spreading basins for augmented groundwater recharge, all as part of an effort to settle the litigation.

Finding 8: *In 1999, the Regional water quality control Board notified all water quality control districts that management and measurement of groundwater quality were being mandated by Federal law, and that each district would have two years to draft a plan that would create voluntary guidelines for the district. Failure to meet the deadline by 2002 would result in a systematic loss of local control over groundwater management in that district.*

The District agrees with this statement. The District's AB3030 groundwater management plan states that it will "protect water quality and quantity for all basin users." The District has not made groundwater quality a priority and the Directors are divided on whether this is an appropriate task for the District. The District has contracted with a consultant to prepare a water quality report, which should be released by October 1, 2001.

Recommendation 8a: *Before the State Water Quality Control Board mandates measures to improve groundwater quality in the Santa Maria Basin, the SMVWCD should insist on voluntary "best farming practices" among its membership, and provide local leadership in that area.*

The recommendation has not yet been implemented. The District Directors are divided on what appropriate policy or action would be in this area. The majority is concerned

about becoming a regulatory agency although it has been explained that authorities are looking for voluntary management plans that address water quality issues. The District appreciates the fact that voluntary water quality management plans are the first option of choice before other external regulations are applied. The District has not committed itself to water quality management in its actions and has, so far, provided no leadership even though it takes “protecting water quality” as one of its primary responsibilities. The Districts expert consultant has advised it to do more in this area.

Recommendation 8b: The SMVWCD should work with the Cachuma Resource Conservation District in implementing these recommendations to improve groundwater quality and provide leadership promoting “Best farming practices”.

The recommendation has been implemented. The District has endorsed the general recommendations of the Cachuma Resource Conservation District’s non-point source pollution study of the basin. The District has expressed a willingness to work with Cachuma Resource Conservation District on these issues but has not taken a leadership role.

Finding 9: The SMVWCD political boundaries do not reflect the boundaries of the groundwater basin it is charged with protecting and managing, and six of the seven divisions of the District currently have a very small population of eligible voters because of the historic configuration of the District.

The District agrees with the finding. In conformance with AB2543, which was signed into law by the governor on September 12, 1999, the District will be reconfiguring its division based on population and a “one person one vote” principal prior to the 2002 elections. This will result in each of the seven divisions having approximately 10,000 residents, which means that urban voters will dominate the voting electorate.

Recommendation 9a The District should move forward on expanding its boundaries, at least those within Santa Barbara County, to provide for better groundwater management before the next election.

The recommendation requires further analysis. The District has studied the process of expanding its boundaries and has met with LAFCO representatives. The Directors are divided on this topic and the majority voted down a proposal to move forward on annexing overlying basin lands within Santa Barbara County. There are concerns related to whether the District could afford to run elections in the new territories and also giving representation to persons who have not paid for the Twitchell project. The LAFCO process would indicate early on whether there would be enough revenue from the new lands to pay for elections, before the process is finalized. In fact, the District could not proceed if it were financially infeasible (its application would not be approved).

Recommendation 9b: The SMVWCD should adjust its boundaries to include all of the SMV groundwater aquifer.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented. In addition to the response in 9a, there exists a factual disagreement over the northern boundary of the basin. Once this issue is resolved (a central point in the current litigation) the district could move forward in annexing lands overlying the basin if it had the will to do so.

Recommendation 9c: The SMVWCD should charge fees on the annexed lands at the same rate structure applied to existing district landowner, both rural and urban.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented. Assessing newly annexed lands would be somewhat problematic given provisions of Prop 218, which requires a public vote. The current litigation may result in provision for court ordered assessments to support groundwater management and Twitchell sedimentation projects.

Recommendation 9d: The District should revise its division boundaries in the near future to comply with the new Special District election laws. In this way, any remedy to the problems facing the groundwater in the Valley would be based on the needs of all users, and could be funded comprehensively.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The District will be working with Santa Barbara County staff to redraw the division boundaries once the Supervisorial districts are finalized and staff has more free time to devote to this project.

Finding 11a: The integrity of the Santa Maria River levee is important to the recharge of the aquifer, as well as the safety of all who live, school, and work near it.

The District agrees with the finding. The District has no authority over the Santa Maria River levee. The District has managed Twitchell releases in order to protect the levee and cooperate with other agencies.

Finding 11b: Many Santa Maria Valley residents are questioning the flood protection capability of the levee on the Santa Maria River.

The District agrees with the finding. In addition, as noted above the District has no authority over the Santa Maria River levee. The District has managed Twitchell releases in order to protect the levee and cooperate with other agencies. The District shares concern about the levee and support its rehabilitation. The District has provided verbal and written input to various agencies on levee issues.

Recommendation 11: County Flood Control should continue with its plans to repair the Santa Maria River levee.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The District has no authority over County Flood Control.

The District appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 2000-2001 Grand Jury Report. If any additional information is needed, please contact the District Secretary, Debi Askew-Verdin.

The District would like to request a copy of the Responses by Affected Agencies To the Reports of the 2000-2001 Grand Jury when it is completed.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Arthur Tognazzini,
President