

Focus

Chance for differences to wash away in land- mark water exchange

Metropolitan Water District and the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) are only a five-man vote away from making history.

After more than a year of long and difficult negotiations, the two water agencies hammered out a proposed memorandum of understanding for a landmark water-exchange program that would net Metropolitan an additional 100,000 acre-feet of dependable water supply from the Colorado River each year.

Approval for the tentative accord also is needed from Coachella and Palo Verde water agencies as well as from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

"Both sides gain valuable assets at a very reasonable cost to Metropolitan and at no cost to Imperial," says Met's General Manager Carl Boronkay, who calls the unprecedented arrangement—the first between an agricultural and an urban area—one of the most important



Conservation efforts in the Imperial Valley are expected to save more than 100,000 acre-feet of agricultural drainage water a year for use in coastal cities.

water development issues since the construction of the State Water Project in the 1960s.

Met's board of directors unanimously approved the agreement in July.

Now the outcome—which would provide IID with a minimum of \$300 million from Metropolitan over the next 35 years to finance costly conservation measures—hangs on a final vote by Imperial's board of directors in October.

"So far the proposal has been generating more favorable than unfavorable comment here," says IID's general manager Charles Shreves, noting that the board's decision will follow a series of six public meetings held throughout the farming area in September.

Under terms of the tentative accord, Met will start paying IID \$10 million a year on Jan. 1, 1986. The money is to be used for conservation projects such as building new reservoirs and lining canals with concrete.

In exchange, Imperial would make available to Met 100,000 acre-feet of water each year starting Jan. 1, 1988. Met would divert the water—enough to supply 200,000 families a year—from the Colorado River.

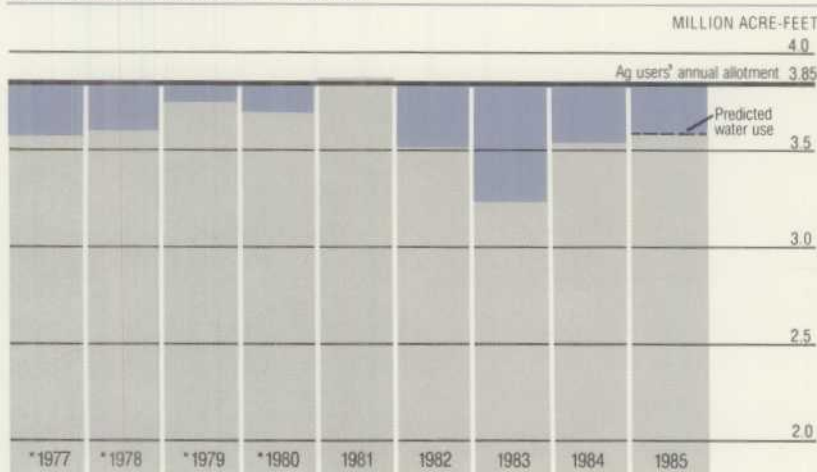
Contrary to some local concerns, says Shreves, Imperial Valley growers would not face a reduction in the amount of water available to them as a result of the proposal.

For IID, which has been under pressure from the State Water Resources Control Board to save a good share of the more than 300,000 acre-feet of its water that's still being lost annually to seepage and runoff, Met's annual \$10 million conservation payment would provide welcome relief.

As new conservation facilities are constructed, the amount of water that drains into the Salton Sea will decline, thus reducing the likelihood of more lawsuits brought by area property owners. Imperial has had to pay for property flooded by the rising level of the Salton Sea.

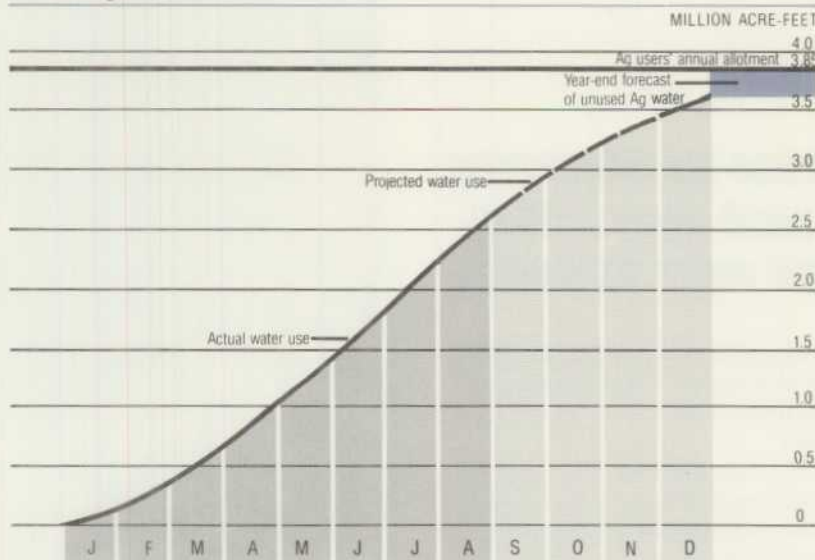
As for Met, the proposed deal with

Annual Agricultural Use of Colorado River Water



* 1977-80 totals were reduced to reflect what usage would have been if the Coachella Canal had been lined, which it was in 1981.

Forecast of Agricultural Use 1985



Above, in all but one of the past eight years, California's agricultural agencies did not use their full Colorado River water allotment of 3.85 million feet a year. Below, forecasters are predicting that about 280,000 acre-feet of the farmer's 1985 entitlement may go unused.

IID would replace roughly 15 percent of the water it will lose in coming years as the Central Arizona Project begins taking its share from the Colorado River. And there may be a chance for more.

Officials from both districts say that additional agreements are probable. But coming to this first pact was extremely difficult, notes Boronkay, because each agency began from widely divergent points of view.

Opposing IID's position, Met held that Imperial could not legally sell conserved Colorado River water "to any

agency wanting to buy it." Metropolitan cited existing federal and state priority agreements on apportionment of Colorado River water, including those among Met, Imperial, Palo Verde and Coachella Valley water contractors. Metropolitan is entitled to take any water not used by the agricultural agencies. The new pact would simply guarantee that Met would get the water it already has priority claim to, explains Boronkay.

"This should make winners of both agencies for decades to come," he says.



Southern California farmers are entitled to nearly 1.3 trillion gallons of Colorado River water annually to grow food and fiber crops.

A novel way to get more water: predict it

Up to several hundred thousand acre-feet a year of unused agricultural water may become available for Metropolitan's vast urban supply system if a new program to predict farmers' annual use of Colorado River water can be implemented, perhaps as early as 1987.

Because of a 1964 U.S. Supreme Court decree in *Arizona v. California*, there is no carry-over provision for excess water from one year to the next. Any of California's share not taken within the 12-month allotment period ends up in Colorado River reservoirs, where it becomes available for future use by Arizona or Nevada, or spills over in years of heavy river flow.

"In any year that the agricultural agencies don't use their full allotment of 3.85 million acre-feet, we would get whatever water remains," notes Met's Assistant General Manager Myron Holburt.

Metropolitan has a lower priority to Colorado River water than the agricultural contractors in Imperial, Palo Verde, Yuma, and Coachella valleys, Holburt explains.

Several years ago, Holburt, as then chief engineer for the Colorado River Board of California, came up with a forecasting concept that would allow Met to take advantage of the surplus agricultural water before Dec. 31 of the entitlement year.

"The objective is to utilize all of the 4.4 million acre-feet of Colorado River water that California will be restricted to in a 'normal' year after the Central Arizona Project (CAP) commences," says Holburt, adding that when the CAP starts pumping, Met's dependable supply in a normal year will drop from 1.2 million to less than 550,000 acre-feet annually, leaving unused capacity in Met's Colorado River Aqueduct system.

The centerpiece of the new program is a curve of historic water use, painstakingly charted by Colorado River Board staff in conjunction with the agricultural agencies and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Monthly records since 1960 clearly show an annual pattern of agricultural water use.

By comparing current monthly water-use totals with the curve, generally as early as July, the board can then pro-

ject the year's probable total agricultural need. In each subsequent month, the predictions will become more precise.

"By August or September, with the heaviest water use behind us, the approximate amount of water agriculture will require for the rest of the year becomes better known," says Holburt. "Then Met could begin to take whatever water the farmers clearly won't need."

If, for example, the district knows by the end of August that the agricultural users aren't likely to utilize some 235,000 acre-feet for the year, it could divert this water into its Colorado River Aqueduct over the next four months. This would replace some of the water Southern California will lose to the Arizona project.

The program, now in its first year of tracking on paper, shows promise of providing Met up to 300,000 additional acre-feet of water a year, says Holburt. "We can't count on getting it every year or knowing the quantity in advance, but what we do get will be valuable to the Southland." ♦

More water could flow from new accord

Adoption of a far-reaching agreement by state and federal officials to coordinate the operation of California's two largest water projects would, among other things, provide Metropolitan with enough additional water in dry years to serve at least 500,000 Southern Californians.

The Coordinated Operation Agreement between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the state Department of Water Resources would end a quarter-century of debate over the extent of the bureau's responsibility for maintaining water quality in the fragile Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

And because of the increased efficiency of operating the two projects in the delta—the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project—in concert, the plan should also provide the state project's urban and agricultural users with an additional source of reliable water during drought years.

"The agreement is a fair, efficient and practical method for resolving the problem centered around the delta, which is a source of water for some 20 million Californians," says Met General Counsel Warren Abbott, noting that together the state and federal projects—two of the largest water projects in the world—presently draw 6 million acre-feet a year from the delta for deliveries as far south as the Mexico border.

The complex water-management agreement, reached in May, passed its first test in Washington on July 31 when the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee approved an implementing bill, HR 3113. The bill was passed by the House in September.

Metropolitan's 51-member board of directors unanimously urged swift Congressional approval of the plan. Other endorsements came from the mayors and city councils of Los Angeles and San Diego, the boards of directors for all six counties in Met's service area,



The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is a common source of water for nearly 20 million Californians.

and various environmental groups around the state such as the Environmental Defense Fund.

A key provision in the agreement involves the State Water Resources Control Board's Decision 1485.

Once signed, the bureau obligates itself to meet the current D-1485 delta water-quality standards as well as future standards providing they don't impede the operation of the Central Valley Project as directed by Congress. The bureau would be bound to provide its share of water to sustain needed flows in the delta—especially needed in dry years.

Not only would this action take a tremendous potential burden off the State Water Project, but it also would insure a more reliable water supply for the state water contractors. For if the bureau chose, as it did in the 1976-77 drought year, not to help meet delta standards, it could cost the state project 150,000 acre-feet of water a year or more to maintain delta water quality.

HR 3113 also specifies the bureau must meet future state Suisan Marsh and San Francisco Bay standards as long as these standards are not unreasonable and don't substantially hinder the operation of the federal project.

The Coordinated Operation Agreement would make more water available to Southern California. And it provides an institutional framework for the two projects to share both water supply and facilities, thereby improving the two separate systems.

In short, the Central Valley Project has more storage capacity (containing

a surplus of about 1 million acre-feet of water a year) than it currently has customers for, and the state project has more aqueduct capacity than it has water.

The agreement sets the groundwork for the federal project to sell as much as 500,000 acre-feet of water a year to the state on a short-term basis over the next 10 to 30 years. In return, the state's facilities would be made available to deliver water the bureau previously had no way to transport to farms in the San Joaquin Valley.

The pact also would increase the dry-period yield of the State Water Project by approximately 200,000 acre-feet through refined operating criteria and a more precise allocation of water surplus to the delta. Half of this reliable source would be made available to Metropolitan.

Despite widespread support for HR 3113, its passage wasn't assured. Apparently, the primary concern is the allocation of costs to the federal government for meeting California delta quality standards.

The agreement now goes to the Senate for approval. Then the President must sign it before it becomes law.

"Speedy approval would allow all of us to be less tentative about providing Californians with the water they need," says Abbott. "It will allow us to better plan for the future because of the improved reliability of delta water supplies and it will give us the assurance that the delta itself will be protected."

A drop saved is a drop earned

As the population in Metropolitan's six-county service area grows by an expected 3 million people by the turn of the century, the state's developed water is dwindling to levels even below today's.

That, say Met officials, is cause for concern. And it's a key reason that the district decided to develop one of the most comprehensive conservation plans in the country.

"Conservation and good water management practices will be an essential part of the future water supply situation in Southern California," notes Metropolitan's assistant general manager Myron Holburt. "We want to help make that happen."

Called the Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Met's program will help set the framework for future

efforts and enhance existing programs to increase water efficiency in the Southland.

Many of the district's 27 member agencies and their sub-agencies are expected to use the regional plan in developing their own local water management plans, which, under the Urban Water Management Planning Act of 1983, must be submitted to the state Department of Water Resources by the end of this year. Met was not required to prepare a program under the act since it provides no direct retail customer service.

In its plan, Met proposes to assist member agencies in developing local conservation programs, provide kits for retrofitting existing plumbing fixtures, aid large water users such as turfgrass irrigators and heavy industry in achiev-

ing water-efficient operations, and create an emergency plan for use during severe shortages.

Already in operation are water audits, leak detection programs, elementary and high school education programs, and distribution of literature detailing how to make water-saving modifications to residences and landscapes.

Besides these conservation efforts, the district finances special reclamation projects, conducts groundwater replenishment programs and uses price incentives to urge members to store water during wet years for use during dry ones.

Met's comprehensive water management plan is designed to be flexible and able to change as conditions change. A full-scale evaluation will be made after it has been in effect for five years. ♦

Another dry winter could make the Southland blue

Southern Californians could once again be singing the "How Dry I Am" blues, and Metropolitan General Manager Carl Boronkay says now is the time to take action.

The drought affecting New York and other East Coast states has been getting most of the media attention this summer, but record rates of water use and unusually dry winters are on the verge of combining to cause problems in Southern California as well.

"Adequate water supplies are available for the remainder of this year, but if the coming winter, like the last, is unusually dry, California again could be in the early stages of a serious drought," Boronkay cautions.

California's major storage reservoirs are already significantly lower than normal, he notes, and Metropolitan has been delivering water in record-breaking amounts this summer to agencies in the six Southern California counties it serves.

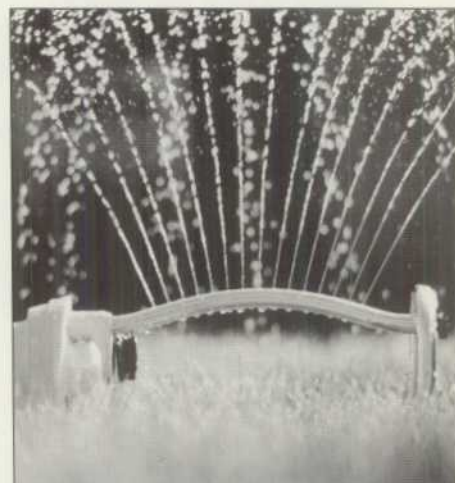
Since early June, Met's previous single-day water delivery record, established in 1981, has been broken 16 times. July water sales of more than 200,000 acre-feet broke the all-time record for water sales in a single month, exceeding by 11 percent the previous record of 183,000 acre-feet set in 1981.

Higher-than-usual sales also continued through August, shattering the previous August record of 178,490 acre-feet, set in 1981, by more than 10,000 acre feet.

Boronkay says that although the California reservoirs are not dangerously low at this time, this could occur should we experience a winter as dry as that of 1976. If that happens, he adds, deliveries from the State Water Project could be reduced.

Meanwhile, Metropolitan advises the following conservation measures:

- Use a broom instead of water to clean sidewalks and driveways.
- Water lawns and gardens during the cooler hours of the day and no longer than necessary.



More than 40 percent of all water used at California residences is applied to the landscape.

- Wash cars using a bucket of water instead of a hose spray.
- Fix plumbing leaks and install flow restrictors in sinks and showers, and put water displacement bottles in toilet tanks.
- Wash only full loads in washing machines and dishwashers. ♦

Quick and to the point

Met raises tax rate

Metropolitan raised its 1985-86 tax rate charged against property in its six-county service area to .0164 percent. The new levy represents a 5 percent increase over last year's rate, which was the lowest since 1934. Met's portion of an annual tax bill for a home assessed at \$100,000 will be \$16.40 this year.

Revenues generated by the tax increase will be used to pay interest and principle on \$100 million in general obligation bonds issued by the district this year. The levy is also used to pay the district's share of the State Water Project as well as its aqueduct and distribution system. The tax will be phased out over the next 40 years, at which time the district will rely entirely on wholesale water charges to meet expenses.

Reagan to push the 'button'

President Ronald Reagan is being invited to push the button on Nov. 15 that will trigger the delivery of Colorado River water to Phoenix, marking the completion of the first leg of the Central Arizona Project (CAP).

The CAP, which will ultimately use water currently being diverted by Metropolitan, will eventually ferry the river water beyond Phoenix to Tucson.

Dunlap joins state Water Commission

Katherine B. Dunlap, the first woman to serve on Metropolitan's board of directors, has been appointed to the California Water Commission.

Dunlap represented the city of Los Angeles during her 10 years on Met's board, 1974-84. During that time, she served as vice chairman of the organization and personnel committee, as chairman of the special committee on public information, and on the executive and water problems committees.

A graduate of UC-Berkeley, Dunlap is past president of the League of Women Voters of Los Angeles, past chairman of the California Council

for Environmental and Economic Balance, and a former member of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power board of commissioners.

DWP decoys gulls at Mono Lake

California Gulls may have been lured with bird decoys to nest on Mono Lake's second largest island. And that's good news for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which diverts water for Los Angeles from four of the saline lake's seven tributary streams.

According to DWP, a member public agency of Metropolitan, the return of the gulls to Negit Island, where they had not nested since 1979, shows that habitat management techniques, such as placing decoys, driftwood and rocks on island shorelines, may help enhance the gull's nesting population at Mono Lake. The department has been under the environmentalists' gun in recent years because of disruptions in California Gull nesting patterns.

Until recent above-normal water runoff years, diversion of the streams by DWP resulted in a gradually lowering lake level. The gulls abandoned Negit Island when the dropping water level exposed a land bridge, giving predators access to their shoreline nesting area. But now that the rising waters have sealed off the island once again, DWP is attempting to lure the birds back.

Meanwhile, the total gull population increased by about 19,800 chicks this year, more than three times the number hatched last year when the lake was at a similar high level. Scientists say the annual chick production, which has varied significantly since research on the gull colony began in 1976, is not affected by the varying levels or salinity of the lake but rather by natural factors in the Mono Lake ecosystem.

DWP has spent \$1.5 million since 1980 studying the effects of the declining lake levels on the California Gull, migratory birds, brine shrimp and lake chemistry.

Barrett named to Bureau post

Clifford I. Barrett, a civil engineer with 29 years' experience in water resources development, has been named acting commissioner of reclamation in the Department of Interior.

Barrett, a career engineer with the Bureau of Reclamation, became the top official of the federal government's principal dam-building, water supply and hydroelectric power agency for the 17 western states, with a total staff of 8,500.

Selenium found in Kern County

High levels of selenium contamination have been recorded at two widely separated water drainage sumps in Kern County. The contaminated sumps—one in the Lost Hills Water District in north Kern, and the other in the Wheeler Ridge-Maricopa Water Storage District to the south—were found to have concentrations ranging from 362 parts per billion to 827 parts per billion. The federal drinking water standard for selenium is 10 parts per billion. Tests are under way to determine what danger, if any, the selenium poses to wildlife or humans.

The contaminated sumps are located at two of 20 sites in Kern County being monitored by the California Department of Water Resources. The monitoring program was increased last spring after high selenium levels were discovered at Kesterson Reservoir in Merced County just north of Kern.

Met gets full river allotment

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has authorized Metropolitan to again draw its current annual Colorado River water apportionment of 1.2 million acre-feet in 1986 despite the start-up of the first leg of the Central Arizona Project.

Although Met's dependable supply is being reduced to less than 550,000 acre-feet a year, record river flows over the past few years have made it possible for the district to receive its present quota for a least one more year. ♦



The New River carries raw sewage, including agricultural and industrial pollutants, from Mexico to the Salton Sea.

A tale of an open sewer disguised as a river

Carrying raw sewage from Mexicali, Mexico, including agricultural and industrial pollutants, the New River winds north through Imperial County into the Salton Sea. The filthy water, called "a dire health hazard" by Imperial County health officer Dr. Lee Cottrell, contains more than 15 disease-causing viruses, including hepatitis and all three polio strains, and at least five disease-causing bacteria. State scientists also have detected high levels of toxaphene and other pesticides in the water. "This is a clear-cut violation of the Clean Water Act of 1970," says Cottrell. "It's a veritable time bomb."

The United States Geological Survey, declaring the health risk too high, has recalled its monitoring team from the river. Imperial Irrigation District General Manager Charles Shreves followed suit, withdrawing his personnel from duties that brought them in contact with the vile stream. Danger signs are now posted along its banks.

An odd bit of luck is that as the small river snakes its way past Imperial Valley farms, it picks up agricultural drainage. This drain water is of so much better quality than the flowing sewage that it dilutes the deadly little river. Once it reaches the Salton Sea, which is more saline than the ocean, the salt kills some of the bacteria.

But eventually the sea itself, which functions as an agricultural drain as well as offering recreation, could become contaminated. Statewide harm to the economy would be enormous.

Congressman Duncan Hunter and Sens. Pete Wilson and Alan Cranston have campaigned for federal legislation to clean up the New River. Both support the International Boundary and Water Commission study which proposes to build—at a cost of \$15 million to \$20 million—a plant that would treat the 26 million gallons of sewage produced each day by Mexicali.

At the state level, Sen. Marian Bergeson and Assemblyman Steve Peace are backing Assembly Speaker

Willie Brown's \$150 million International Wastewater and Toxics Cleanup Bond Act. Also supported by Metropolitan's board of directors, the act was drafted specifically to deal with the toxics in both the New River and the Tijuana River, which bring Mexican sewage to San Diego. This won a 69-0 Assembly vote in June.

But the expense for California is not small. The bill—AB 1012—faces many hurdles.

In May, at the request of Sen. Bergeson, representatives of all concerned federal, state and local agencies met at the Imperial County Farm Bureau with hopes of reaching an agreement on how to attack the problem. Although no consensus was attained, Shreves calls the meeting very encouraging, reporting that "communication channels are open and future exchanges are planned."

Any solution to this international dilemma will require the backing of all Southern Californians. ♦

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Brick, Nolan join Met board



Timothy F. Brick

Metropolitan's 51-member board, which sets policy for this urban Southern California water supplier, recently seated two new directors. Each director represents one of the 27 member agencies served by the district.

Timothy F. Brick, 38, of Pasadena succeeds Dr. Martin Goldsmith as representative of the city of Pasadena, one of Met's founding members.

An active participant in community affairs, Brick has served for six years on the Pasadena Utility Advisory Commission, which directs the municipal water and power department. He currently chairs the commission's water committee and serves on the finance committee.

A free-lance writer on consumer-related issues for newspapers and magazines, the native of Omaha, Nebraska, moved to the San Gabriel Valley in 1952. He graduated from California State University at Los Angeles in 1971 with a B.A. in philosophy.

He is a member of Met's legal and claims committee and the engineering and operations committee.



Michael A. Nolan

Michael A. Nolan, a fifth-generation Californian whose forebears developed the ranch that became the community of Agoura, replaced 24-year board veteran Earle C. Blais as the city of Burbank (one of Met's 13 original members) representative.

Raised in Burbank, Nolan, 36, has been a member of the board of the United Homeowners of Burbank since 1974, and was its president from 1981 to 1983. He also served on the Burbank Fire Department Master Plan Task Force in 1979.

Since 1974, he has managed private investments. Prior to that, he served on the staff of several Los Angeles city councilmen, most recently with John Ferraro.

On the Metropolitan board, Nolan is a member of the legal and claims committee and the finance and insurance committee. ♦

Metropolitan Water District is one of the world's largest water agencies. From the Colorado River and from Northern California through the State Water Project, it imports about half of all the water used by some 13 million consumers in urban Southern California from Ventura to Riverside to San Diego counties. Met wholesales this water to 27 member public agencies which, along with about 130 subagencies, deliver it to homes, businesses, and even a few farms in Metropolitan's 5,200-square-mile service area.

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