

State And Local Leaders Meet To Discuss Drought Response, Water Solutions For Cedar Valley

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Iron County Commissioner Paul Cozzens talks to a group of state and community leaders who gathered Monday to discuss water solutions for the Cedar Valley. // COURTESY CICWCD

FROM CICWCD—The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District (CICWCD) and mayors of Cedar City, Enoch and Kanarraville hosted a community briefing April 19 to discuss critical water issues including drought, the state’s Groundwater Management Plan for Cedar Valley, and the need to import water.

The meeting was attended by state and local leaders including State Sen. Evan Vickers, State Rep. Rex Shipp, Iron County Commissioners Marilyn Wood, Paul Cozzens and Mike Bleak, Cedar City Mayor Maile Wilson-Edwards, Enoch Mayor Geoffrey Chesnut, Kanarraville Mayor Betty Gould, and Utah’s Senior Advisor for Rural Affairs Stephen Lisonbee, who also serves as Southern Utah University’s Assistant Vice President in the Office of Regional Services.

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The goal of the community leader gathering was to assemble key players from as many local entities and organizations as possible in the same room, discussing issues of tremendous importance to the valley's future. Adding to the collaboration were attendees representing Southern Utah University, the Utah State University Extension Iron County Office, the Enterprise & Iron Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Division of Water Rights and more.

Central Iron County Water Conservancy District General Manager Paul Monroe addressed the group and explained the District's efforts to conserve, recharge, reuse, and import water for the valley. Monroe stressed that the District wants to continually work with communities and other entities in the area to ensure success for vital water projects. The timing is critical with growth, drought, and an overdrawn aquifer making the area's water situation critical, and collaboration moving forward is imperative.

Recent additions to the District's efforts include the Quichapa Recharge project, agricultural conservation, planning for a reuse project with the Cedar City Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility, and the Pine Valley Water Supply project.

The Quichapa Recharge project is part of an extensive recharge program that began in 2016 and now includes seven recharge facilities in Cedar Valley. The recharge facilities, developed in cooperation with local government agencies, have already added more than 14,000 acre-feet of additional water to the aquifer. Approximately \$700,000 has been spent on these efforts.

The District is working with Cedar City and Enoch City to prepare for the construction of a reuse project that would transport treated effluent water from the Cedar City Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility to agricultural fields in the surrounding area. Transporting effluent water to that area will help reduce pumping from the declining aquifer.

Working with the Enterprise & Iron Conservation District and the Utah State Legislature, the District has helped convert more than 2,000 acres of center pivots to using low-elevation bubbler nozzles, which are far more efficient than traditional pivot nozzles. With agricultural water use as a large percentage of the Cedar Valley's consumption, conservation and efficiency in agriculture are important to the District. Monroe has been appointed to serve on the Agricultural Water Optimization Task Force for the state of Utah.

The biggest upcoming project, which will need support from Cedar City, Enoch, Kanarraville and the county, is the Pine Valley Water Supply project, which aims to

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import 15,000 acre-feet of water from a valley northwest of Cedar City. The project is currently in the early planning stages.

The District announced to local leaders a new partnership with Washington County Water Conservancy District in asking residents to focus on three simple actions to conserve water: irrigate after dark, shorten your showers and fix a leak.

"These are three fundamental things we can all do right now," Monroe said. "When entire communities are helping in these ways, that is when we start to see conservation work, and it establishes a beginning to a larger, concerted southern Utah effort."

Mayor Wilson-Edwards urged all community members to do what they can to help.

"The importance of water is pivotal in our desert community, especially during an exceptional drought period like we are currently facing," she said. "I encourage our community and the numerous different stakeholders in our valley to do all they can to help preserve this natural resource. While the City, CICWCD and other partners are looking at major water infrastructure projects, small changes in our personal water-wasting behaviors and habits can make a big difference for our water situation. We all can - and should - do more to ensure our water supply for years to come."

Wilson-Edwards said to help encourage residents to be more water-wise, the city enforces an ordinance that restricts day-time watering from April through October. Cedar City has also decided to replace the grass in the back part of Veterans' Park with a more water-wise landscape. She said she hopes people will see that they have landscaping options that can make their properties look nice without using a lot of water.

Mayor Chesnut said growth has created some unanticipated water issues for the city. He said with a lot of effort from the Public Works Department, two churches, a school and all city facilities except one soccer field will soon be connected to the city's secondary water system, which will give them a net increase of about 3 million gallons of culinary water per month.

Chesnut is excited about the technology of new underground drip irrigation systems that respond to chemicals from the lawn and save a ton of water. Installation of these systems is tricky in Enoch because of the hard, rocky soil, but he said the city will continue to look at options. A major challenge for the city, though, is that they don't have enough places to pull water out of the ground, he said. Chesnut expressed optimism about having an open conversation about water with other community leaders in the area.

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“Working together collectively, that’s a super exciting place to be, so I’m glad we’re all here,” he said.

Mayor Gould said it is important to the town of Kanarraville to educate their community and help them understand the need to conserve. She said they are working on updating their antiquated metering system so they can account for all the water in the town. She also said that she was honored to be at the meeting, collaborating with the rest of the valley.

The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District is charged with conserving, developing and stabilizing the Cedar Valley water supply for the benefit of all current and future water users and consumers in the region. The Water District educates residents about conservation, reuse and water import strategies as it strives to meet the challenges of declining water levels and community growth. For more information, visit cicwcd.org and learn about Localscapes Landscape Design community education classes, water conservation tips and more ways to conserve in your neighborhood. Email info@cicwcd.org for additional information.